

# Joel Lesson 1

## Why study Joel?

Why should we study the book of Joel?

That's a good question to ask any time we embark on a detailed study of a book in the Bible, but our initial answer is always the same. We should study the book of Joel because it is part of the word of God!

There is no book in the Bible that does not merit our deep and intense study. Every book is vital to us. We can't skip over any of them and be pleasing to God! Why not?

One reason is provided by Paul.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** - All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

That phrase "all scripture" refers to the entire word of God, and so Paul tells us that the entire word of God makes us "complete."

With the Bible - the entire Bible - we have what we need to do the work that God has given us to do. With the Bible - the entire Bible - we have what we need to be profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. That is what we have when we have "all scripture."

But what if we don't have all scripture? What if we have only the Old Testament? Or what if we have only the New Testament? Or what if we have only the red letters? Or what if we have only our favorite books? Or what if we have only what we consider to be the easy books? Or what if we have only those verses from those books that prop up our pet theories about the Bible? Or what if we have only those verses that look good on a magnet stuck to our refrigerator door? Or perhaps only those verses that help us in "our day to day lives," whatever that means!

If we do not have the entire Bible, then we are incomplete! That is what Paul tells us. That is an

important reason for why we must study Joel and every other book in the Bible.

But there is still another reason why we must study Joel. We neglect any book of the Bible at our peril! Failing to consider the entire Bible is like walking through a minefield with a blindfold on! Why do I say that?

The entire Bible - "all scripture" - is breathed out by God, inspired by God. And we know that God's word is truth (John 17:17). We know that the sum of God's word is truth (Psalm 119:160).

And we know something very important about truth - truth cannot contradict itself.

That truth about truth is the basis of all logical thought. In fact, that law of contradiction is the foundation of all reasoning.

But what does it mean for our question? What does the law of contradiction have to say about the peril we face if we neglect any book in the Bible? Why does that logical law mean that I am walking blindfolded through a minefield if I neglect any book in the Bible?

It is this: my entire view about any subject in the Bible can be changed by any single verse in the Bible.

I may have the most elaborate theory about the Bible that anyone has ever developed, and my elaborate theory may be based on hundreds of verses scattered all throughout the Bible - but if my elaborate theory is contradicted by a single verse somewhere in the Bible, then my elaborate theory is wrong.

It is God's word that is truth, not my theory. So if my theory contradicts God's word - the truth - then my theory is false.

Now, I should add a warning at this point. Yes, any single verse can change by view, but if my view is supported by many other verses in the Bible, then I need to be extremely careful when I interpret that single verse.

Premillennialism is a good example. That false doctrine views the entire Bible through the lens of a single verse in Revelation - but they have badly misinterpreted that verse!

Yes, God only has to say it once in a single verse for it to be truth, but we need to make sure that we are properly interpreting that single verse.

And after we have done that, what can I say? I can say that if my theory contradicts that one verse or any other verse in God's word - the truth - then my theory is false.

And what does that mean? What it means is that any ideas I have about the Bible must be in complete agreement with every single verse in the Bible - all 31,102 of them! If I ignore some of those verses, then those verses become mines in a minefield through which my theory about the Bible is walking!

Let me give you an example. Back in the 1990's, there was a movement in the church known as the "core gospel" movement. The thought was that we had been neglecting the four gospel books, and that we had instead been spending too much on other books (such as the epistles or the Old Testament).

First, the obvious point - warning bells need to start sounding very loudly any time someone tells us that our problem is that we have been studying the Bible too much!

And, second, as with most movements, this one quickly went to an extreme, and suddenly the "core gospel" movement became the "only gospel" movement in which, absent an opposing verse in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, anything and everything was permissible.

And what led to that movement? It came largely from a desire by some for women to assume leadership roles in the church.

Yes, Paul had some things to say about that topic in his epistles - but we don't find as much about that topic in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And so the thought was that we should just focus on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - and then we can do whatever we want without any interference from the Apostle Paul!

As I said, if we neglect any book in the Bible then we are walking through a minefield with a blindfold!

There are no books in the Bible that are so important that I can focus only on those books while neglecting the other books in the Bible. The entire Bible (**"all**

scripture") is the word of God - not just the red letters.

That's one example - but we have another example from the book we are about to study, Joel.

One of the most important days in the history of the world is described in Acts 2. That was the day when the Lord's church, his eternal kingdom, was established. That great event had been prophesied in Isaiah 2 and in Daniel 2, and it came to pass in Acts 2.

And that great day had also been prophesied in Joel 2. How do we know that? Because Peter told us.

In Acts 2:16, Peter told his listeners that "this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel." And Peter then quoted Joel 2:28-32a. And what was a primary topic in that prophecy? The Holy Spirit. "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

Now, if ever there was an opportunity to walk off into the deep end of a pool, that is it! And let me say at the outset, I do not plan to walk off into that deep end. This is a class on Joel, not a class on the Holy Spirit. My plan is to consider only as much about the Holy Spirit as we need to understand the prophecy in Joel 2 and what it meant in Acts 2.

But, and here is the reason I bring this subject up now, we will need to keep in mind **everything** the Bible has to say about the Holy Spirit if we want to correctly understand what Joel is saying about the Holy Spirit.

Yes, I plan to focus only on that one question - what did Joel tell us about the Holy Spirit - but I also plan to make sure that whatever we conclude about Joel does not contradict anything else we read in the Bible about the Holy Spirit. And we need to do that same thing with every other subject in the book of Joel.

And has anyone ever been guilty of doing otherwise when it comes to the Holy Spirit in the book of Joel? Yes, the charismatics have done that.

The charismatics often use Joel 2 as a proof text for their false views about spiritual gifts. They have even given themselves a name that comes from Peter's use of Joel 2 on the Day of *Pentecost* in Acts 2 - *Pentecostalism*.

But that's not a problem in the church, right? Wrong.

I once personally heard a preacher in the church claim from the pulpit that his words were coming to him straight from the Holy Spirit and that sometimes he felt like taking notes during his own sermons! I remember thinking at the time how odd it was that no one else felt like taking any notes.

So what am I saying? I am saying this: if we want to know the truth about the Holy Spirit, we cannot **neglect** Joel in favor of other books in the Bible, but neither can we **promote** Joel at the expense of other books in the Bible. And that is true of every subject in the Bible and of every book in the Bible.

And, so, to answer our question - why study the book of Joel - we have three answers so far.

First, it is the word of God.

Second, the entire Bible makes us complete, and so we are incomplete if we have only a part of the Bible.

And third, the law of contradiction tells us that we neglect any book in the Bible at our peril. Any single verse found anywhere in the Bible is enough to send our elaborate theories crashing to the ground if those theories are contradicted by that single verse.

And there is a fourth reason to study Joel - it is fascinating!

How many other books of the Bible can we name in which the main character seems to be an insect?

And how many other books of the Bible can we name that describe a single momentous memorable event in the history of Judah that is so hard to date that the various theories about when it happened are up to 700 years apart!

Yes, it is a short book, but we have some work to do in figuring it out!

And there are many good reasons why we should spend the time required to do that right. There are many good reasons why we should all study the book of Joel and why we should all **want** to study the book of Joel!

## What are the themes of Joel?

As we did with Hosea, our plan for understanding Joel is to dissect the book, skipping over nothing, but looking at every verse and every word.

But there is a danger with dissection - death. We kill what we dissect.

And if all we did was march word by word through Joel like locusts, then that deadly danger could easily become a reality. We could study every word of Joel in isolation, but end up missing the message of Joel.

The solution to that problem is to step back and look at the big picture.

Yes, we need to look at each word, but we also need to look at the book as a whole, and we need to look at how Joel fits into the entire Bible as a whole. We need to consider the big picture, without neglecting the details.

Historically, the big picture is shown on the handout for Lesson 1, but how and where does Joel fit into that big picture? Stay tuned...

As we did with Hosea, the best way to keep ourselves on the right track is to identify the themes of the book. Why was the book written? What was the message for the people who first read it? What is the message for us?

What are themes of Joel?

When we studied Hosea, we identified some themes before we studied the book in detail, and then we identified more themes as we slowly worked our way through each verse in the book.

Our plan is to do the same thing with Joel.

So, what then are the themes that we can easily identify just from a quick reading of the three chapters of Joel?

## The Day of the Lord

One theme that jumps out immediately is **the Day of the Lord**.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For **the day of the LORD** is near, and as



destruction from the Almighty it comes.

**Joel 2:1** - Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for **the day of the LORD** is coming; it is near.

**Joel 2:11** - The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For **the day of the LORD** is great and very awesome; who can endure it?

**Joel 2:31** - The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome **day of the LORD** comes.

**Joel 3:14** - Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For **the day of the LORD** is near in the valley of decision.

That phrase is found 25 times in the Bible. Of those 25 occurrences, five of them are found in Joel. That's 20% found in one very short book of the Bible.

And some of the other references to the Day of the Lord elsewhere in the Bible are pointing to Joel. Peter, for example, uses that phrase when he quotes Joel in Acts 2:20, and Malachi 4:5 also seems to be quoting Joel.

If we add in those references to Joel, then the short book of Joel is the source of nearly a third of all occurrences of the phrase "Day of the Lord" in the Bible.

That is what we call a theme!

Here is a Bible study tip. Whatever version of the Bible you use in your daily study (and I recommend either the KJV or the ESV), you should also have a copy of the ASV translation of 1901. It is a little hard to find in print, but Amazon is still selling copies. And if you can't find a paper copy, electronic copies are easy to find because the copyright has expired.

(You can find copies of Hosea and Joel from the ASV at [www.StudyJoel.com](http://www.StudyJoel.com).)

Why is the ASV helpful in Bible study? Because you will not find a translation that is better at using the same English word for the same Greek or Hebrew word. The language of the KJV is more beautiful, and the language of the ESV is more readable, but the ASV is more faithful to the original languages.

Why do I bring that up now? Well, let's read about the Day of the Lord from the ASV and see what we find.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! for **the day of Jehovah** is at hand, and as destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

**Joel 2:1** - 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 Jehovah** cometh, for it is nigh at hand.

**Joel 2:11** - And Jehovah uttereth his voice before his army; for his camp is very great; for he is strong that executeth his word; for **the day of Jehovah** is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

**Joel 2:31** - The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible **day of Jehovah** cometh.

**Joel 3:14** - Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! for **the day of Jehovah** is near in the valley of decision.

In the ESV, God is being referred to by a **title**, but in the original Hebrew, God is being referred to by his **name**.

The ESV changes the name of a God to a title for God, but we can't be critical of that change. Why not? Because Jesus did the same thing!



**Deuteronomy 6:16** - [ASV] Ye shall not tempt **Jehovah** your God...

**Matthew 4:7** - Jesus said unto him, Again it is written, Thou shalt not make trial of the **Lord** thy God.

One of the commentaries I read complained that by using “the Lord” in English, “*we depersonalize the name into a title,*” but that commentator had apparently failed to notice that when he wrote that he was also criticizing Jesus! We know from Matthew 4:7 that both the name of God (Jehovah in the ASV) and the title of God (Lord) are correct understandings of the Hebrew word.

But what is going on? Why did Jesus make that change in the New Testament? Why do modern versions make the same change in the Old Testament?

The original Hebrew word consists of four Hebrew consonants, which in English correspond to YHWH. Those four letters are called the Tetragrammaton or the Sacred Tetragrammaton.

**Exodus 6:2-3** - And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am **Jehovah**: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty; but by my **name Jehovah** I was not known to them.

The ESV changes both of those names to “Lord,” and the KJV changes one of them to “Lord.” As the ASV correctly shows us, both occurrences are the Tetragrammaton.

So, why the change from the name to the title?

Traditionally, the Jews did not pronounce the name of God. Why not? There are various possible reasons, but most likely it was to prevent the name from being used in vain or because they believed the name was imbued with a special spiritual force.

It is unclear whether the Tetragrammaton was spoken in antiquity but if it was, then it was probably pronounced “Yahweh.”

Originally, the Hebrew text consisted of consonants, but later vowel marks were added by scribes to help people pronounce the Hebrew words.

So what did those scribes do with a word that was not to be pronounced? What they did was they added the vowel marks for another word - the Hebrew word *adonai*, meaning Lord. That word “Lord” was the word you were supposed to say when you pronounced the name of God, and so, to remind you, the scribes added the vowel marks for “Lord” to the Hebrew name for God.

Later, the KJV translators combined the Hebrew consonants for the name of God and the Hebrew vowel marks for the Hebrew word “Lord” to come up with the English word “Jehovah.”

Here is how one source described what happened:

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, some Christian readers of printed Hebrew Bibles thought the vowels under the Tetragrammaton were the vowels for pronouncing the divine name and concluded, incorrectly, that it should be pronounced “Jehovah.” This became the standard rendering of YHWH in English literature. Most modern English translations, however, have followed the Jewish practice, rendering the name as “the LORD.”

The KJV uses the word “Jehovah” only four times, but the ASV uses that word 6889 times! That let’s us know just how often the name of God is found in the Old Testament. It is found 33 times just in the three chapters of Joel.

Why is that important? Because the **Day of the Lord** or the **Day of Jehovah** is a central theme - and perhaps **the** central theme - in the book of Joel.

But what does that theme mean? Is the Day of the Lord a single day or can it refer to multiple days? Either way, which day or days is it?

Let’s save those questions for later along with a more detailed study of the name of God, but for now let’s just be on the lookout for that important phrase as we study the book.

## Restoration and Salvation

A second theme that jumps out from a quick read of Joel is the combined theme of repentance and restoration and salvation.

**Joel 2:12-13** - “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “**return to me** with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” **Return to the LORD your God**, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

**Joel 2:25** - I will **restore** to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you.

**Joel 2:32** - And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be **saved**.

**Joel 3:1** - For behold, in those days and at that time, when I **restore** the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem.

But who or what is being saved? And who or what is being restored? And when? Let's save those questions for later.

## Calamity and Loss

And if repentance, restoration, and salvation is a theme, then we should not be surprised to find the opposite theme of calamity, loss, and death, and we do find that theme.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

**Joel 2:1-2** - Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

But what is the great calamity? And who is suffering this calamity and loss, and when? Let's save those questions for later.

## Judgment

And we also see the closely related theme of judgment.

**Joel 3:2** - I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land.

But who is being judged? And when? Let's save those questions for later.

## The Church

Another theme that we will find in the book of Joel is the church of Christ.

And how do we know that the church is a theme in Joel? Because Peter told us that it is when he quoted Joel 2 on the day that the church was established in Acts 2.

There is something in Joel that is crucial for us to understand what was happening centuries later on that great day of Pentecost when the eternal kingdom of Christ was established and the first gospel sermon went out from Jerusalem.

But what is it? Let's save that question for later.

## The Covenant

When we studied Hosea, we found that his book was based largely on the covenant that existed between God and his people. The people had broken that covenant, and so now they were experiencing the curses of Deuteronomy 28 that God had told them would come to pass if they broke the covenant.

I think we will discover that the covenant is also a key theme in Joel, and I think we will also find that the book of Deuteronomy is as important to understanding Joel as it was to understanding Hosea.

So what themes have we seen so far?

- The Day of the Lord
- Restoration and Salvation
- Calamity and Loss
- Judgment
- The Church
- The Covenant

Those six themes are easy to spot, but there may be some others that are a little harder to see. Let's start with those themes and keep our eyes open for others.

## Is Joel one book or multiple books?

That's a good question, but let's come back to it. Instead, let me ask a different question: how can I choose a good commentary on the book of Joel?

I have about 25 commentaries on Joel that I am using for these lessons, and some of them are good and some of them are bad.

But let me clarify what I mean by good and bad. I do not mean useful or useless. A bad commentary can be very useful by sometimes providing good thoughts or useful information about a particular verse or word.

So how then do I sort my commentaries into the good stack and the bad stack? I can usually do that by looking at the preface and the index.

The preface tells me the philosophy of the commentator. Does he or she believe in God? Does

he or she believe that the Bible is the word of God? Does he or she believe the Bible is inspired and inerrant? If so, then that commentary goes in my good stack. Yes, I might end up disagreeing with most of their conclusions about the book, but I like how they approach it.

We can certainly reach a wrong conclusion even though we start from the right spot - but we are almost guaranteed to reach the wrong conclusion if we start from the wrong spot - and bad commentaries are bad because they start from the wrong spot. They reject the very first thing we read in Joel - that his book is "the word of the Lord." And we can often see that in the preface of their commentary.

And the index? The index will tell me the other verses in the Bible that the author cited in the commentary. For an Old Testament book, you should also ask how many of those citations are from the New Testament? If there are very few, then that commentary goes in the bad pile.

Believe it or not, but there are commentaries out there than have absolutely nothing to say about Acts 2 in their commentary on Joel 2. That is bad, bad, bad!

So, let's get back to the question that started us off on this tangent: Is Joel one book or multiple books?

The book of Joel (in the very first verse) identifies Joel and tells us that this book is the word of the Lord that came to Joel.

So, is this book one book or many books? Did Joel or someone else perhaps receive and write the first two chapters, and then did someone else come along much later and write the third chapter?

If I believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, then my answer is no. My answer is that the book of Joel is what it tells me it is - the word of the Lord that came to a prophet named Joel.

So, if you pick up a commentary and it splinters the text into multiple parts all said to be written by a different person or if it somehow tries to explain Joel 2 without ever referring to Acts 2, then that commentary should go in your bad pile. You can still read it, and likely get some useful information



from it, but you shouldn't be surprised when it very often gets things completely wrong.

## Joel Lesson 2

### Where are we, when are we, and how did we get here?

Those are good questions to ask anytime we embark on a study of a book in the Bible, and especially a book of prophecy.

Why especially prophecy? Because there are two things that are vital to correctly understanding any prophecy in the Bible: context and time frame.

What is the context? What is the time frame? If we keep asking ourselves those two questions, then we can unravel any prophecy in the Bible be it the 70 weeks in Daniel or the whore of Babylon in Revelation.

But to answer those questions, it usually helps a lot to know when the book was written.

Was Daniel written in 500 BC or 300 BC? Was Revelation written before AD 70 or after AD 70? Those are questions we always consider when we study those two books. And if we get those questions wrong, we will probably get the books wrong.

Peter helped us with the chronology of some of the prophecies in Joel when he told us in Acts 2 that some of the prophecies in Joel were being fulfilled on that particular day. But what about the other prophecies? What is their time frame? What is their context?

It seems that all roads lead us back to the same question: when was Joel written?

That question sounds so simple - when was Joel written - but it is anything but simple. In fact, it is the one of the most difficult questions in the entire Bible!

Joel is not the only undated minor prophet. Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Malachi also present some dating challenges - but not like Joel. Joel is the most difficult minor prophet when it comes to the question of when it was written.

Unlike Hosea, Joel does not tell us the name of any king who was ruling when he wrote the book. And unlike Hosea, Joel does not provide us with any

historical events that would firmly establish the date of his book.

Given the lack of a firm date in the text and the lack of any external evidence about Joel, all we can do is look for whatever internal evidence we can find in the book.

After looking at the evidence, I think what we will find is that the question of when Joel was written is impossible to answer with complete certainty. And I think we will also find that the question is still very difficult to answer even if all we want is a reasonable likelihood.

That is certainly where many others have ended up. Here is how some commentaries describe the question of when Joel was written:

[Nass] - "With this topic, we enter a quagmire of scholarly contention. Since there are no outside references to Joel, the dating of the book relies totally on internal evidence, and there are interminable debates on what that evidence suggests."

[Garrett] - "Probably no book of the Bible has had a wider range of dates assigned to it."

[McComiskey] - "But [with the date of Joel] we encounter a thicket of seemingly insoluble questions."

[Delitzsch] - "The bringing down of Joel into the post exilic age ... is one of the most rotten fruits of the modern criticism."

In researching this question of when Joel was written, I looked at 25 commentaries. And do you know what I found? I found 25 different opinions, ranging from the middle of the 9th century to the middle of the 2nd century BC - which is a range of 700 years!

You can see the great sweep of history covered by those opinions on the Handout for Lesson 1 - from

the days of Elijah and Elisha up until the fall of Greece seven centuries later!

That would be like us today trying to date a locust invasion that occurred at some point in a window of time extending from our own day back to the 1300's when the Black Death was sweeping across Europe!

In short, it is a very difficult assignment!

## But does it matter?

Does it really matter if we don't know when Joel was written?

John Calvin answered no. He said it does not matter when Joel was written.

“As there is no certainty, it is better to leave the time in which he taught undecided; and, as we shall see, this is of no great importance.”

Was Calvin correct? He was wrong about most things, but did he get that one question right? Does it matter when the book was written?

On one hand, my answer is that I hope not! Why? Because we don't know for sure when the book was written! If we have to know with certainty when Joel was written to understand Joel, then we have a big problem.

But, on the other hand, I think we perhaps should be asking ourselves a different question - would it **help** to know when Joel was written? Would knowing that fact about Joel make it **easier** to understand the book?

And the answer to that question is most certainly yes. It would help - and sometimes it would help a lot.

And so I disagree with Calvin that the date of Joel is “of no great importance.”

If we knew the date, then our job of interpreting Joel would be much easier, and I think that fact alone makes the date important. Knowing the date of Joel would let us know more easily how Joel fits in with the other prophets, and that, too, makes the date important.

But if knowing the date is important, and we don't know the date, then what do we do? What is our game plan?

In short, our game plan is to **punt**!

I propose that we not come up with an answer prior to our study of Joel, but that instead we look for an answer as we study the book.

Perhaps we will have a date for the book after we finish, and perhaps not. We may have to be content with not knowing when the book was written.

But how do we study the book without knowing when it was written? How do we answer questions about what is being described in the book of Joel if we don't know whether the book was written in the 8th century or the 2nd century?

The answer is that we have to look for answers that fit with each of the possible dates for the book.

That is also how we can figure out when it was written. If we are unable to explain a verse in Joel under a particular view about when it was written, then we can likely say that view about the book's date is wrong.

But, to keep things manageable, our plan will be to focus on three views about when the book was written.

Why only three? Because almost all of the various viewpoints from the 25 commentaries can be sorted into three buckets.

What are the three buckets? They are shown on the Handout for Lesson 1: the early view, the pre-exile view, and the post-exile view.

- Under the **early view**, Joel was written during the reign of King Joash toward the end of the 9th century BC.
- Under the **pre-exile view**, Joel was written in the 7th century, after the fall of Israel in 722 BC but before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC.
- Under the **post-exile view**, Joel was written after the return from exile in 539 BC, after the temple was rebuilt in 515 BC, and after the wall was rebuilt following Nehemiah's return in 445 BC.



So, as we study the text, we will be trying to understand it under each of these three scenarios. If we are unable to make the text fit with one of the scenarios, then we will cast that scenario aside. But let's start our study of Joel by keeping our mind open to all three of them.

But with that said, I think it would be helpful to look briefly now at the evidence that we will need to explain later under each of the three proposed dates for the book. This evidence is highlighted on the Handout for Lesson 2.

## What is the internal evidence about when the book of Joel was written?

I think we can find at least 20 pieces of internal evidence in the book of Joel about when the book was written.

**Exhibit No. 1:** Other than a reference to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, Joel never refers to a king either by name or by use of the word "king" without a name.

Does that mean there was no king? Or does it mean that the king was a child, such as with Joash? Or is there another reason Joel never refers to a reigning king?

**Exhibit No. 2:** The book of Joel never mentions idolatry or false gods or the high places.

Does that mean those practices were not a problem when Joel was written? Or is there perhaps another reason why Joel tells the people to repent but does not tell us the sins they had committed?

**Exhibit No. 3:** The book of Joel never mentions Assyria by name.

Does that mean the book was written before Assyria became a world power or after Assyria fell to Babylon? Or did Joel fail to mention Assyria for another reason?

We know that Amos was written in the same time frame as Hosea, during the height of Assyrian power, but Amos also never mentions Assyria by name.

**Exhibit No. 4:** The book of Joel never mentions Babylon by name.

Does that mean the book was written before Babylon became a world power or after Babylon

fell to Persia? Or did Joel fail to mention Babylon for another reason?

Joel 1:2 seems to describe an invasion of locusts as being worse than anything that has happened in the people's memory. Does that mean the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions had not yet occurred? Or does it perhaps mean instead that those events had happened long ago? Or were the locusts really worse than the Assyrians and the Babylonians?

**Exhibit No. 5:** As shown on the Handout for Lesson 2 with blue highlights, there are many apparent parallels between Joel and other books or prophecy in the Bible.

For example:

**Joel 3:16** - The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem...

**Amos 1:2** - ...The LORD roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem...

and:

**Joel 3:18** - And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk...

**Amos 9:13** - ...the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.

and:

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

**Isaiah 13:6** - Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!

Are any of those parallels quotations in Joel from that other book? Or are any of them quotations from Joel in that other book? In short, who is quoting whom?

**Exhibit No. 6:** In Joel 3:10, we read: “Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears.”

That sure sounds familiar! We see something close to it in Isaiah.

**Isaiah 2:4** - He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and **they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;** nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

But that phrase from Isaiah is not what Joel said, but instead is the opposite of what Joel said!

In Joel, the plowshares become swords, while in Isaiah, the swords become plowshares. One of them takes the other one and turns it completely around - but which one came first? (One of them was chosen for the entrance of the UN - but the other one was definitely not!)

**Exhibit No. 7:** Joel 2:32 arguably refers to and then cites Obadiah 1:17 (even though Obadiah is not named).

**Joel 2:32** - And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. *For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said,* and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

**Obadiah 1:17** - *But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape, and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions.*

Unlike the other parallels, with this one it looks like Joel is the one who is doing the quoting, and it looks like Joel is quoting Obadiah. If both of those things are true, then Joel must be dated after Obadiah.

That sounds good, but there are at least two problems. First, Joel never mentions Obadiah, and so we can't say for sure whether he is quoting Obadiah. All we know for sure is that he is quoting God - “as the LORD has said.”

But second, even if we were to conclude that Joel is after Obadiah, that would not solve our problem. Why? Because we don't know the date of Obadiah either!

Some say Obadiah was written during the reign of King Jehoram in the 9th century BC, while others say Obadiah was written after Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 BC.

All we can say for sure about the timing of Obadiah is that it proclaims a judgment against Edom, but Edom had been a thorn in Judah's side for centuries. I think the later date is more likely for Obadiah (as shown on the Handout for Lesson 1), but we can't say for sure, and we can't say for sure whether Joel is quoting Obadiah.

**Exhibit No. 8:** In the book of Joel, there is a functioning temple in Jerusalem.

**Joel 1:9** - The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from **the house of the LORD**. The priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD.

**Joel 2:17** - **Between the vestibule and the altar** let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?

It seems from those verses that the temple was standing and was functioning as a temple, at least before the locusts caused some of the offerings to temporarily stop.

That fact would seem to exclude the time period between 587 BC (when the temple was destroyed) and 515 BC (when the temple was rebuilt), although some commentaries even disagree with that!

**Exhibit No. 9:** Israel is mentioned three times in the book of Joel, but *arguably* only as a reference to the people of Judah and never as a reference to the northern kingdom.

**Joel 2:27** - You shall know that I am in the midst of **Israel**, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

**Joel 3:2** - I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage **Israel**, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land.

**Joel 3:16** - The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of **Israel**.

If Israel does not refer to the northern kingdom in those verses, then does that mean the northern kingdom had already fallen when Joel was written? Or is there perhaps another reason Israel is used that way?

**Exhibit No. 10:** The book of Joel describes a restoration of Judah, a scattering of Israel, and a division of the land.

**Joel 3:1-2** - For behold, in those days and at that time, when I **restore** the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have **scattered** them among the nations and have **divided** up my land.

Is that describing the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria, the fall of the southern kingdom to Babylon, or something else?

If the restoration of Judah in Joel 3 is the return from Babylon, then what is the scattering?

But if the scattering in Joel 3 is the scattering of Israel, then what is the restoration of Judah?

**Exhibit No. 11:** The book of Joel includes a summons for **all** people to gather in the temple in Jerusalem.

**Joel 1:14** - Gather the elders and **all the inhabitants of the land** to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.

If all the people of the land could gather in temple, then does that mean the population was very small when Joel was written?

**Exhibit No. 12:** While Joel does not mention a king, Joel does refer to elders.

**Joel 1:2** - Hear this, you **elders**; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?

Were those elders the leaders of the people? And, if so, does that mean Joel was written after the exile when the elders were in charge and there was no king? Or are the elders mentioned in verse 2 for another reason?

**Exhibit No. 13:** When Joel was written, there was a wall around Jerusalem.

**Joel 2:7** - Like warriors they charge; like soldiers they scale the **wall**.

**Joel 2:9** - They leap upon the city, they run upon the **walls**...

Does that mean Joel was written before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the wall? Or does it instead mean that Joel was written after Nehemiah rebuilt the wall?



**Exhibit No. 14:** When Joel was written, there were granaries and storehouses in Judah.

**Joel 1:17** - The seed shrivels under the clods; the **storehouses** are desolate; the **granaries** are torn down because the grain has dried up.

Does that mean Joel was written before Nebuchadnezzar invaded and destroyed such buildings?

**Exhibit No. 15:** Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia are mentioned in Joel 3:4.

Can we somehow use the mention of those traditional enemies of the Jews to date the book of Joel? Is it helpful to know that the Philistines are mentioned in Joel while the Assyrians and the Babylonians are not?

**Exhibit No. 16:** The Greeks are mentioned in Joel 3:6.

Does that help us date the book? Yes, we know the Greek were a world power in the 4th century BC, but we also know that Greek traders were in Palestine at least as early as the 8th century BC.

**Exhibit No. 17:** The Sabeans are mentioned in Joel 3:8.

Does that help us date the book? We know that the Sabeans dominated the eastern trade routes in the 5th century BC.

**Exhibit No. 18:** Egypt and Edom are mentioned in Joel 3:19.

Does that help us date the book? As with Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia, we again see traditional enemies of the Jews. Egypt and Edom were long a thorn in Judah's side.

Obadiah is also directed against Edom, but when was Obadiah written? We know that Edom caused trouble for the Jews after Nebuchadnezzar invaded, but we know that was not the only time Edom caused them trouble.

**Exhibit No. 19:** The Valley of Jehoshaphat is mentioned in Joel 3:2 and Joel 3:12.

Where is that valley? If the location of that valley is not known, then does that mean Joel was likely written close to the time when Jehoshaphat was king in the 9th century?

**Exhibit No. 20:** The book of Joel is the second of the twelve minor prophets in the Old Testament.

Yes, the ordering of the minor prophets in the Bible seems to be at least roughly chronological, but how roughly?

And with that, we have now looked at the internal evidence in the book of Joel for when the book was written.

Most of those clues are highlighted on the Handout for Lesson 2, and we will discuss them in more detail as when get to them. We will also consider how each piece of evidence relates to the various viewpoints about the date of Joel.

And whatever viewpoint we consider or adopt regarding the date of Joel, that viewpoint will have to explain all of this internal evidence.

Now why did I say that only **most** of the internal evidence was highlighted on the handout? Because some of the internal evidence depends on arguments from silence.

That is, some of the evidence points not to something Joel wrote but rather to something Joel did not write. And because (by definition) we will never see such evidence in our study of the text of Joel, we should likely consider those arguments from silence now.

Let's list those arguments again: No reigning king is mentioned; Assyria is not mentioned; Babylon is not mentioned; idolatry is not mentioned; the northern kingdom is not mentioned.

Does the lack of a king mean there was no king? Does the lack of Assyria and Babylon mean that they were not yet or no longer world powers? Does the lack of idolatry mean that idolatry was not a problem? Does the lack of clear references to the northern kingdom mean there was no northern kingdom?

How do we explain all of that? I think the explanation is pretty easy - Joel is a very short book! It is only

three chapters long! There are only 73 verses in Joel!

In short, there are a lot of things that are not mentioned in the book of Joel. I don't think any argument from silence should move the needle very much when it comes to when the book was written.

We may have some more to say about such evidence from silence, but my plan is to focus more on the evidence for which Joel was not silent.

Now, let's pause for one more point about the three viewpoints we are going to consider, and particularly about the third one - the **post-exile** viewpoint.

Some of those who adopt that third viewpoint do so for a bad motive. They believe that the Law of Moses was not written during the days of Moses but was instead written in Babylon during the exile. We talked about that theory in our study of Ezra, and we showed why that theory is completely wrong.

But, for those who believe that wrong theory, they cannot date Joel prior to the exile. Why not? Because Joel refers to the grain offerings and drink offerings detailed in the Law of Moses. If that system was created during the exile, then Joel must be dated after the exile. And so, for some, their false belief about the dating of the Law of Moses determines their viewpoint about the date of Joel.

That bad motive explains one of the quotes we saw earlier.

[Delitzsch] - "The bringing down of Joel into the post exilic age ... is one of the most rotten fruits of the modern criticism."

But that bad motive is not true of everyone who holds that third viewpoint, and so we cannot reject that third view just because some have adopted it for the wrong reason.

We may determine that we should adopt it for a right reason! We need to just consider the evidence and set motives aside - which is always a good plan when it comes to studying the Bible!

## Why is Joel undated?

As we have seen, it is a very tough job - and possibly an impossible job - to determine when Joel was written.

Is there a reason for that? Is there a reason why Joel does not tell us when it was written?

Yes, there is some evidence in the book, but that evidence seemingly supports possible dates for the book that are up to 700 years apart! Was that intentional?

My initial inclination is to answer yes. Otherwise, we may have to explain how something in the inspired word of God was not intentional! Remember what we know about the written word of God.

**Matthew 5:18** - For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

If I were to think something about the Bible was not intentional, it might be the placement of a dot - but if I thought that, I would be wrong!

But here we are not looking at a dot that was placed in the text - instead we are looking at what was left out of the text - clear evidence of the date.

Was that evidence left out of Joel for a reason? And, if so, what could that reason be?

One possible reason is that perhaps the book of Joel is undated because the prophecies in the book are applicable to more than one historical event.

Are there other possible reasons? Let's keep that question in mind as we work through the text.

## What are the other big issues in Joel?

We just looked at perhaps the biggest issue when it comes to Joel - when was it written - but that is not the only issue when it comes to Joel.

There are controversies about every book in the Bible. What are the controversies about Joel?

Although I suspect we will find some others, here are some big issues that I am sure we will see.

One big controversy involves the locust invasion that is described in Joel.

Are we seeing actual locusts, or are the locusts just a metaphor? And if we are seeing actual locusts, is that all we see? Or do we see both an army of locusts and an army of human warriors? And if the latter, which army do we see?

Another big controversy about Joel involves the timing of the blessings that we see in the second half of the book.

Were those blessings confined to Joel's day? Or were they first century blessings under Christ? Or are they blessings for God's people at the end of time?

A third big controversy involves the role of the Holy Spirit, both in Joel 2 and in Acts 2, where Peter quotes Joel 2.

What is the promise? For whom is the promise? When will be or when was the promise received? Peter said that "this is that" - but what is "this," and what is "that"?

Again, I am sure we will discuss each of those issues in our study of Joel, and, for now, a good homework exercise would be to think about these questions as we read the short book of Joel each week and to also look for other questions.



## Joel Lesson 3

### Is there a lesson for us in the book of Joel?

We know that there are lessons for us in Joel. Why? Because there are lessons for us in every book of the Old Testament, and that includes the book of Joel.

The Apostle Paul tells us that.

**Romans 15:4** - For **whatever** was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

And Peter also tells us that, especially with regard to the books of prophecy such as Joel.

**2 Peter 1:19** - And we have **the prophetic word** more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

What do those verses from Peter and Paul tell us about Joel?

- They tell us that Joel was written for our instruction.
- They tell us that Joel was written for our encouragement.
- They tell us that Joel was written so that we might have hope.
- They tell us that Joel should be to us like a lamp shining in a dark place.

So, yes, there are most certainly lessons for us in the book of Joel! But what are they? What lessons can we learn from Joel?

We can learn lessons from Joel about times of trouble for the people of God.

When the book of Joel opens, the people of Judah and Jerusalem are reeling from a terrible disaster that was worse than anything they had experienced in their collective memory (Joel 1:2). In fact, the disaster was so bad that it prevented the daily offerings in the temple (Joel 1:13).

And what was that terrible disaster? It was an invasion of locusts. And when we get to chapter 1 we will look at just how devastating such an invasion can be.

But, as bad as that way, it was not the only trouble the people faced. Depending on when we date the book, other troubles would come later or had already come in the form of invasions from Assyria and Babylon.

Those were the troubles for God's people in Joel's day, and they were terrible troubles.

And today? What are the troubles today? Pandemics, hurricanes, wildfires, economic turmoil, terrorism, crime, violence, war, and on and on.

In fact, as we study Joel in 2024, we are aware of a very recent modern-day parallel. As with the locusts in Joel's day, the Covid crisis in our own day was unlike anything we could remember and interfered with our worship services. Both of those things were also true about the troubles we will see in Joel.

There are two constants when it comes to troubles in this life. First, we will always face them, and second, we can always turn to God for help when those troubles come - and I think that both of those important lessons from Joel are also important lessons for us today.

And, of course, we see that all throughout the Bible.

**Psalms 37:39** - The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble.

**Isaiah 33:2** - O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for you. Be our arm

every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble.

And we will see that in Joel.

**Joel 2:12** - "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

When troubles come we should turn to God, and, when we do, we will find hope and comfort in God's great love and in God's great promises.

God has a plan for us that goes far beyond whatever troubles we may face in this life. That was a message in Joel for the people of Joel's day - and this is a message in Joel for the people of our own day.

Another lesson we can learn from the Joel is the importance and possibility of restoration.

One of the most beautiful promises in the Bible is found in the second chapter of Joel.

**Joel 2:25** - I will restore to you **the years** that the swarming locust has eaten...

Yes, God can restore time! That wonderful promise reminds us of what Jesus said in Luke 18.

**Luke 18:27** - And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

We cannot restore time, but God can!

And we also find restoration in the opening chapters of the book of Acts, which we know are very closely related to the book of Joel.

**Acts 1:6** - So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord,

will you at this time **restore** the kingdom to Israel?"

Yes, that question is often described as a display of ignorance by the apostles, but that is not correct at all. There is nothing wrong with that question, and Jesus never says otherwise (beyond his comment about the timing of its fulfillment). In fact, Peter in the very next chapter explains how it was fulfilled - the kingdom was restored to Israel when Jesus sat down to rule the world from the throne of King David (Acts 2:30). That throne had been unoccupied for centuries, but that throne was restored by Christ.

We also see a restoration in the next chapter of Acts.

**Acts 3:21** - Whom heaven must receive until the time for **restoring** all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Joel teaches us about both the *importance* of restoration and the *possibility* of restoration.

Yes, the troubles will come, but yes, we can be made new! God can restore what we have lost - even if what we have lost is time! "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten."

Another lesson we can learn from the Joel is the certainty of judgment.

Whatever troubles we face in this life, there is one thing we should always remember - the Day of the Lord is coming! God will have the final word.

The Day of the Lord is perhaps the central theme of Joel, and it is certainly a timeless lesson from the book of Joel.

The world does not like to think about God. The world believes that it is in charge of things, and the world does not ever like to be reminded that it is not.

Peter described the attitude of such people.

**2 Peter 3:3-4** - Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They

will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

And Peter also told us about what was coming for such scoffers - complete destruction of their world and of their works.

**2 Peter 3:9-10** - The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

And did you catch it? Did you notice how Peter described that event? He called it **the day of the Lord!** No Jew could ever use that phrase or hear that phrase without thinking of the prophet Joel!

What is the day of the Lord? Is it a one-time event or can multiple events be called the day of the Lord? And what does it mean for a day to be the day of the Lord?

Let's save those questions for later, but for now the lesson for us is this - whether or not there have been days of the Lord in the past, one thing is certain: the day of the Lord is coming! That is what Joel told us and that is also what Peter told us. Judgment is coming! God will have the final word!

And what must we do in response to that great truth? Peter also told us that.

**2 Peter 3:11-12** - Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of **the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the

heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

We know that Peter was thinking about Joel in Acts 2. I think Peter was also thinking about Joel in 2 Peter 3, and I think we will see these same lessons in the book of Joel.

Another lesson we can learn from Joel is the need for us to always have a Biblical worldview.

What do I mean by that? Here is how one commentary explains it:

"The Bible calls upon readers to accept its world as their world. It is not content simply to speak to us or allow us to pick and choose from among its ideas in an eclectic fashion. Rather, it demands that we see the world as it sees it and interpret events accordingly. Joel, in his treatment of a locust plague in the context of biblical theology, has modeled this kind of thinking."

Whatever happens in this world, we must see it through a Biblical lens. Joel provides a good lesson for us about how that is done.

Yes, the locusts came, and yes, it was a very horrible event that must have been terribly frightening to all who saw those insects darken the sky.

But when viewed through a Biblical lens, those terrible locusts looked very different. And I think Joel was calling upon the people to see them differently.

Those locusts were a warning of coming judgments, and those those locusts were also a reminder of the people's need for God and of the promises of God.

Likewise, today, when our own locusts come we need to see them through a Biblical lens. We need to see them in light of the big picture, and the only way we can know the big picture is by studying the word of God.

We cannot close our ears to the word of God and expect to have a Biblical worldview. That was a

lesson for God's people in Joel's day, and that is a lesson for God's people in any day.

Another lesson we can learn from Joel is the role of the church in world history.

We know that the book of Joel includes a prophecy about the church because Peter told us that in Acts 2:16 on the day the church was established.

And we also know that Joel speaks of a day when God would gather all nations for judgment.

**Joel 3:2** - I will gather **all the nations** and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there...

**Joel 3:11-12** - Hasten and come, **all you surrounding nations**, and gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O LORD. Let **the nations** stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge **all the surrounding nations**.

**Joel 3:20-21** - But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations. I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged, for the LORD dwells in Zion.

Now that's interesting. Why? Because there is another verse in the Bible that talks about both of those same things - the establishment of the church and the judgment of the nations.

**Daniel 2:44** - And in the days of those kings the God of heaven **will set up a kingdom** that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall **break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end**, and it shall stand forever.

We will have much more to say about Joel 3 when get there, but for now I think we can safely say that there are some great lessons about the church of Christ in the pages of Joel.

We just looked at the book of Daniel - let's briefly consider its counterpart in the New Testament.

## Is the book of Joel related to the book of Revelation?

We just saw a connection between the book of Joel and the book of Daniel. Is there also a connection between the book of Joel and the book of Revelation?

Yes, I think so. As with the book of Joel, the book of Revelation was also written at a time when the people of God were suffering a terrible trial.

Initially, Rome ignored the church, seeing it only as a branch of Judaism, but that all changed after Christians were cast out of the synagogues and after the church began proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. By the time Revelation was written, Rome was actively persecuting Christians.

What did those suffering Christians need to hear? Two things - they needed to hear a message of comfort, and they needed to hear a message of victory. And, not surprisingly, the combination of those two messages is the theme of Revelation: **Fear not! We win!**

And what is the message of Joel? **Fear not! We win!**

And however one dates the book of Revelation or the book of Joel, that message is timeless! That is a message that we all need to hear all the time! **Fear not! We win!**

That is one big similarity between Joel and Revelation, but are there any others? I think so.

In both Joel and Revelation we find locusts.

**Joel 1:4** - What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.



**Revelation 9:3** - Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth.

In both Joel and Revelation we find apocalyptic language.

**Joel 2:10** - The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

**Joel 2:31** - The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

**Joel 3:15** - The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

**Revelation 6:12-13** - When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.

In both Joel and Revelation we find a great northern army arrayed against the people of God.

**Joel 2:20** - "I will remove **the northerner** far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.

**Revelation 20:7-8** - And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the

nations that are at the four corners of the earth, **Gog and Magog**, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.

**Ezekiel 38:14-15** - Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and **say to Gog**, Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day when my people Israel are dwelling securely, will you not know it? **You will come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north**, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great host, a mighty army.

And in both Revelation and Joel, we find the number four.

**Revelation 7:1** - After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

**Revelation 9:13-14** - Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

And we also have four beasts in Revelation 13:1-2. When we studied Daniel 7:3-7, we discovered that those four beasts were Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.

We will also see hints of the number four in our study of Joel. We will see four kinds of locusts in Joel 1:3, and we will see four groups addressed by Joel in Joel 1.

Is that just a coincidence, or should we look a bit deeper when we see that number four? And why four? What is the significance of four? And is that similar language from Joel and Revelation all

describing the same thing or different things? Let's save all of these questions for later!

## What is the structure of Joel?

I think we should answer that question as we study the text, but I think it would be helpful to briefly consider the main headings of the book before we begin.

And, although we might find ourselves disagreeing with this initial outline a bit as we work through the book, I think we can spot at least these potential sections.

First, we see a locust plague in Judah, and that invasion of locusts is described as the day of the Lord and as a time for repentance.

Second, the locust invasion of the land is seemingly transformed into an image of a northern army sacking Jerusalem.

Third, we see repentance and restoration as the means of healing. Rains restore the land, and the northern army is destroyed.

Fourth, the image of rain falling upon the land is transformed into an image of the Spirit being poured out on all people.

And finally, God's fury falls upon the Gentile nations in retribution for their hatred of God's people.

Most commentaries agree that there some key pivot points in the book of Joel where Joel goes from discussing one thing to instead discussing something else. But there is a lot of disagreement about where those pivot points are located. A good exercise for us is to think about that question as we read the book of Joel each week - where are the pivot points?

Yes, Joel is a short book, but it is an action-packed book! Let's get started!

## Joel 1:1

**Joel 1:1** - The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

The opening words of the book of Joel are the most important words in the book of Joel - "the word of the Lord."

If this book were just the word of Joel, then there would be no reason for us to spend much time on it. It might be interesting, but at the end of the day it would just be a book of Joel's opinions.

But the book of Joel is not the word of Joel; the book of Joel is the word of God. And we might be surprised how many commentaries miss this all-important point about the book of Joel. But we will not miss that point - this book of Joel is the word of God that came to Joel.

Let's pause and look at that phrase: "the word of the Lord."

If you are using the ESV or the KJV, you might notice that the word "LORD" is written with all capital letters. That typographic convention is how those translations let us know that the Hebrew word translated "Lord" is the name of God, which we usually pronounce as Yahweh or Jehovah. We talked about the name of God in our introduction when we discussed the Day of the LORD or the Day of Jehovah.

There are four common Hebrew words used to refer to God in the Old Testament, and we can find them all in a single verse.

**Deuteronomy 10:17** - For the **LORD** your **God** is God of gods and **Lord** of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome **God**...

In that one verse we find the name of God (Yahweh or Jehovah, translated LORD with all capital letters), the word "Lord" (with lower case letters) (Hebrew *adon* or *adonay*), and two words translated "God" (Hebrew *elohim* in the first and second occurrence and Hebrew *el* in the final occurrence). And so in the ESV those four different Hebrew words for God are translated as two different English words.

The ASV uses three English words for the four Hebrew words:

**Deuteronomy 10:17** - For Jehovah your God, he is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God...

Which word do we find in Joel 1:1? The book of Joel opens in the Hebrew by declaring that it is the Word of Yahweh or (as in the ASV) the Word of Jehovah.

What does the use of God's name in verse 1 tell us about the book of Joel? Two things: the use of God's name tells us something about God's **redemption** and tells us something about God's **retribution**.

First, God's name tells us something about redemption. The use of God's name in verse 1 shows us the special relationship that exists between God and those who had been redeemed by God and placed in a special covenant relationship with God.

We saw that special relationship characterized as a marriage in our study of Hosea. It is an intimate relationship characterized by a special knowledge and by a special bond.

The name of God always had special significance to those in a covenant relationship with God.

**Exodus 3:14-15** [ASV] - And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **Jehovah**, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.

**Exodus 20:2-3** [ASV] - I am **Jehovah** thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

This special covenant relationship explains a puzzling verse in Exodus 6.

**Exodus 6:2-3** [ASV] - And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am **Jehovah**: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty; **but**

**by my name Jehovah I was not known to them.**

And why is that verse from Exodus 6 puzzling? Because of what we read much earlier in Genesis 4.

**Genesis 4:26** - And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enosh. **Then began men to call upon the name of Jehovah.**

If Adam's children and grandchildren were calling upon the name of Jehovah in Genesis 4, then what did God mean in Exodus 6:3 when he told Moses that "by my name Jehovah I was not known to them"?

The answer is the covenant. In fact, that is what God says in the very next verse.

**Exodus 6:4** - And I have also established **my covenant** with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, wherein they sojourned.

The name of God was known prior to Moses, but the character expressed by that name was not.

God had not previously made himself known in that special covenant relationship that he shared with his people. "By my name Jehovah I was not known to them."

We know that names in the Bible are often used to denote a person's status. We see that with Jesus, for example, in Revelation 19.

**Revelation 19:12-13** - His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, **and he has a name written that no one knows but himself**. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, **and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.**

In verse 12 we are told that Jesus "has a name written that no one knows but himself," but in the very next verse we are told that "the name by

which he is called is The Word of God.” What does that mean? How can it be that no one knows a name when that name is given for all to see in the very next verse?

The answer, as we said, is that names in the Bible are often used to denote a person’s status. When one’s status changed, his name was changed. We are reminded, for example, of Abram, Jacob, and Saul.

To have a name that no one else can know means that you have a status that no one else can share. That is what Revelation 19:12 means. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, and no one else can share that status.

Roman emperors were a dime a dozen, but there is only one Christ. Only Jesus can wear the name, The Word of God. Only about Jesus can it be said that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). “For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus is unique!

And so, when God told Moses in Exodus 6 that “by my name Jehovah I was not known to them,” Moses was being told that there was something about God that had not been revealed earlier - something about the status of God or the character of God that they did not know but that had now been revealed to them.

And that something was the special covenant relationship between God and the people of God.

This opening phrase in Joel 1:1 - the word of Jehovah - would, for a faithful Jew, bring this all to mind.

This was the word of God Almighty - the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was the word of Jehovah, who loved his people as a husband love his wife, and who redeemed and delivered his people from Egyptian bondage.

And, so, in verse 1 we see God’s **redemption** of his people.

**Leviticus 26:44-45** [ASV] - And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am **Jehovah** their God; but I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am **Jehovah**.



## Joel Lesson 4

### Joel 1:1, Continued

**Joel 1:1** - The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

Last week we discussed the use of God's name in verse 1, and we saw how the use of that name in this opening verse would have conveyed some very important messages to any faithful Jew who was hearing it or reading it.

The first message that name conveys involves the redemption by God of his people, and we discussed that message last week.

But there is a second message. There is still something more that is revealed by the use in verse 1 of the name of God - God's name tells us something about God's **retribution**.

We see examples of that use of God's name elsewhere in the Old Testament.

**Jeremiah 16:20-21** [ASV] - Shall a man make unto himself gods, which yet are no gods? Therefore, behold, I will cause them to know, this once will I cause them to know **my hand and my might**; and they shall know that **my name is Jehovah**.

**Ezekiel 25:7** [ASV] - Therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand upon thee, and will deliver thee for a spoil to the nations; and I will cut thee off from the peoples, and I will cause thee to perish out of the countries: I will destroy thee; and thou shalt know that **I am Jehovah**.

Likewise, when we see God's name in Joel 1:1, we are also given a glimpse of God's retribution that will be revealed more fully later in this book. We will soon see God's judgment of the nations and all who are opposed to him. "Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah."

And so, we see both redemption and retribution in the opening words of the first verse of Joel.

And the remainder of the book of Joel? What will we see there? We will see the same thing. We will see both redemption and retribution. We will see the special relationship between God and his people, and we will see the terrible judgment that awaits all others.

But we are not yet through with verse 1: "The word of the LORD **that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel**."

The word of the Lord in the book of Joel came to a person named Joel, who was the son of someone named Pethuel.

All that we know about Joel comes from that verse along with whatever personal information we can uncover about him by reading between the lines in the text of his book. (For example, I think we will see later that Joel was most likely **not** a priest.)

If you search the Bible for the name "Joel" you will find 21 matches dating from the 10th century BC to the 5th century, but only two of those verses are talking about the Joel of interest here - Joel 1:1 and Acts 2:16.

But we can learn something from all of those other people named Joel - we can learn that Joel appears to have been a common name over a wide range of time - and, in fact, Joel is still a common name today.

Joel's introduction of himself is very brief, which likely suggests that Joel was well-known to those who first received his message. He did not need to give them his credentials, but he only needed to give his father's name to distinguish himself from any others who shared the name Joel.

In Hebrew, the name "Joel" means *Jehovah is God*. It is a reverse form of the name "Elijah," which means *God is Jehovah*.

Unlike Joel, Pethuel does not seem to have been a common name. This is the only place in the Bible where we find that name. Some suggest that it means "persuaded by God."

Some commentaries try to find the themes of Joel hidden somewhere in the meaning of the names of its author and his father, but to me that seems a bit like putting the cart before the horse. Joel and his

father had these names long before Joel received this word from God and long before the events described in this book.

If we are looking for themes of Joel in a name from verse 1, I think a better name to choose is the name of God rather than the name of Joel or the name of his father. As we saw, it is the name of God that shows us the great themes of this book - redemption, retribution, and the Day of Jehovah.

And one final point about the name of God the Father in verse 1 - that same name also applies to God the Son. We will see that great truth later in this book of Joel.

**Joel 2:32** [ASV] - And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of **Jehovah** shall be delivered.

**Romans 10:9, 13** [ASV] - Because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth **Jesus as Lord**, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: ... for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the **Lord** shall be saved.

What the Old Testament tells us about Jehovah is attributed to Jesus in the New Testament.

One more example: What did Isaiah prophecy?

**Isaiah 40:3** [ASV] - The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of **Jehovah**; make level in the desert a highway for our God.

And what did John say?

**Matthew 3:3** - For **this is he** that was spoken of through Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the **Lord**, Make his paths straight.

When Isaiah prophesied about Jehovah, Isaiah was prophesying about Christ. "This is he," John said.

And which religious group today denies that great truth? Ironically, it is a group that has named itself "Jehovah's Witnesses." When we compare their false teaching about God with what we read in the word of God, we can quickly see that they are not Jehovah's witnesses, but rather are false witnesses.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus is God. Jesus is Jehovah.

And so if we are looking for Jesus in the book of Joel, we have found him in the very first verse!

## Joel 1:2

**Joel 1:2** - Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?

"Okay - I have an announcement to make. I have something very important to say to the whole congregation. **Now, hear this, you elders!**"

If I had started my first class that way, there might not have been a second class! But that is precisely how Joel begins in verse 2! Joel did not lack for courage or boldness!

But there is a reason why Joel could be so bold in verse 2, and that reason is in verse 1 - what Joel was boldly proclaiming was the word of God. And we should all be bold whenever we are proclaiming the word of God. That is never a time to shrink back or be timid.

**2 Timothy 1:7-8** - For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord...

I think we can see that spirit of power in Joel as soon as he opens his mouth in verse 2!

"Hear this, you elders."

With that statement, we meet the first of four groups that Joel will address in this first chapter. And it is a strange assortment - elders in verse 2, drunkards in verse 5, farmers in verse 11, and priests in verse 13.

Why those groups? What do elders, drunkards, farmers, and priests have in common? Let's save that question until we get to the final group in verse 13 - the priests. Maybe we can figure it out along the way.

For now, let's ask a different question - who are these elders? Does their description here as "elders" mean that they are leaders, or does it just mean that they are old?

Let's keep in mind that we are studying this book of Joel under three possible dating scenarios - the early view, the pre-exile view, and the post-exile view. We discussed all of that in our introduction, and you can see the three options on the Handout for Lesson 1.

Under the post-exile view, there was no Jewish king reigning in Jerusalem. Instead, the king over Palestine was a Persian king. So, those who hold the post-exile view about when Joel was written argue that verse 2 is evidence in their favor. They say that the leaders at this time were the elders because there was no king.

But does that make sense with what we see here in verse 2? Are these elders presented to us as leaders? I don't think so.

First, as we said, Joel's rather brusque command to these elders in verse 2 might suggest they were not the ones in charge. Verse 2 does not seem to be ringing with respect.

But second, look at what Joel asks these elders in verse 2 - "Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?" That is not a question you address to leaders - that is a question you address to old people. That is a question for the old-timers in the group.

I think Joel calls out these elders, not because they are leaders, but because they are old. If these elders can't remember such an event in their lifetime, then it has truly been a long time since such a thing has happened before.

Another thing we should note about verse 2 is that the elders are not the only ones addressed - Joel also says, "Give ear, all inhabitants of the land!"

Why are they included? I think the answer is simple - the question in verse 2 is for the elders, but Joel wants everyone in the land to listen to their answer.

I think the elders are told to listen to the question from God, and the inhabitants of the land are told to listen to the answer from those elders.

And what was the answer? We know the answer. The question is rhetorical. God would not have asked that question had the answer been anything other than "never." Such a thing had never happened in living memory.

Finally, let's not leave verse 2 until we have noticed the first word in that verse - "Hear!" That is the same Hebrew word *shema* that begins the famous passage from Deuteronomy 6 that faithful Jews recited every day.

**Deuteronomy 6:4** - Hear, O Israel:  
The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Or, as we read in the ASV:

**Deuteronomy 6:4** - Hear, O Israel:  
**Jehovah** our God is one **Jehovah**.

Just that single opening word "Hear" in verse 2 is itself a reminder of the special relationship between God and his people that we also saw in verse 1.

## Joel 1:3

**Joel 1:3** - Tell your children of it,  
and let your children tell their  
children, and their children to  
another generation.

Verse 1 reminded us about the special relationship between God and his people. Verse 2 also reminded us about the special relationship between God and his people. And verse 3? The reminders continue!

We just looked at the first verse in the daily *Shema* recitation - let's read some more of it.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-7** - Hear, O  
Israel: Jehovah our God is one  
Jehovah: and thou shalt love  
Jehovah thy God with all thy heart,

and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; **and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children**, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Hear this - and tell your children! That is what we read in Deuteronomy 6, and that is the first thing we read in Joel 1.

With this language, God is reminding the people about their relationship with him using something that they recited every day. Hear this, and tell your children!

Had they become guilty of just saying the words without thinking about the words? Perhaps.

We also see similar language in another well-known Old Testament passage.

**Exodus 12:24-27** - You shall observe this rite as a statute for you **and for your sons** forever. And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. **And when your children say to you**, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

Had the people forgotten what God had done for them? Had the people failed to teach their children about it? Perhaps.

And that may be why the thing they are told to hear and to tell their children about in Joel 1 has changed dramatically from what we read in Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 6. Rather than hearing about who God is and what God had done **for them**, they

will soon be hearing about who God is and what God had done **to them**.

But we are not finished looking at parallels between Joel 1:2 and the rest of the Bible. There is another important one that we must consider.

**Acts 2:38-39** - And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you **and for your children** and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

We already know that there is a connection between Joel 2 and Acts 2, but I think there is also a connection (or at least a similarity) between Joel 1 and Acts 2.

Yes, God was dealing with a specific generation in Joel 1 - but his message in Joel 1 was for more than just that specific generation. "Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation."

Likewise, there was a promise in Acts 2 that was a promise for more than just the specific generation that heard it in Acts 2. "For the promise is for you **and for your children**."

We will have more to say about that when we get to Joel 2, but for now I think there is an important lesson in these verses for us today. All throughout the Bible we find God's concern that his word be passed on to future generations. In Exodus 12, the children asked questions, and the parents were told how to answer them.

There are no more important Bible classes than the classes in which we teach our children about the word of God. If our children have questions about the Bible, and if we are not answering those questions, then that is a terrible failure on our part. If their questions remain unanswered, they will eventually quit asking them. We need to teach our children about God and about the word of God. Nothing we do here is more important when it comes to answering Jesus' question in Luke 18:8 -



“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

But, back to verse 3, what is the message here? What is it that the people are to tell all future generations so that they never forget it?

It is a great locust invasion!

Yes, that may seem like a surprising thing to pass down to all generations, but let’s take a close look at it, starting with verse 4.

## Joel 1:4

**Joel 1:4** - What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.

Now, before we talk about what verse 4 **says**, let’s first talk about how verse 4 **sounds**.

Even in the English translation, there is a cadence or a rhythm to how the verse sounds when we read it out loud.

What the cutting locust left,  
the swarming locust has eaten.

What the swarming locust left,  
the hopping locust has eaten, and  
what the hopping locust left,  
the destroying locust has eaten.

We can also see an unusual parallel structure in how those phrases are arranged.

What A left, B has eaten.

What B left, C has eaten.

What C left, D has eaten.

And verse 4 is not the only verse in Joel that has some of these unusual characteristics. In fact, in the book of Joel, such characteristics are not really that unusual at all. The unusual verses in Joel are the verses **without** such characteristics.

If you are using the ESV translation, notice how verse 4 is typeset. It is written, not as prose would be typeset, but rather as we might expect to see a poem or the lyrics of a song typeset.

If you look back at verse 1, you will see that it is typeset as ordinary prose. But starting with verse 2, that changes. The ESV begins typesetting the text as poetry.

And notice that poetic typesetting continues all throughout the remainder of chapter 1, and almost to the end of chapter 2. But starting with Joel 2:30 it switches back to prose, continuing through Joel 3:8, where it switches back to poetry. What is going on?

The first thing to note about the difference between Hebrew prose and Hebrew poetry is that it is usually not a clear cut division. For example, not everyone agrees that the poetry in Joel ends in Joel 2:29 and picks up again in Joel 3:9. The typesetting that we see in the ESV was a decision made by the translators.

The second thing to note is that this different typesetting is, for the most part, a modern phenomenon. In the ancient manuscripts, the text is all shown in the same way except for Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and a few special passages such as the Song of Moses and the Song of Deborah.

For example, in the KJV and the ASV, the text of Joel is all shown as prose. The RSV of 1952 was the first major English translation to show it otherwise - as we also see in the ESV. Here is how one commentary describes the situation:

“No definitive answer can be given on this complicated question, and nothing crucial is at stake. Hebrew poetry is usually recognized by parallelism, as units of thought are put side by side. But there is no strict delineation between poetry and prose, and sometimes it is difficult to determine if poetic parallelism is present or not.”

But I think it is helpful for a translation to show the text differently as we see in the ESV. Why? Because the text is different. We can see that difference

easily in the English when it comes to verse 4, but that difference is more difficult to see elsewhere in the English translations, and so the special typesetting can help.

Perhaps we should pause for a moment and discuss what we mean by the word “poetry” when it comes to the Bible.

If we today were going to write poetry in English about Joel, it might be something like this:

The prophet Joel saw locusts galore,

“Repent!” he cried, “or there will be more!

But that is not what Hebrew poetry is like. When we think of poetry we usually think first of rhyme, but rhyme is very rarely found in Hebrew poetry.

Instead, the primary characteristic of Hebrew poetry is parallelism in which two or more lines of the poem contain corresponding elements. Joel 1:4 is a perfect example of Hebrew parallelism, but we could find many other examples.

But that is not the only characteristics of Hebrew poetry. We also see many other characteristics as shown by the examples on the Handout for Lesson 4 (which is **not** an exhaustive list).

Yes, rhyming is on the list, but rhymes are very rarely found in Hebrew poetry. Why? Most likely because of the different vocabularies.

There are between 600,000 and 1 million English words, and even then we have words such as “orange” and “month” that lack an exact rhyme. Modern Hebrew has fewer than 100,000 words, and ancient Hebrew had fewer than 10,000 words. That makes it very difficult to come up with rhymes!

And so Hebrew poetry is not based on rhymes, but instead is largely based on parallel statements. And, again, you can see some examples of that on the handout - with Joel 1:4 being one of the best examples.

Unlike prose, poetry is usually figurative and indirect. Poetry also often uses a meter or a cadence that is different from ordinary speech.

What can we say about the use of such language in the Bible?

The first thing we can say about poetry is that God must really like it! Why? Because, by most estimates, about a third of the Old Testament uses Hebrew poetry.

But why? Why does God so often speak to us that way?

Isaiah may answer that question.

**Isaiah 55:8-9** - For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Perhaps Hebrew poetry is used so often because it can provide a perfect bridge between the thoughts of God and the thoughts of man - just as Jesus so often spoke to us with parables.

- Poetry grabs our attention.
- Poetry makes us think.
- Poetry is easy to remember.
- Poetry can convey multiple thoughts and multiple meanings.
- Poetry is beautiful.
- Poetry is forceful.
- Poetry can show us something new about that which we see as familiar and well-known.
- Poetry is different.

And perhaps that final characteristic of poetry is the most important - **poetry is different**. It uses different words in different arrangements with a different cadence. Poetry is not ordinary everyday language.

And, again, Joel 1:4 is a great example. That verse causes us to sit up and take notice. After reading it, we can easily picture in our minds the locusts as they cut and swarm and hop and destroy.

Poetry is never the everyday language of the people. Not in the Bible and not anywhere else. Poetry

always uses some sort of specialized language. If it didn't, it wouldn't be poetry.

We often hear from the modern translators of the Bible how we should translate the Bible into the ordinary language of the people. But much of the Bible was never written in the ordinary everyday language of the people, not even the original language received by the original recipients.

As the famous poet Thomas Gray said, "the language of the age is never the language of poetry." Poetry always has what Tolkien described as an "arresting strangeness." Otherwise it would not be poetry.

And, once again, Joel 1:4 is a great example. No one ordinarily talks that way! No one has ever ordinarily talked that way! That is not ordinary language. It is Hebrew poetry, and much of the Old Testament uses it.

It is different, and we need to recognize those differences if we want to understand it.

Let's look at an example of how we can go wrong.

**Psalm 38:1** - O LORD, rebuke me  
not in your anger, nor discipline  
me in your wrath!

That verse uses the different words "rebuke" and "discipline," and that verse uses the different words "anger" and "wrath." What are we to do with those differences?

If I were to put my lawyer hat on for a moment, my answer would be simple - if you use two different words, you must have intended them to mean two different things. That is Contracts 101. Lawyers don't like synonyms!

But that is not how you read Hebrew poetry. The primary characteristic of all Hebrew poetry is parallelism. It says something, and then it says it again using parallel language.

That is certainly what we see in Psalm 38:1 - "O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath!" And, of course, we see it in many other verses.

Yes, there may very well be some nuanced differences in phrases such as that, but we need to be very careful if we start driving wedges between

such terms when those wedges are not supported by the text.

For example, someone might say, "God uses two different words in Psalm 38:1 - anger and wrath. Because God used two different words, they must mean two different things - otherwise God would have used only one word. Therefore, let's look at the anger of God, and then we can look at the wrath of God - and we can discuss how the anger of God is different from the wrath of God."

If you have never heard a sermon like that, I suspect you have not been a Christian for very long!

And that sort of a study might be interesting up to a point, but I think it badly misses the boat when it comes to recognizing and interpreting Hebrew poetry. Sometimes God says the same thing in two different ways to better drive home a single point.

Modern translations such as the ESV can help us recognize such language by typesetting the language differently.

But, unfortunately, some modern translations typeset the poetry but then proceed to then effectively remove it all by stripping out all the strangeness and all the imagery! Here is how one author describes the problem:

"The translator who removes biblical metaphors to make the text easier for readers may defeat the purpose of the Holy Spirit, who chose a metaphor in the first place. Metaphors grab us and work on us and in us. They have spiritual power to transform our minds."

And let me give a plug here for the KJV. When it comes to appreciating the Hebrew poetry in the Bible, you will never find a better English translation than the KJV. Listen to this example:

**Psalm 24:1** - The **earth** is the  
**LORD'S**, and the **fulness** thereof;  
the **world**, and **they** that **dwell**  
therein.

The KJV was translated at the height of the English language. Here is how one author describes it:

Stylistically, the King James Version is the greatest English Bible translation ever produced. Its style combines simplicity and majesty as the original requires, though it inclines toward the exalted. Its rhythms are matchless.

Yes, the ESV is good for everyday use, and the ASV is good for word studies - but we should never set the KJV aside. We should always have it close by on our shelf when we study the Bible. The KJV was the Bible of the restoration movement, and it was the Bible that the church was using when it experienced its greatest growth in modern times.

Much more could be said on this subject, but for now let's get back to the text of verse 4.

We need to look at the specific words used to describe the insects in verse 4. And, perhaps not surprisingly, there is a great deal of controversy about the meaning of these words.

Let's start by looking at some other translations.

**Joel 1:4 [KJV]** - 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.

**Joel 1:4 [NIV]** - What the **locust swarm** has left the **great locusts** have eaten; what the great locusts have left the **young locusts** have eaten; what the young locusts have left **other locusts** have eaten.

**Joel 1:4 [NASB]** - What the **gnawing locust** has left, the **swarming locust** has eaten; And what the swarming locust has left, the **creeping locust** has eaten; And what the creeping locust

has left, the **stripping locust** has eaten.

As one commentary explains:

The precise meaning of the four Hebrew words translated "locust" in this verse is a long-standing challenge to Hebrew linguists; the problem combines etymology with entomology.

Here we see four words, but we could have seen even more. The Old Testament uses no less than ten different words for locusts and grasshoppers, and the Talmud uses twenty. (Don't worry! We aren't going to look at all of them!)

Various interpretations have been proposed for the words found in verse 4.

- First, the words may refer to different species of insects.
- Second, the words may describe subspecies of locusts or even locusts of different colors.
- Third, the terms may refer to different stages of development in the life cycle of the locust.
- Fourth, the terms may reflect regional differences in dialect as to the words used to describe the locusts.
- Fifth, the terms could refer to four different locust swarms that each hit Jerusalem.
- Sixth, the terms may be synonyms that are all used just for rhetorical effect.

I think we can quickly scratch some of these off our list.

As for different species, that is what we see in the KJV with its palmerworms and cankerworms, but that does not seem likely. The descriptions we are about to see all point to an invasion of locusts, not an invasion of worms.

As for regional differences in dialect, the focus here seems to be on Jerusalem, and so would likely not expect to see a wide variety in dialects.

As for multiple swarms, the text seems to describe a single swarm, and it is not clear what the later



swarms would find to eat and destroy after the first swarm had already done its work. And even if there were multiple swarms, it is not clear why different words would be needed to describe the locusts in the different swarms.

So which of the remaining options is best?

## Joel Lesson 5

### Joel 1:4, Continued

**Joel 1:4** - What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.

When we ended last week we were looking at six theories about why we see four different words for insects in verse 4.

- Different species of insects?
- Different subspecies of locusts?
- Different colors of locusts?
- Different stages of development of locusts?
- Different regional words for locusts?
- Different locust swarms?
- Synonyms used for rhetorical effect?

Perhaps we can rule out different species of insects given the focus here on locusts.

And perhaps we can rule out different swarms of locusts given the severity of the swarm described here - although the language of verse 4 could be describing waves of a single swarm.

And perhaps we can rule out different regional words for “locust” given the focus on the single area of Jerusalem.

But, with that said, any of these theories could be correct given what little we know about the Hebrew words used in verse 4. As one commentary explains, “we simply do not know what these four words denote.”

So how do we decide which option is best?

I think that what we have here is our first example of how recognizing the use of Hebrew poetry in a verse can help us understand the meaning of that verse.

Verse 4 is not a textbook on locusts. I don’t think that verse 4 is intended to teach us anything about

the life cycle of the locust, as fascinating as that subject may be to many commentators.

I think the final option is the best option - the different words are used for rhetorical effect. The parallel phrases work together to paint a vivid word picture of this terrible swarm of invading insects.

So why do we see so many words for locust? **Because we see so many locusts!** God wants us to picture the invasion in our minds! And so God drew us a vivid picture with words.

But why was this particular locust invasion so bad?

We know that locusts invasions were not always so horrible. In fact, Nahum uses a locust invasion to describe something that just quickly comes and goes without much effect.

**Nahum 3:17** - Your princes are like grasshoppers, your scribes like clouds of locusts settling on the fences in a day of cold — when the sun rises, they fly away; no one knows where they are.

But that was not always the case with locusts, and it was certainly not the case with these locusts.

This invasion in verse 4 was so bad that no one could remember anything like it. This invasion in verse 4 was so bad that the people would be talking about it for generations to come. That is what we saw earlier in verses 2-3.

What was this locust invasion like? Why was it so bad? What would it have been like to experience such a thing?

One way we can know what it was like is to read about it in the book of Joel, as we are doing. But another way to know what it was like is to read about it in the *National Geographic* - or at least read about a later locust invasion that was most likely very similar to what happened in Joel.

In March of 1915, a terrible locust plague occurred in the area of modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. The result was a devastating agricultural disaster. Swarms of locusts consumed crops, trees, and vegetation, leading to widespread famine. And to make matters worse, it happened at

the worst possible time - during the on-going first World War when the region was already suffering.

Much of what happened in 1915 reminds us of how Joel describes the locust invasion that occurred in his own day. An article describing the event in the December 1915 issue of *National Geographic Magazine* makes that same point - so much so that the article begins by quoting Joel 1:2-6. (The photos on the Handout for Lesson 5 are from this article, and a copy of the article is available at [StudyJoel.com](http://StudyJoel.com). Note that the article has quite a bit to say about Joel, but we may not end up agreeing with all that it has to say about the Biblical account.)

The Bible frequently mentions locusts, often as a symbol of destruction and judgment.

Locusts were one of the plagues God sent upon Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery.

**Exodus 10:13-15** - So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts. The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again. They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

Those were the locusts that God sent against the Egyptians, but here in Joel the locusts are coming against the people of God. The target has changed, but the locusts have not. What can we say about these locusts?

Perhaps the first thing we should say is that they are not what we often call a locust today. These locusts are not cicadas. Locusts are a type of grasshopper,

while cicadas are cousins of crickets. Cicadas are called locusts only because, like actual locusts, they also show up suddenly in large numbers, but cicadas are not locusts.

But what is the difference between a locust and a grasshopper? The surprising answer is that there is no difference. They are the same insect.

When conditions are right, the usual solitary grasshoppers can change their character and together become an aggressive swarm of locusts. When that happens, those grasshoppers are called locusts.

What causes that change to occur?

What is needed for the change to occur is rainfall in a place where a large number of grasshopper eggs are buried. When that happens, the grasshoppers hatch all at once, and that event triggers a physiological change in the insects.

The young grasshoppers change in color from green to yellow, black, and red. They also change in behavior, from solitary creatures to what scientists call “gregarious” creatures. The grasshoppers become voracious and migratory.

What causes that to happen? Scientists have concluded that it is caused by the contact the insects have with each other after they all hatch at the same time.

Researchers have simulated that contact by putting a grasshopper in a jar with threads constantly brushing against its body - and they have watched as that grasshopper changes its color to become a locust. That transformation is why they have been called “The Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of Insects.”

There are numerous stages in the lifespan of a locust, which is usually four months but can be as long as a year. The stages go from the wingless larva and pupa stage to the winged adult locust stage. In that process, the locusts molt their exoskeleton five times. Toward the end of their lives, the adult female locusts lay hundreds of eggs in the ground.

These desert locusts have a phenomenal sense of smell. In a test, a single blade of grass was put at a distance from some locusts, and the locusts immediately started to move toward it.

The locusts also move together in an organized social group. The Bible tells us that elsewhere.

**Proverbs 30:27** - The locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank.

The locusts can travel as far as 3000 miles in their lifetime, staying aloft for as long as 12 hours at a stretch. Their insatiable need for food usually keeps them on the move.

In all stages, locusts are voracious and destructive, even sometimes eating each other. The adults consume the equivalent of their weight every day. They first eat the leaves that are green and succulent, but, when necessary, they will chew on bark and branches. We will see that fact later in this chapter.

**Joel 1:7** - It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white.

Our own country experienced a great locust invasion in the 1870's stretching from Colorado and Montana to Missouri and Minnesota. Laura Ingalls Wilder described that event in her book *On the Banks of Plum Creek*.

A cloud was over the sun. It was not like any cloud they had ever seen before. It was a cloud of something like snowflakes, but they were larger than snowflakes, and thin and glittering. Light shone through each flickering particle.

There was no wind. The grasses were still and the hot air did not stir, but the edge of the cloud came on across the sky faster than wind. The hair stood up on Jack's neck. All at once he made a frightful sound up at that cloud, a growl and a whine.

Plunk! Something hit Laura's head and fell to the ground. She looked down and saw the largest grasshopper she had ever seen. Then huge brown grasshoppers were hitting the ground all around her, hitting her head and her face and her arms. They came thudding down like hail.

The cloud was hailing grasshoppers. The cloud was grasshoppers. Their bodies hid the sun and made darkness. Their thin, large wings gleamed and glittered. The rasping whirring of their wings filled the whole air and they hit the ground and the house with the noise of a hailstorm.

And later she wrote:

All across the dooryard the grasshoppers were walking shoulder to shoulder and end to end, so crowded that the ground seemed to be moving. Not a single one hopped. Not one turned its head. As fast as they could go, they were all walking west.

That final excerpt from her book reminds us of what we just read from Proverbs.

**Proverbs 30:27** - The locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank.

Even today, a locust invasion can be catastrophic and life-threatening. We use satellites to watch for emerging swarms, but once a locust swarm is on the move, it is nearly impossible to stop.

One more interesting fact about locusts is that, apparently, they are delicious!

**Leviticus 11:20-22** - All winged insects that go on all fours are detestable to you. Yet among the winged insects that go on all fours you may eat those that have jointed



legs above their feet, with which to hop on the ground. Of them you may eat: the locust of any kind, the bald locust of any kind, the cricket of any kind, and the grasshopper of any kind.

Or perhaps they are delicious only with honey.

**Mark 1:6** - Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

That is what we know about these locusts, but we still have some open questions about them in the book of Joel.

Let's list those questions now, but let's not try to answer them yet. Instead, let's keep these questions in mind as we work through the text of Joel.

- Are the locusts in Joel literal locusts or are they being used here as a metaphor for something else?
- If there are literal locusts in Joel, is that true of all the locusts in Joel? Or does Joel show us both literal locusts and metaphoric locusts?
- If there is a dual meaning for the locusts in Joel, where does that change in meaning occur? Or is there perhaps a dual meaning all throughout the book?
- And, if the locusts are a metaphor, what are they being used to describe?

Those are all good questions, and those are all controversial questions. Let's try to answer them as we work through the text.

But, with that said, let's look at one theory right now. Why now? Because this theory is based on verse 4, and, in fact, it is based on the number 4 that we see in verse 4.

In verse 4, we find four words for these insects. Why four? Is the count of four just a coincidence or is there some deeper meaning?

Some commentators, and especially some much earlier commentators, saw a special meaning in the count of four that we see in verse 4.

- Theodore (AD 428) thought the four locusts in verse 4 represented three Assyrian kings followed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.
- Jerome (AD 420) thought the four locusts represented the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans.
- Cyril of Alexandria (AD 444) thought the four locusts represented Shalmaneser V, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus Epiphanes, and the Romans.
- Julian (AD 455) thought the four locusts represented the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and the Romans.

The basis for these views came from the four beasts in Daniel and in Revelation, which (in our study of Daniel) we identified with Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.

But is any of that history really in view in Joel 1:4?

My initial thought is that, no, that is not in view here. I think the appearance of four in verse 4 is more likely just intended to leave the visual image of a huge, devastating, seemingly unending swarm of locusts.

We know that the number four is used elsewhere as a figure for the earth (four directions, four seasons, etc.), so perhaps, at most, the number depicts these locusts coming up out of the earth.

But, rather than shut the door now on those other views, let's keep them in mind as we proceed through the text.

One final point about verse 4 before we move on: let's notice the **tense** of the verbs.

"What the cutting locust **left**, the swarming locust **has eaten**. What the swarming locust **left**, the hopping locust **has eaten**, and what the hopping locust **left**, the destroying locust **has eaten**."

Not "will leave" or "will eat," but "left" and "has eaten." I think we must conclude that Joel has shown up **after** the locusts have already done their damage.

Joel (at least in chapter 1) is not warning the people about a coming invasion of locusts, but has instead shown up to explain an invasion that has already occurred. The Hebrew verbs in chapter 1 are describing a completed action.

Will that also be true of chapter 2? No, it will not.

**Joel 2:3-5** - Fire **devours** before them, and behind them a flame **burns**. ... like war horses they **run**. ...they **leap** on the tops of the mountains...

To be technical, we primarily see **perfect** verb forms in chapter 1 and **imperfect** verb forms in chapter 2. The perfect form is used for completed action, while the imperfect form is used for incomplete action or future action.

Let's wait until we get to chapter 2 to say more about that difference, but for now let's just keep a close eye on the verb tenses.

## Joel 1:5

**Joel 1:5** - Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth.

Having completed his message to the elders, Joel now moves on to the second of the four groups we see in chapter 1 - the drunkards!

Remember that we have an on-going question - why these four groups? What do elders, drunkards, farmers, and priests have in common? Let's keep that question in mind as we proceed.

There is some controversy about the type of wine that is being described in verse 5. Two Hebrew words are used and are translated "wine" and "new wine." The latter term ("new wine") refers to grape juice that has not fermented, but the other word can refer to either grape juice or alcoholic wine depending on the context.

I think we have several choices.

- Verse 5 is talking to those who drink grape juice (which would have included everybody).
- Verse 5 is talking both to all drinkers of alcoholic wine and to all drinkers of grape juice.
- Verse 5 is talking to heavy drinkers of alcoholic wine (drunkards) and to heavy drinkers of new wine (gluttons).

So which is it?

It would help if we could figure out why these four groups have been called out by Joel. Is it because of their sin?

That seems unlikely given the first group that we saw - the elders. They seem to have been addressed only because of their advanced age. If they could not remember such a thing ever having happened, then certainly it had been a long time since such an event had occurred.

Looking forward in chapter 1, we see farmers in verse 11 and priests in verse 13. The farmers are told to be ashamed, and the priests are told to put on sackcloth. Why? What had they done? That we are not told.

Let's keep this question open as we proceed, but for now I lean toward the third view - that verse 5 is addressing drunkards and gluttons. While the elders were not addressed because of their sin, we do see some hints of sin with the final two groups - farmers and priests.

Plus, we will soon see a call to repent.

**Joel 2:12-13** - "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments."

What had they done? For what are they repenting? From where are they returning? Those will be our questions when we get to Joel 2. Perhaps we are seeing the answers to those questions here in Joel 1.

If so, then what can we say about these drunkards? We can say several things, and none of it complimentary!

- Drunkards use the fruit of the land in excess. In fact, the mere presence of drunkards and their close cousins, the gluttons, is evidence of agricultural bounty. If the harvest fails, the drunkard and the glutton will quickly cease out of the land.
- Drunkards were more common during times of celebration. Even for those who were not normally drunkards, a good harvest might lead them to drink heavily. Rather than thanking God for the harvest, they would use the harvest just as an excuse to drink.
- Drunkards have a well-deserved reputation for being self-indulgent, self-absorbed, and unconcerned about the things of God. Over and over again in the New Testament we are called upon to be sober-minded and watchful. Drunkards are neither of those things.

I think all of that together explains the message that Joel has for these drunkards in verse 5: “**Awake**, you drunkards, and **weep**, and **wail**!”

Awake! These locusts were a wake-up call!

The drunkards had been self-indulgent, self-absorbed, and unconcerned about God - but now their alarm clock was ringing, and they could not turn it off.

Their decadence had caught up with them, as it always does. They had ignored God for a long time, but that time of ignorance had ended, as it always does. They had used alcohol to dull and stupefy their senses, but now they had been jolted wide awake.

And after waking up, what are they told to do? Weep and wail! Why? Because, as the poet tells us, “they are not long, the days of wine and roses.” Or as verse 5 tells us, “for it is cut off from your mouth.”

The phrase “cut off” or “snatched away” in the Hebrew refers to an act that is sudden and violent. These grapes did not wither on the vine, but rather these grapes were there one day and not there the next day - just as one would see with a locust invasion.

Drunkards and gluttons are focused on themselves. They are not concerned about God or about others. But that attitude cannot continue forever. There is a day coming for every person when he or she will bend the knee and confess to God (Romans 14:11).

I may live my life as if every day was a **Day of Me!** But I cannot do that forever. Why not? Because the **Day of the Lord** is coming! (2 Peter 3:10)

I think what we are already seeing here is the major theme of the book of Joel - **the Day of the Lord!**

We may think we are in charge. We may think we have everything planned out. We may think we have all of our bases covered. We may think that the world will just continue on for us day after day as it always has. But, if so, we are wrong!

God has very often inserted himself into the affairs of men, often very suddenly and violently. We may make plans apart from God, but God is not restricted by our plans. Instead, God interrupts our plans. And what might we call such a divine interruption? The Bible calls it the Day of the Lord!

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

And so why do we see drunkards and gluttons in verse 5? I think Jesus answers that question.

**Luke 17:27-30** - They were **eating and drinking** and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot — **they were eating and drinking**, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all — so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

Eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting and building. But then, in one day, it all changes. Perhaps because of locusts, or perhaps because of

a great flood, or perhaps because of fire and sulfur raining down from heaven, or perhaps because the great last day as finally arrived when time will be no more. It all changes when the Day of the Lord arrives.

As with the Day of the Lord here in Joel, those who are unprepared on that last great day will also awaken, will also weep, and will also wail. That is what Jesus tells us.

**Matthew 24:46-51** - Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and **eats and drinks with drunkards**, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be **weeping** and gnashing of teeth.

But what about those who are prepared? Paul answers that question.

**1 Thessalonians 5:6-10** - So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us **keep awake and be sober**. For **those who sleep, sleep at night**, and **those who get drunk, are drunk at night**. But since we belong to the day, let us be **sober**, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

There is a theme in the Bible that I think we are seeing here in verse 5. And what is that theme?

It is the theme of people eating and drinking with no concern for God. It is the theme of people thinking that everything will continue to be as it always has been. It is the theme of a people fast asleep who need to wake up. Again and again in the Bible, we find God interrupting the complacent lives of such people and suddenly changing everything. I think that is exactly what we are seeing here.

And, although we have not yet defined what is meant by a Day of the Lord, we should not be surprised if that definition involves these same key components - **a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before.**

Is that the definition of the Day of the Lord? Perhaps, but for now, let's just call that our working definition for a Day of the Lord.

## Joel 1:6

**Joel 1:6** - For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness.

We know that we are looking at a locust invasion in this chapter. Verse 4 used four different words for "locust" to describe it.

But after reading verse 6, we are immediately confronted with a vexing question - is this locust invasion the only thing we are looking at in this chapter? Or does the text also have something else in mind?

Who or what is this "powerful" "nation" that we see in verse 6?

On one hand, it may just be the locusts. As we saw, the Bible describes locusts elsewhere as an organized army.

**Proverbs 30:27** - The locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank.



And the two previous verses in Proverbs 30 describe the ants and the rock badgers as each being a “people.”

So maybe the locusts are this powerful nation in verse 6. And, I think that is correct. I don’t think the subject has changed. We saw locusts in verse 4, and we will see locusts later in this chapter. I think we are also seeing locusts here in verse 6.

But we still have a question - are these locusts the **only** thing we are seeing here in verse 6 and the surrounding verses? Or does the text intend to broaden our view a bit by its use of the word “nation”?

We find the Hebrew word translated “nation” used elsewhere in the Bible to describe foreign powers.

**Leviticus 26:33** - And I will scatter you among the **nations**, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste.

And we find that same word in one of the great prophecies about the church.

**Isaiah 2:4** - He shall judge between the **nations**, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; **nation** shall not lift up sword against **nation**, neither shall they learn war anymore.

And we also find the Hebrew word translated “powerful” used elsewhere in the Bible to describe foreign nations. In fact, we find both of the words used together for that purpose in Deuteronomy.

**Deuteronomy 7:1** - When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many **nations** before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the

Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and **mightier** than you.

Let’s not make a final decision yet, but if later we determine that the text is intentionally blurring the lines between an invasion of locusts and an invasion of something else, then verse 6 is most likely where that intentional blurring begins.

What else do we find in verse 6? We find another phrase that is very significant - “my land.” “For a nation has come up against **my land**.”

Where else in the Bible do we find that same phrase? One place where we find it is with the mysterious Gog and Magog of Ezekiel and Revelation.

**Ezekiel 38:15-16** - You will come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the **north**, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, **a great host, a mighty army**. You will come up against my people Israel, **like a cloud covering the land**. In the latter days I will bring you against **my land**, that the **nations** may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

That description sounds a bit like this locust invasion in Joel. Or is it perhaps that this locust invasion sounds a bit like Gog and Magog?

Who or what are Gog and Magog? Let’s save that question for later, but if you want to read ahead you should look at Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20.

So where are we so far with verse 6? After reading verse 4, we were certain that we are seeing a locust invasion. But after reading verse 6 we are beginning to wonder whether a locust invasion is all that we are seeing.

And I think that is exactly where the text wants us to be - looking at these locusts but also looking for something else that might also be described as “a nation” that “has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number.”

The final thing we see in verse 6 about this powerful nation is that “its teeth are lions’ teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness.”

Earlier we looked at some scientific facts about locusts, but one fact we didn’t mention then is a fact that we should mention now: locusts don’t have teeth. So what then can we say about the end of verse 6?

Perhaps the first thing we should say is that we would likely have a hard time convincing these people that locusts don’t have teeth! They certainly have something that allowed them to eat virtually everything in their path! If they don’t have teeth and fangs, then they must have something very close to teeth and fangs!

But second, if in our study of Joel we ever start looking inside a locust’s mouth for teeth or start comparing a photo of a locust with a photo of a lion, then I think that is a sure sign that we have badly missed the point!

Again, we are reading Hebrew poetry. We should not be surprised at all to find metaphors, and that is what we see here. These locusts are fierce and destructive just like a lion.

When we reach the end of verse 6, our question should not be whether locusts have teeth. Our question should be whether anything else has teeth!

Were these locusts the only problem here, or was there something or someone else out there who also had the teeth of a lion and the fangs of a lioness? Something worse than these locusts that was perhaps just around the corner?

## Joel Lesson 6

### Joel 1:7

**Joel 1:7** - It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white.

The issue last week with verse 6 was not whether we were seeing locusts. The issue was whether we were also seeing something else. We knew that we were at least seeing locusts in verse 6, and now with verse 7, we know that we are still at least seeing locusts.

In fact, verse 7 reads like a summary of that 1915 *National Geographic* article. On the Handout for Lesson 5, we saw photos of wasted vines and splintered fig trees, and we saw photos of stripped bark and branches made white.

Whether it is the locust invasion of Joel's day or the locust invasion of 1915, the devastating results of the locust invasion are the same - and those results are described perfectly by verse 7.

But we do have a question to consider about verse 7. Whose vine is it? And whose fig tree is it? And I suppose we could back up and ask that same question about verse 6 - whose land is it?

**"My land."** **"My vine."** **"My fig tree."** Who is talking here?

Some commentaries suggest that Joel is talking about himself, and that he is telling us that his own tree and his own vine were destroyed by these locusts. But I don't think that is right.

Joel is a prophet. Joel is a spokesman for God. Joel is proclaiming the word of God. We saw that in the very first verse of the book - "the word of the LORD that came to Joel."

So when we see the word "my" in this message from Joel, we should see that pronoun as a reference to God unless we have some really good reason to see it otherwise.

Here we have no such reason, and, in fact, we have every reason to view these words as words spoken

by God through the prophet Joel. This land is God's land. These trees are God's trees. These vines are God's vines.

But is God just talking here about his greenery? Or is God also talking about something else when he talks about his vine and his fig tree?

We know that God often used such language to refer metaphorically to Judah.

**Isaiah 5:7** - For the **vineyard** of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his **pleasant planting**; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

**Ezekiel 15:6** - Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like **the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest**, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And we know that Jesus described Judah as a fruitless fig tree.

**Luke 13:6-9** - And he told this parable: "A man had a **fig tree** planted in his **vineyard**, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this **fig tree**, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, **you can cut it down.**'"

What do those metaphors of a vine and a tree all have in common? In each case, the metaphor anticipates the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of a northern invader. In Isaiah and Ezekiel, that northern invader was Babylon. In Luke, that northern invader was Rome.

And here in Joel? We know that locusts were an invading force, but is there also some other invading force in view here?

When we get to Joel 2:20, here is what we will read: "I will remove the **northerner** far from you." Will we still be looking at locusts then? Or is there perhaps something else that comes from the north?

Back to Joel 1, is verse 7 just about locusts and plants, or is verse 7 also talking about something else?

Let's keep that question in mind as we proceed, but for now let's add another question to it.

When we get to Joel 3:2, we will find God judging all the nations because of what they have done to his people. And here is what our question will be about that verse: does that charge by God against all the nations just suddenly appear without warning in chapter 3 - or is the basis for that charge against all the nations somehow laid out for us in chapters 1 and 2? Does chapter 3 change the subject or not?

When we get to chapter 3 our question will be, "Why?" What had these nations done? Why are they being judged? We know that the nations didn't send these locusts. Did they do something else?

If that question has not been answered by the time we get to Joel 3, then perhaps we have missed something in Joel 1 and Joel 2! Let's keep our eyes open for an answer!

"It has laid waste my vine." That phrase "laid waste" in Hebrew means "made into **desolation**." We can see that word in the *Legacy Standard* translation of verse 7.

**Joel 1:7** - It has made my vine a **desolation** And my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast them away; Their branches have become white.

Any time we see that word "desolation" in either Hebrew or Greek we need to pay extra close attention. That word runs like a thread through many key events in the Bible from Genesis 47:19 all the way through Revelation 17:16.

For example, we see that same Hebrew word in the warnings in Deuteronomy 28 for those who

would break their covenant with God (where it is translated "horror").

**Deuteronomy 28:37** - And you shall become a **horror**, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away.

And we see that also same Hebrew word in Isaiah 13 regarding the day of the Lord that came upon ancient Babylon.

**Isaiah 13:9** - Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a **desolation** and to destroy its sinners from it.

And we see that same Hebrew word in God's great judgment of all the nations in Isaiah 24.

**Isaiah 24:12** - **Desolation** is left in the city; the gates are battered into ruins.

And we see the corresponding Greek word in Jesus' statements to Jerusalem at the end of Matthew 23.

**Matthew 23:37-38** - O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you **desolate**.

And we see the same word later used with regard to Rome.

**Revelation 17:16-17** - And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her **desolate** and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and



handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

What do those events all have in common? They each describe a judgment of God - against his own people when they became faithless or against those who harm his faithful people.

They each describe a situation in which God intervened into the affairs of this world so that everything changed in something like a cosmic upheaval for whatever group was involved.

They each describe a situation in which a self-satisfied complacency was suddenly replaced by desolation.

In short, they each involve a Day of the Lord!

And that is what these locusts do here - they come against a self-satisfied complacent people, and they leave nothing but desolation.

And when we look at the specific word used in this verse to describe that desolation we are reminded of many other such events in the Bible.

And, of course, we know that there is such a day coming for the entire world - a day in which God will intervene into the affairs of self-satisfied complacent mankind and change everything in the twinkling of an eye.

**2 Peter 3:10** - But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

If we are starting to see more in this first chapter of Joel than just a bunch of locusts, then I think we are on the right track! I think there is much more for us to find here.

## Joel 1:8

**Joel 1:8** - Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.

In verse 8, the sorrow of the lost harvest in verse 7 is compared to the sorrow of an unconsummated marriage. What should have been a day of great joy and great celebration (as with a wedding or a harvest) has instead become a day of terrible sorrow and lamentation.

The “sackcloth” in verse 8 would have been a coarsely woven piece of black material usually made of goat’s hair. We often see sackcloth used in the Bible by those who are mourning.

**2 Samuel 3:31** - Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, “Tear your clothes and put on **sackcloth** and mourn before Abner.” And King David followed the bier.

**1 Kings 21:27** - And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put **sackcloth** on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly.

**Isaiah 32:11** - Tremble, you women who are at ease, shudder, you **complacent** ones; strip, and make yourselves bare, and tie **sackcloth** around your waist.

In each case, the sackcloth was as a visible representation of distress and humiliation. And, as one Rabbi described the use of goat’s hair for that cloth, “one wants to say with it: Behold, we are accounted like cattle!”

Verse 8 seems straightforward, but we do have some remaining questions about it.

First, what does verse 8 mean when it says that a “virgin” is mourning for her “husband?”

Some commentaries complain that it doesn’t make sense for a virgin to mourn for her husband, but it makes perfect sense in the context of the Jewish marriage law.

Under that law, a woman became bound to a man as his “wife” as soon as that man had paid the agreed bride-price. That, in fact, was the situation of Mary in Matthew 1:19 when Joseph planned to divorce

her even though their marriage had not yet been consummated.

A second question about verse 8 is who is being addressed by that verse? Are we still just talking to the drunkards?

Although verse 8 may still be addressed to the drunkards we met back in verse 5, I think the better view is that these verses are now being addressed to the wider audience of all who had suffered because of the locust invasion.

Why? Because, in the Hebrew, the command to mourn in verse 8 is feminine. Something feminine is commanded to mourn like this virgin. To whom or to what is that command addressed?

Most likely, that command is addressed to Jerusalem as the daughter of Zion, which is a description of Jerusalem that we often see in the prophets.

**Zechariah 9:9** - Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! ...

Here in verse 8 the command is to weep rather than to rejoice, but I think the commands are addressed to the same group - the people of Jerusalem.

The book of Isaiah opens with a description that is very similar to what we see here in Joel.

**Isaiah 1:7-8** - Your country lies desolate; your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence foreigners devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. And **the daughter of Zion** is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

## Joel 1:9

**Joel 1:9** - The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD.

As we said in our introduction, verse 9 is very important when it comes to dating the book of Joel. Although verse 9 does not tell us when the book was written, verse 9 does tell us when the book was **not** written.

And how does it do that? It does that by telling us that there was a functioning temple in Jerusalem when the locust invasion described in Joel 1 occurred. There were grain offerings and drink offerings and there were priests functioning as the ministers of God until those offerings were cut off by the locust invasion.

And so verse 9 explains why the three possible dates for Joel that we are considering all occur either before 587 BC (when the temple was destroyed) or after 515 BC (when the temple was rebuilt). I don't see how the locust invasion in Joel 1 could possibly have occurred between 587 and 515 when there was no temple.

So far we have seen how this locust invasion was a terrible agricultural disaster, but verse 9 tells us that it was more than that. This locust invasion was also a terrible theological disaster.

The Jews were commanded to make daily offerings that included lambs, grain offerings, and drink offerings.

**Exodus 29:38** - Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. And with the first lamb a tenth measure of **fine flour** mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and a fourth of a hin of wine for a **drink offering**.

That "fine flour" is called a grain offering in Numbers 28:5. Verse 9 tells us that both that daily grain offering and the daily drink offering had been cut off from the house of the Lord.

Even though I think the intended audience of the message has broadened here from the drunkards and the gluttons we met in verse 5, I think the

text may still have a specific message for those drunkards and gluttons here in verse 9.

What was their concern back in verse 6? The harvest had been destroyed - and what was their biggest worry about that terrible event? Their biggest worry was how it affected them. Would they have enough to drink? Would they have enough to eat?

And, yes, those were legitimate concerns. In fact, we will see those concerns in the very next verse. And the lack of food and drink that we will see in verse 10 was a good reason to lament, as they were told to do in verse 8.

But there is another reason to lament - a more important reason - a reason that we find in between verse 8 and verse 10 - the reason we are given here in verse 9: they should lament because of the lack of food and drink offered to God.

I think there is an important lesson for us here in verses 8-10. When disasters come is our first concern for the things of God?

We all know that we should put God first. We all know that God must always be our top priority. But if there was ever a time when we might become our own top priority, it would be during a time of disaster. A time when a storm or a plague or a war or something else comes, and suddenly we are faced with a life or death situation. When that happens, can't we flip the order and put our concerns ahead of God?

Verses 8-10 say no. Those verses remind us of the proper order of our concerns - even in a life or death situation - and perhaps we should say **especially** in a life or death situation. The first concern here was not the agricultural disaster that affected the food on people's tables but was instead the theological disaster that affected the food on God's table.

But verse 9 tells the **priests** to mourn as the ministers of the LORD. So maybe that's it. Maybe the **priests** are supposed to be concerned about the things of God, while the ordinary people like us can be concerned about our own stuff.

No, that's not it. The command to "lament" in verse 8 applied to everyone. The priests, as the ministers of God, had a heightened responsibility to conduct the daily offerings, and so they had a heightened

reason to mourn - but everyone was called to mourn the cessation of these daily offerings.

But what about today? Can we just leave the worry about the things of God to the priests today?

Yes, absolutely we can! Why? Because we are all priests today. We are all the ministers of God today. Saying that it is the priests' responsibility today is the same as saying that it is our responsibility.

**1 Peter 2:9** - But you are a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

**Revelation 1:6** - And made us a kingdom, **priests to his God and Father**, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

As priests, we have an **access** to God that the ordinary people did not enjoy in the Old Testament. But there is another side to that coin - we also have **responsibilities** to God that the ordinary people did not have in the Old Testament.

When we study the Old Testament and read about the things that the priests did, we need to always look for lessons about what we should be doing today. Why? Because we are priests. We are the royal priesthood. Because today we are the ones making the sacrifices to God.

**Romans 12:1** - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as **a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

There is still a question about this locust invasion that we have not asked yet - **who caused it?** Who sent these locusts against the people?

Maybe the answer is no one. Perhaps this terrible invasion of locusts was just one of those things that happens.

I suspect that is how we would view a locust invasion that happened today - not as a judgment sent by God, but just as a natural disaster that happens when you live in a world with insects.

But what about this locust invasion in Joel? Was it just a natural disaster?

Verse 9 gives us a strong indication that it was not. And how does it do that? With the verb **stem** that it uses.

A verb **tense** tells us **when** something happened, while a verb **stem** tells us **how** something happened.

Biblical Hebrew has seven common verb stems. Three of them are shown on the Handout for Lesson 6. There are two simple verb stems:

- Simple Active (Qal): "Moses broke the tablets"
- Simple Passive (Niphal): "The tablets were broken"

And there is another passive verb stem:

- Causative Passive (Hophal): "Moses was caused to break the tablets"

The verb "cut off" in verse 9 is clearly passive. We can see that in the English: "The grain offering and the drink offering **are cut off**." That is not something the offerings are doing but rather is something that is being done to the offerings.

But which passive stem is used here for the verb translated "cut off" in verse 9? The answer to that question is surprising.

It is not the simple passive stem that would have commonly been used. In fact, we saw that simple passive form of this same verb just a few verses ago.

**Joel 1:5** - Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it **is cut off** from your mouth.

That is the simple passive - it is cut off - but that is **not** what we find in verse 9.

Instead, in verse 9, we find the unusual **causitive** passive ("it was **caused** to be cut off"). And while

that particular root verb occurs many times in the Bible, verse 9 is the only place in the Bible where the "causitive passive" stem for that Hebrew verb is found.

An English translation of verse 9 that captures that unusual verb stem might be this: "grain offerings and drink offerings **have been caused to be cut off** from the house of the Lord."

If I told you that my house had been destroyed, you would like have some questions for me. But what if I told you that my house **was caused** to be destroyed? Again, you would likely have some questions for me, but I suspect I already know what your first question would be: **Who caused it?** Who did it?

The use of this rare causative passive stem in verse 9 leaves any Hebrew reader with that same question: **who caused it?** Who caused these offerings to be cut off from the house of the Lord?

Maybe this natural disaster isn't as natural as we thought? Did this terrible disaster come from God?

We **may** later find an explicit answer to that question in the book of Joel, but I think we may see a hint here in verse 9 (at least in the original Hebrew of verse 9). This disaster was not just something that happened - this disaster was something that was **caused** to happen.

But who? Who caused this disaster in Joel? Lawyers might refer to such an event today as "an act of God" because it is an event beyond human control for which there is no legal redress. Is Joel telling us here that this "act of God" really was an act of God?

Let's keep reading.

## Joel 1:10

**Joel 1:10** - The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes.

As we said, verse 10 gives us another reason why the people were told to lament in verse 8. Not only did the locust invasion bring a terrible theological disaster, but it also brought a terrible agricultural disaster.



And not only were the people mourning and the priests mourning, but here in verse 10 the ground itself is mourning. Why? Because the fields are destroyed. The locusts have stripped them bare so that nothing remains. The grain, the wine, and the oil have all been destroyed.

These three things - grain, wine, and oil - were the basic food requirements of the people and are described in the Old Testament as special signs of God's blessings for the people.

**Deuteronomy 7:13** - He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, **your grain and your wine and your oil**, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you.

Losing all three of those blessings in a single event would be a devastating life-ending disaster.

When we studied Hosea, we saw how the language in Hosea kept taking us back to the curses in Deuteronomy 28, where God told the people what to expect if they broke their covenant with him. Do we see something similar here in Joel? Yes, we do.

**Deuteronomy 28:42** - All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the **locust** consume.

**Deuteronomy 28:48-51** - Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. The LORD shall bring a **nation** against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a **nation** whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A **nation** of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor

shew favour to the young: And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: **which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil**, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee.

So what do we see in those promised curses? We see locust, and we see a nation that destroys the people and leaves neither grain, wine, nor oil.

And what have we see so far in Joel? We have seen locusts *that are called* a nation and that leave neither grain, wine, nor oil.

And perhaps that answers the question we had about verse 6 - why are these locusts called a "nation?" The answer may be that Joel wants us to think back to the curses in Deuteronomy 28.

And if that is right, then it confirms what we said earlier about verse 6 - that the word "nation" was intended to broaden our view of these events. We know that Deuteronomy 28 is not just talking about locusts, and so perhaps we now know that neither is Joel 1 just talking about locusts.

And if these verses in Joel are intended to point us back to Deuteronomy 28, then that also answers another earlier question that we had - was this event happening because the people had sinned?

If God through the prophet Joel is pointing us back to the curses in Deuteronomy 28, then we know the people had sinned. We know that these events occurred because there was sin in the camp.

How do we know that? Because the curses in Deuteronomy 28 were specifically directed to those who disobeyed God.

**Deuteronomy 28:45** - Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee.

And if you were reading Deuteronomy 28 in the days of Joel looking for what curse would come next, what curse would that be? We saw locusts in Deuteronomy 28:42. What comes next?

**Deuteronomy 28:49-50** - The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young.

What comes next is an invasion, not of locusts, but of people - “a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand.” Is that also what we will see next in Joel? Let’s keep reading.

## Joel Lesson 7

### Joel 1:11-12

**Joel 1:11-12** - Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man.

We have now reached the third of the four groups specifically addressed in the first chapter of Joel. Earlier, in verses 2 and 5, we saw elders and drunkards. Later in verse 13 we will see priests. Here in verse 11 we see farmers.

Again, we are still wondering why these four groups. What do they have in common? Let's continue to save that question until we get to the final group in verse 13.

Verse 11 addresses both of the common categories of farming the time: horticulture (tillers of the soil) and viticulture (vinedressers).

And Joel likewise lists all of the common categories of crops at the time: wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranate, palms, and apples.

There is some doubt about whether the Jews had apples as we know them, and so many say that the word translated "apple" in verse 12 refers instead to an apricot.

And, yes, I know we usually think of Eve eating an apple, but the Bible never identifies the fruit that she ate. (The idea that the fruit was an apple is so deeply embedded that the Latin word for "apple" is "malum," meaning "evil" - but maybe Eve ate an apricot!)

The appearance of the pomegranate here is interesting. Why? Because we see images of that fruit so often in the decorations of the tabernacle and the temple and on the garments of the high priest. And the early blossoming of the pomegranate was one of the signs of the arrival of spring.

**Song of Solomon 7:12** - Let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom.

But now the pomegranates were gone, and so there would be no sign of spring. The only pomegranates that the people would see now would be the metal variety that they could still see in the temple as a reminder of the blessings they had once enjoyed.

We are told here that the vine dries up and that the trees are dried up. That is our first hint that this calamity involves more than just locusts - this disaster also involves a drought. (We will see that drought even more clearly later in verse 17.)

And this drought had not just dried up the crops - verse 12 tells us that this drought had also dried up "gladness ... from the children of man."

For ancient Israelites, the harvest was the high point of the year, and it was celebrated each year with the Feast of the Tabernacles (also known as the Feast of the Booths or Succoth).

There are important connections between that feast and the book of Joel, but we need to look a bit below the surface to find them. Let's start by reading about that feast from Leviticus.

**Leviticus 23:39-43** - On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord seven days; on the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And you shall take on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord seven days in the year; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations; you shall keep it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days; all

that are native in Israel shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated on the 15th day of the seventh month, Tishri, which is typically around the end of September or early October.

The Feast is primarily agricultural and celebrates the gathering of the harvest. In John 7:37 it is referred to just as “The Feast.”

On the first day of the feast, 13 bulls were offered, 12 on the next day, 11 on the third, and so on until 7 bulls were offered on the seventh day — making a total of 70 offerings.

The rabbis taught that there were 70 nations in the world and so the number 70 looked forward to a time when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together. That is something we will see later in our study of Joel.

One of the most important rituals during the feast was the pouring of water in the temple.

A specially appointed priest was sent to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher to bring water from the pool. This water was then poured by the High Priest into a basin at the foot of the altar amidst the blasting of trumpets and the singing of the Hallel (Psalm 113-118).

The significance of that pouring was twofold.

First, it was a symbolic and ritual prayer for abundant rain. But second, it looked toward the outpouring of God’s spirit upon all nations. And, once again, that is something we will see later in our study of Joel.

As with the other Jewish feasts, this feast looked forward to the coming Messiah. And it was at the end of such a feast that Jesus stood up and announced that he was the real source of living water.

**John 7:37-38** - In the last day, that great day of **the feast**, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and

drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

So, what can we say about the Feast of the Tabernacles and its relation to the book of Joel?

First, as we just saw, that great Feast looked forward to some great events that we will see in this short book of Joel - God’s plan for the Gentiles, and the outpouring of God’s spirit.

But second, that great feast shows us just how joyous of an event a good harvest was to the Jews. In fact, the Rabbis said that “he who has not seen Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles does not know what rejoicing means.”

But we do not see that joy here in Joel. We see the harvest in verse 11, but we are told that it has perished. And verse 12 tells us that the crops have dried up; we do not see any water being poured.

The locusts have destroyed the harvest, and the people’s gladness has dried up along with their trees and their vines. Rather than abundant rain, there is just a terrible drought.

We need to always be thinking about this feast of the harvest as we study the book of Joel. This great feast of joy is the backdrop to what we are seeing here, and that backdrop will help us understand the great prophecies in the book of Joel.

Before we move on, we still have a question we need to consider about verse 11. “Be **ashamed**, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers.” We can understand why the vinedressers were told to **wail** - but why were the tillers of the soil told to be **ashamed**? What had they done?

According to the lexicons, the Hebrew word translated “ashamed” in the ESV translation of verse 11 means “to be ashamed, confused or disappointed.” That definition gives us two other possible meanings, and we see those possibilities in other translations of verse 11:

- [ASV] Be **confounded**, O ye husbandmen, wail, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; for the harvest of the field is perished.



- [NRSV] Be **dismayed**, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, over the wheat and the barley; for the crops of the field are ruined.

Those other possibilities may solve our problem. While it is not clear why the farmers should be ashamed, it is easy to see why the farmers might be dismayed or confounded as they watched an entire year of work suddenly turned into nothing by those locusts. I think that would leave anyone confounded and dismayed.

So perhaps verse 11 is not telling the farmers to be ashamed, but is only telling them to be confounded and dismayed. And that may be correct, but I'm not sure I'm convinced. That proposed solution may be just a bit too simple. Why?

For one reason, I'm not sure why those farmers would have needed a command to be confounded or dismayed. It seems that those feelings would have come naturally, although perhaps we could say the same thing about the command to wail.

But second, I don't think we should be so quick to dismiss the possibility that these farmers are told here to be ashamed because of sin they had committed or were committing.

Why not? At least three reasons.

- First, the previous group - the drunkards - seem to have been called out because of their sin.
- Second, as we have seen, Joel may be referring us back to Deuteronomy 28 with the use of the word "nation" in verse 6, and, if so, that reference would confirm that sin is involved here.
- And third, Joel will soon tell the people to repent, which also tells us that sin is involved here.

That second reason about Deuteronomy 28 is particularly compelling. Why? Because when we compare Deuteronomy 28 with what we are seeing in Joel we find some remarkable parallels.

As we know from our study of Hosea, Deuteronomy 28 begins by listing the blessings that the people would enjoy if they were faithful to God, and

Deuteronomy 28 ends by listing the curses that the people could expect if they were faithless.

What do we see in that list of blessings? We see the same blessings that had just been taken from the people here in Joel.

- (28:4) - the fruit of your ground.
- (28:5) - blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.
- (28:8) - the blessing on you in your barns ... and he will bless you in the land.
- (28:11) - abound in prosperity ... in the fruit of your ground.
- (28:12) - to give the rain to your land in its season.

And what curses do we see in that list of curses? We see the same curses that had just arrived for the people here in Joel.

- (28:22) - with drought and with blight.
- (28:24) - make the rain of your land powder.
- (28:38) - you shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it.
- (28:39) - you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes.
- (28:40) - you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off.
- (28:42) - the cricket shall possess all your trees and the fruit of your ground.

As for that word translated "cricket" by the ESV, I agree with the Pulpit Commentary: "The name given here to the ravaging insect is not the same as in verse 38; but there can be no doubt it is the locust that is intended." The Hebrew word seems to be naming the locusts based on the sound they make - it may literally mean "buzzer" or "whirler," and the Hebrew word for "cymbals" (the percussion instrument) comes from the same root word.

So, for those three reasons (and especially the second reason) I don't think we should so quickly dismiss the idea that these farmers were, in fact, told to be ashamed because they had sinned.

And I think when we look at the Hebrew we can add a fourth reason - **wordplay**.

There is some wordplay going on here in the Hebrew, and it is wordplay that we see elsewhere in the Old Testament.

The root word for the Hebrew word translated “ashamed” in verse 11 appears five other times in this chapter, where it is translated “dries up” or “dried up.”

**Joel 1:10** - ...the wine **dries up**.

**Joel 1:12** - The vine **dries up** ... all the trees of the field are **dried up**...

**Joel 1:17** - ...because the grain has **dried up**.

**Joel 1:20** - ...because the water brooks are **dried up**.

By repeatedly using two Hebrew words that share a similar sound, the text of Joel seems to be linking God’s command to these farmers in verse 11 with the drying up of their harvest.

If we tried to achieve the same effect in English it might be: “Shame. Your crops have shriveled!”

But how does that observation help us understand the meaning of the command? How does that wordplay help us interpret the Hebrew word translated “ashamed?”

The answer is that the wordplay in verses 11-12 helps us when we compare another place where the same wordplay is used.

**Jeremiah 50:2** - “Declare among the nations and proclaim, set up a banner and proclaim, conceal it not, and say: ‘Babylon is taken, Bel is put to **shame**, Merodach is **dismayed**. Her images are put to **shame**, her idols are **dismayed**.’

That word “shame” in that verse from Jeremiah 50 comes from the same Hebrew root word that is translated “ashamed” in Joel 1:11.

And we should note that in Jeremiah 50:2 it is a *different* Hebrew word that is translated “dismayed.”

And later in that same chapter from Jeremiah we find the same Hebrew root word translated “shame” in Jeremiah 50:2 again, but here it is translated “dried up,” just like we see in Joel 1.

**Jeremiah 50:38** - A drought against her waters, that they may be **dried up**! For it is a land of images, and they are mad over idols.

What do those verses from Jeremiah tell us?

They tell us that we may have taken a wrong turn when we said that the word “ashamed” in Joel 1:11 might just mean “confounded” or “dismayed.” That is most certainly **not** the meaning in Jeremiah 50. There we see a different word used for “dismayed,” and there we know that the word used in Joel 1:11 means “shame.” Babylon’s false gods are put to shame.

So where are we after looking at that? Where we are is that I think the farmers were told to be ashamed in verse 11 because they had sinned. And I think Joel is using wordplay to link the farmers’ shame with the drought that had dried up their vines and their trees.

But what had the farmers done? What was their sin?

Perhaps we can find the answer to that question by looking at another farmer. Let’s listen as Jesus describes him, and as we read this let’s think about what we have said so far about the theme of the Day of the Lord in the book of Joel.

**Luke 12:16-21** - And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods

laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Is that rich farmer in Luke 12 like our farmers here in Joel 1? Were they both guilty of complacently thinking that all things would just continue on forever the same as they always had? Were they both guilty of trusting in themselves with no thought of God? Were they both guilty of praying only to themselves and saying, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry”?

“Eat, drink, be merry.” There we see it again - that theme we saw with the drunkards and the gluttons. I think we are seeing that same theme again with the farmers.

And what is that theme? It is a theme that runs all throughout the Bible from beginning to end. It is the theme of people eating and drinking with no concern for God. It is the theme of people thinking that everything will continue to be as it always has been. It is the theme of a people fast asleep in desperate need of a wake up call.

Again and again in the Bible, we find God interrupting the complacent lives of such people and suddenly changing everything.

Remember that, at this point in our study of Joel, our working definition for the Day of the Lord is **a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before.**

I think that is exactly what we are seeing here with these farmers. And they are told to be ashamed!

Why ashamed? Because their riches have dried up!

Why ashamed? Because God has suddenly shown up and said to them: “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

Why ashamed? Because the Day of the Lord has come!

## Joel 1:13

**Joel 1:13** - Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.

With verse 13, we see the fourth of the four groups that are specifically addressed in the first chapter of Joel. We saw the elders in verse 2, we saw the drunkards in verse 5, we saw the farmers in verse 11, and now we see the priests in verse 13.

Why those four groups? We have been kicking that question down the road ever since verse 2, but now the time has come for us to answer it if we can. And surprise! There are several possibilities.

Perhaps those four groups are addressed because they are affected the most by this disaster.

The very young and the very old were most at risk even in good times, and especially in bad times. Perhaps that is one reason why we see the elders in verse 2 - although we know the main reason we saw the elders was because of the question they were asked. If they couldn't remember such an event, then it certainly must have been a long time since something like that had happened. But the elderly were also at great personal risk from such a disaster.

Likewise, the drunkards and the gluttons were affected more than most. They loved wine, but now the vines had been stripped. They loved food, but now the fields had been stripped. Soon there would be no drunkards and no gluttons left in the land.

And the farmers, of course, were greatly affected. They had not only lost their food, but they had lost their livelihood. It would take years to recover from such a disaster.

And the priests? Were they also affected more than most? Yes - for at least two reasons.

First, as we saw earlier, the priests could no longer make the required daily grain and drink offerings. But second, the priests depended on those offerings for their own food.

**Deuteronomy 18:1** - The Levitical priests, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel. They shall eat the LORD's food offerings as their inheritance.

If we are looking for what these four groups all have in common, then that is certainly one answer - they are each affected more than most by the locust invasion.

But we also see something else they all have in common when we read what God tells them to do - each of these four groups hears a very unexpected command from God.

What are the elders commanded to do in verse 2? **HEAR!**

Shouldn't the elders have been the ones talking? Shouldn't the elders have been telling the young people to listen? Instead, the elders surprisingly are the ones told to listen!

What are the drunkards commanded to do in verse 5? **WEEP!**

Aren't the drunkards supposed to be happy and jolly all the time? They certainly look that way on all of those TV commercials. I thought the drunkards were the ones who had all the fun. But here they are surprisingly told to weep!

What are the farmers commanded to do in verse 11? **BE ASHAMED!**

If anyone could rightly be filled with pride, wouldn't it be the farmers? They worked hard to achieve a good harvest that fed the people. Without the farmers, there would be no harvest and no joyous feast celebrating the harvest. In most situations the farmers would be very proud of their accomplishments. But here they are surprisingly told to be ashamed!

What are the priests commanded to do in verse 13? **GET DRESSED!**

If anyone did not need a command to get dressed, it would have been a priest. Priests had special outfits designed for glory and beauty.

**Exodus 28:40** - For Aaron's sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty.

But here the priests are surprisingly told to get dressed!

And why the surprising messages at the beginning of the book of Joel? Why does the book begin with things that no one would ever have expected to hear? Is it perhaps because the theme of the book involves a day that no one ever expected to come?

A third possibility is that God may have chosen these four groups because each of them has a different relation with God's blessings for his people.

- The elders had seen God's blessings for many years.
- The drunkards perverted God's blessings.
- The farmers reaped God's blessings.
- And the priests offered back God's blessings.

Each of the four groups had a different view of God and a different view of God's blessings. And so, perhaps God spoke to those four groups because he had a different message related to each of those different viewpoints.

So where are we? We are looking for what elders, drunkards, farmers, and priests have in common - and we have found at least three answers. They were each affected more than most by the locust invasion, they each receive a surprising command from God perhaps to perfectly set the stage for the major theme of the book, and they each had a different relation with the blessings God had provided them.

Those are three possible answers to why we see these four groups in chapter one. All of that (and more) could have been intended, so I don't think we have to choose a single answer.

But if I did choose, I might choose the second option because of its relation to the major theme of the book - the Day of the Lord that comes as a sudden



unexpected surprise to those who are not sober and watchful.

Now that we have answered that question about why we see these four groups, let's focus on this fourth and final group - the priests.

What are the priests commanded to do in verse 13?

They are commanded to lament and to wail, and they are commanded to put on sackcloth and wear it all night.

Why? Verse 13 answers that question - "Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God."

We have already talked about all of that. We saw the same lamentation, the same mourning, and the same priests back in verse 8, and we saw the same reason for the same lamentation and the same mourning back in verse 9.

Why is Joel repeating himself? For at least two reasons.

First, as we said earlier, we are reading Hebrew poetry here, and the fundamental characteristic of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Something is said, and then it is said again in some parallel manner. We saw that very clearly in verse 4, and I think we are seeing it again with verses 8-9 and verse 13.

But second, even without the Hebrew poetry, repetition may be used here for the same reason it is used by any teacher - to emphasize something that is very important. (I don't know about you, but when a teacher told me the same thing more than three times, I would always turn to back of my notebook where I listed topics that I was sure would be on the next exam!)

But what very important message for the final exam is being emphasized here? It is the same message we talked about when we looked at verse 9 - it is that this terrible disaster has had a terrible impact on the worship of God. The daily offerings have been cut off!

Did the people see that cutting off as God saw it? Did the people view those daily offerings as God viewed them? Did the people understand the importance of those daily offerings?

The locusts had invaded! Did the people view those ceased offerings as the **least** of their problems or as the **greatest** of their problems?

Let's fast forward a few thousand years. The Covid virus has come! Did we view our ceased in-person worship assemblies as the **least** of our problems or as the **greatest** of our problems?

We could discuss that question all day and likely get many different viewpoints - but you know what? The only viewpoint that matters is God's viewpoint.

How does God view it? Was it the least of the problems - or the greatest? Verse 13 answers that question when it comes to this locust invasion. It was the greatest of problems.

God did not say: "Yes, the worship service has ceased, but you have bigger things to worry about now, so go take care of all that, and then later you can get things restarted in the temple. But don't lose any sleep over it. After all, it's all just ritual. You have bigger fish to fry!"

Instead, God says: **"Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God!"**

Why? Because your harvest has been destroyed? Because your fields have been stripped bare? Because your food supply has been decimated? No. **"Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God."**

Were those other things terrible? Yes, they were. Were those other things a reason to weep and lament? Yes, they were. Were they the biggest problem? They were not. Verse 13 gives us the biggest problem: "Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God."

Let's all keep something very important in mind about the Day of the Lord in the Bible - it is always accompanied by a **sudden attitude adjustment!** People always have a completely different attitude about things after the Day of the Lord than they had before the Day of the Lord.

We will certainly see that with the last great Day of the Lord. Think for a moment about the smug, smirking, self-satisfied attitude of those today who wallow in their sin and ignore God and God's word.

What will their attitude be when they hear that final trumpet and see the King of kings appear in the clouds to judge this world? Now that is what I call a sudden attitude readjustment!

Today such people do not see things as God sees them, but one day that will change. One day they will see their sin as God sees it. One day they will see this world as God sees it. One day they will see their possessions as God sees them. One day they will see the church as God sees it. But if they wait until that last great day to see things as God sees them, they will have waited too long.

What do they need to do? Joel has already answered that question. In fact, Joel answered that question with the very first word he spoke after he told us about the locusts in verse 4. Look at the first word of verse 5: **"Awake!"**

Almost all of the commentaries tell us that the major theme of Joel is the Day of the Lord, and perhaps it is. But we don't see that phrase until later in verse 15. Perhaps the major theme of Joel is the first thing Joel said - **"Wake up!"** And, of course, those themes are closely related - the Day of the Lord is a wake up call!

We have had some truly terrible hurricanes this year. We thought Beryl was bad - and it was - but it was nothing compared to Helene and Milton.

Here is a question for us about those hurricanes - **for what should we be praying?**

There is not a single answer to that question. We can certainly pray, as I'm sure we have, for the safety of those in the path of such a storm.

But I think we are given an additional answer here in Joel - something we should pray for whenever a disaster hits, whether it is a storm, a war, or a virus. We should pray that those things will be **a wake up call** for those who desperately need to wake up!

That is how Joel viewed this locust invasion. It was the first thing he said about it. **Awake!** Wake up!

Yes, this is a Day of the Lord - but there is another Day of the Lord coming! You were sleeping when this one came - will you be sleeping when the next one comes?

I think that is Joel's message here, and it is not just a message for an ancient people battling ancient insects - it is a message for all of us!

**1 Thessalonians 5:6** - So then let us **not sleep**, as others do, but let us keep **awake** and be **sober**.

**Romans 13:11-12** - Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to **wake from sleep**. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

**1 Corinthians 15:34** - **Wake up from your drunken stupor**, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

**2 Peter 3:10-12** - **But the day of the Lord will come like a thief**, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, **what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

## Joel Lesson 8

### Joel 1:13, Continued

**Joel 1:13** - Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.

The commentaries almost all agree that the central theme of Joel is the Day of the Lord, but last week we looked at another candidate for the central theme of Joel.

And what is that theme? It is the very first word in verse 5 - "Awake!" It is the very first thing that Joel says after he describes the locust invasion in verse 4. "Awake!"

So which is it? Which one of those two possibilities is the central theme of Joel? I think the answer is that we don't have to make that choice. Why not? Because those two themes are closely related. The Day of the Lord is a wake up call from God! God sent such days and warned the people about such days so that they would wake up.

But what does it mean to wake up? I think verse 13 answers that question.

What happens when we **physically** wake up?

We quit seeing things in the dream world, but we instead start seeing things in the physical world. When we see something in a dream we are not seeing it as it really is, but when we wake up and see that same thing in the physical world we are seeing it as it really is - not in a dream, but in real life.

What happens when we **spiritually** wake up?

The same thing! When we awaken spiritually and open our spiritual eyes we see things as they really are - we see things as God sees them. That is what it means to wake up! I think that is what Paul tells us.

**Ephesians 5:13-14** - But when anything is exposed by the light, it

becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

But how does verse 13 tell us that?

It tells us that by showing us how God saw this locust invasion. It tells us that by showing us what God viewed as the worst thing about that locust invasion. It tells us that by showing us how the people should have been seeing that locust invasion.

"Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God."

If the people did not see the locust invasion that way, then they needed to wake up! They needed to start seeing things as God saw them.

And we all need to be doing that. Otherwise, we are spiritually asleep, and we are not seeing things as they really are.

### Joel 1:14

**Joel 1:14** - Consecrate 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 out to the LORD.

It is surprising how many commentaries tell us that these elders in verse 14 were the leaders of the people at this time. They tell us that there was no king, and so the people were being led by these elders. And they say all of that so that they can date the book of Joel *after* the exile when there was no longer any Jewish king.

And why is that view surprising? It is surprising because we have read the text of Joel!

We have now seen these elders twice in this first chapter. In verse 5, these elders were commanded

to hear something, and now in verse 14, the priests are commanded to gather these elders.

Let me ask a question: do these elders look like leaders to you? Do we see them leading? Or do we see them being led? "Listen up! And stand over there!" Does that sound like something directed to the leaders?

But, with that said, we do have a question about these elders: why are they mentioned again in verse 14 if they aren't the leaders?

I think the answer to that question comes quickly when we compare verse 14 with verse 2. In both of those verses we see the same two groups - the elders and the inhabitants of the land.

In verse 2, the elders listened to a question, and the inhabitants of the land listened to their answer.

Here in verse 14, we find the same two groups - the elders and the inhabitants of the land - gathered into the temple so that they can cry out to God.

In verse 2, the elders and the inhabitants of the land are listening. In verse 14, the elders and the inhabitants of the land are crying out. Those events are what? They are parallel. We are seeing parallelism, the defining characteristic of Hebrew poetry.

I think we should see verses 2 and 14 as bookends for the messages that we find between those verses. Verse 14 parallels and closes verse 2.

That answer also makes sense with what we said earlier about these elders - whatever they are doing, they do not seem to be leading. There is no indication either here or back in verse 2 that these elders are the leaders of the people. In fact, the indication is that they are not - these elders are being told what to do: to listen and to gather together in the temple.

In fact, if anyone is leading here, it is the priests. In verse 14, we see the priests consecrating a fast, calling an assembly, and gathering everyone into the temple.

So are the priests the leaders in place of the king?

There is no need to jump to that conclusion based on what we see in verse 14. It would be perfectly natural for priests to do these things whether or

not there was a king - and particularly so when, as here, the priests had been commanded by God through the prophet Joel to do these things!

In short, what we read here about the elders and the priests tells us nothing about whether a king was reigning over the people at this time.

Let's look next at what the priests are told to do in verse 14: "Consecrate 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 out to the LORD."

That looks like three things, but I think it is really just two things: consecrate a fast and call a solemn assembly. The call to gather the people seems to be just a more specific and parallel way of calling the solemn assembly.

So what can we say about the consecrated fast and the solemn assembly? Why are the people called to do those things after this locust invasion?

One thing we should note right from the start is that one of those commands (fasting) is a private or individual response to the disaster, while the other command (assembling) is a public or corporate response to the disaster.

What does that tell us? Let's save that question until after we have looked more closely at each command, but let's keep that distinction in mind.

The first command in verse 14 is to "**consecrate a fast.**"

And that command at first seems very odd given the context. Why does God command a *fast* after the food supply has been destroyed?

I think the first word in the command answers that question - consecrate. This fast involves more than just not eating - the people would have been doing that anyway. This fast is consecrated - it is a fast with a spiritual purpose.

But why did God call for such a fast after the food supply had been destroyed? I think God did it for the same reason that he sent Joel after the locust invasion.

God wanted the people to learn a lesson from that locust invasion.



God did not call this sacred fast so that the people could think about the locusts - they would have been doing that anyway.

God called this sacred fast so that the people would think about how they had been living prior to the day the locusts arrived and on how they should live differently after that day.

And, as we will soon see, God also wanted them to reflect on the great theme of this book: The day of the Lord!

The second command is to **“call a solemn assembly.”**

Yes, the people were suffering, but they were not suffering alone. God wanted them to gather together in a solemn assembly. They were not in this alone.

I think this command for the people to gather together in their suffering provides a very important lesson for us today.

Yes, we each have an individual responsibility to God, but that does not mean we are in this alone. Each of us is a part of a body - the body of Christ, the church of Christ.

**1 Corinthians 12:27** - Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

**Romans 14:7** - For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.

The people listening to Joel had experienced a terrible devastating event. When the locusts came, I suspect they did what we did during the pandemic - they likely retreated to their homes to keep the danger outside.

But now that the locusts were gone would they continue to struggle alone or would they struggle together? In verse 14, God is calling on them to struggle together.

“Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the

LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.”

Earlier we noted that fasting is a private or individual response to the disaster, while assembling is a public or corporate response to the disaster. And we saved for later the question of what that tells us.

I think we have now answered that question. The private response reflects private suffering, and the corporate response reflects common suffering as a body.

If the proper response to either is neglected, then the body is not functioning as it should.

**1 Corinthians 12:26** - If one member suffers, all suffer together...

I think we all understand the truth of that statement when it comes to the members of our **physical** body. But do we understand the truth of that statement when it comes to the members of our **spiritual** body?

**One final question about verse 14:** What was the population of Jerusalem at this time?

And perhaps you have a question about that final question: why do I ask?

I ask that question because some commentaries claim that the population was very small when Joel was written, which, they say, means that Joel was written not long after the people returned from the Babylonian exile.

And why do they say the population was small? Because of the command in verse 14 to “gather the elders and **all** the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God.”

So, now back to our question. What was the population of Jerusalem at this time? Can we infer from verse 14 that the population was very small?

Let’s start by figuring out how many people we are talking about here.

We find the dimensions of the first temple in 1 Kings 6:2, and it was about 2700 square feet. If the command was to gather everyone inside the temple, then it would have held likely only a few hundred people. If instead the command was

to gather everyone in the temple complex, then it would likely have held only several thousand people at most.

Those estimates create a problem no matter how we date this book.

Even if we were to look at the post-exile date we would still have trouble locating a period during which the population was that small. Why? Because the first return under King Cyrus included more than 40,000 people (Ezra 2:64), and the population seems to have increased from there.

So what is the solution? The solution is to remember that we are reading Hebrew poetry, and one common characteristic of Hebrew poetry is hyperbole.

I think we have already seen some hyperbole in the first chapter of Joel.

- **Joel 1:6** - For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and **beyond number**; its teeth are **lions' teeth**, and it has **the fangs of a lioness**.

Yes, the locusts were numerous and fierce, but they were not literally beyond number and they did not literally have teeth and fangs like a lion.

Do you mean to say that there is hyperbole in the Bible? Yes, absolutely there is.

The Bible sometimes uses figures of speech, just as we do today. And such figures of speech in the Bible are more common in the poetry of the Bible, just as they are today. We often see hyperbole in the Psalms.

**Psalm 6:6** - I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.

But if we are bothered by the idea that the command in verse 14 uses hyperbole, we do have some other options.

Verse 14 is just a command for all to gather; it does not tell us that everyone obeyed that command. And neither does verse 14 tell us when they were to gather; perhaps they came in smaller groups as they traveled to the city over some period of time.

And, again, if we infer from verse 14 that everyone came to the temple or the temple complex at the same time, then it is not clear at all when we could locate such a small population on the timeline prior to the destruction of the first temple or after the construction of the second temple.

## Joel 1:15

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

Most English translations do not do a very good job in conveying the emotional impact of the opening phrase of verse 15: "Alas for the day!"

The Hebrew word translated "alas" occurs 15 times in the Old Testament and is always used as an exclamation from someone who has experienced shock, dismay, or despair. The Hebrew word is stronger than the English word "alas," but it is difficult to find a better English counterpart.

One commentary says that the Hebrew word is best described as the sound a person makes when punched in the stomach! Another commentary suggests that it is the first thing that flies out of a person's mouth in a moment of surprise or pain, perhaps like, "oh no!" That commentary says that the English word "ah!" sounds much like the Hebrew word and might be the best choice.

Why is that word important? Because that little word is the link between what we have been seeing so far in Joel and what we are about to see in verse 15. Joel is not changing the subject here. Instead, Joel is about to tell us something that comes straight out of the extreme shock and dismay that he and the people have just experienced.

"Alas for **the day**!" What day? That question is answered by the next phrase in verse 15: "For **the day of the LORD** is near!" That day is the day of the Lord.

And so, finally, in verse 15 we find the all-important phrase "the day of the Lord" in the book of Joel!

This is the first time the phrase occurs in Joel, but it is certainly not the last time we will see that phrase.

And we will have many questions about that phrase as we proceed in our study of Joel.

And our first question is immediate! There is something very puzzling about the first occurrence of this phrase in Joel that we see here in verse 15: "For the day of the LORD **is near**."

**Near?** Why **near**?

If this day of the Lord is the locust invasion, and if the locust invasion has already happened, then why does Joel say that the day of the Lord is **near**?

We might be tempted to interpret "near" to mean "near in the past," but that will not work grammatically.

In the Hebrew, the only verb in verse 15 is the word translated "comes," and it is in the imperfect tense, which means that it is describing an action that is either future or in the process of happening. It is not describing a completed action in the past.

But perhaps that is still the answer - the day that is near is a day that is in the process of coming. And that could certainly be true of this disaster when we combine the destruction of the crops from that locust invasion with the drought that we are also seeing here.

If this day of the Lord in verse 15 is or includes the locust invasion in verse 4, then that is the most likely answer to why we see the word "near" in verse 15. The disaster was not over; it will still in the process of happening.

But there is another possible answer for why the word "near" might have been used to describe that locust invasion - Joel may be quoting someone in verse 15. We find some very similar phrases elsewhere in the Bible.

**Ezekiel 30:2-3** - "Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: "Wail, '**Alas for the day!** For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.

**Isaiah 13:6** - Wail, **for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!**

Those verses do sound a lot like Joel 1:15 - but what can we conclude from that similarity? The answer is not much! One commentary accuses Joel of ransacking the prophetic literature - which is certainly a ridiculous and baseless charge.

Perhaps Joel is quoting Isaiah or Ezekiel, but the opposite may be true - perhaps Isaiah and Ezekiel are quoting Joel. Or, more likely in my view, no one is quoting anybody here.

And why do I favor that latter view? Because the context is different in each case.

Joel is talking about his own people, Isaiah is talking about Babylon, and Ezekiel is talking about Egypt. Yes, the language they each use is very similar, but we already know that their language all comes from a common source - the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21) - so why shouldn't it be similar?

But there is another possible person that Joel could be quoting here in verse 15 - Joel could be quoting himself!

Perhaps Joel had been telling the people before the locust invasion that the day of the Lord was near - and so perhaps Joel quotes himself in verse 15 so that the people would remember that they had been warned. Joel might be saying: "See! I told you! The day of the Lord is near!"

Those two possibilities are the most likely explanations for the word "near" in verse 15 if this day of the Lord is or includes the locust invasion.

But what if the day of the Lord in verse 15 is **not** the locust invasion?

This view that the day of the Lord in verse 15 is not the locust invasion has two immediate advantages over the view that the day of the Lord in verse 15 is or includes the locust invasion. What are those two advantages?

First, the second view is the most natural view from the grammar that is used in verse 15. The verbs in verse 4 were perfect (completed past action), but the verb in verse 15 is imperfect (continued or future action).

And second, we have already seen a hint that some other day may be in view here, and we will see much stronger hints later in the book.

What is the hint that we have already seen? We saw the word “nation” in verse 6, which, along with the locusts, caused us to think back to the curses of Deuteronomy 28. In that chapter, there is clearly something more to come after the locusts.

But what? What is this day of the Lord in verse 15 if it is not the locust invasion? And why would Joel bring up some other day here in the middle of his discussion of the locust invasion?

Let’s look first at that last question - why would Joel mention a later day of the Lord in this context of the locust invasion?

To answer that question, let’s put ourselves in the shoes of the people who were listening to Joel. What can we say about those people?

The first thing we can say about them is that most likely they were looking forward to the day of the Lord (at least before they heard Joel)! Why? Because they were certain that day would be the day when God delivered them and vindicated them by judging their enemies.

In their mind, destruction on the day of the Lord was something that happened to other people but that would never happen to them. We see that attitude in Amos.

**Amos 5:18** - Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!

I suspect the people in Joel had that same attitude. I suspect they too desired the day of the Lord - at least before they heard what Joel had to say about it.

But before they heard Joel - what were they thinking then? Most likely, they thought they were completely right with God. They were doing all the right things and saying all the right things. What could be wrong?

And, yes, the locusts had invaded, and yes, that invasion was worse than anything anyone could remember, but, you know, those things happen.

There was no reason to see those locusts as a punishment or a warning from God, right? After all, these people were God’s special chosen people. God had promised to bless them, and God was on their side, right?

But then Joel shows up. And Joel tells them that there was, in fact, something wrong about their relationship with God - that they needed to be ashamed and that they needed to weep and wear sackcloth. And Joel tells them that these locusts were, in fact, a judgment from God and a warning from God intended to wake them up.

But a warning of what?

Perhaps that is why we have verse 15 - to answer that question - a warning of what? A warning of the day of the Lord - which is near!

So, Joel, you mean to say that God sent these locusts? And you mean to say that God is going to show up soon - not to deliver us - but to destroy us? Yes and yes. “For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.”

God did not send Joel to tell them that things would get better. God sent Joel to tell them that things would get worse! God was not coming to deliver the people but rather to destroy the people!

That is not at all what the people would have expected to hear - but that is what they heard from this prophet of God.

So which is it? Is the day of the Lord in verse 15 the locust invasion or is the day of the Lord in verse 15 something else that was yet to come?

I favor the second view. I think this day of the Lord in verse 15 is not the locust invasion but in instead something else that was yet in the future for Joel’s listeners.

Why do I favor that second view?

As we saw in the introduction, Joel uses the phrase “the day of the Lord” five times, and almost everyone agrees that it is the central theme of the book. Let’s quickly look at all five occurrences and see if that helps us with this first occurrence.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! **For the day of the LORD is near**, and



as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

**Joel 2:1** - Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, **for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near.**

**Joel 2:11, 14** - The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. **For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?** ... (14) Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

**Joel 2:31** - The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, **before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.**

**Joel 3:14** - Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! **For the day of the LORD is near** in the valley of decision.

Of those five occurrences, four of them (including the one here in verse 15) are most naturally viewed as future events - the day is near; the day is coming; something else will happen before the day comes.

The fifth occurrence in Joel 2:11 is ambiguous (at least in English) - the day is great and very awesome - but a few verses later we are told that God might yet relent about the day, which means that the day in verse 11 must also have been a yet future day. And the verb "endure" in Joel 2:11 has the same imperfect tense that we see here in verse 15.

So where does that leave us? As one commentary explains it: "the day of the Lord is always future oriented in Joel." And having now looked at all of them, that conclusion does seem to be correct. The day of the Lord is always future oriented in Joel.

And does that surprise us? Are we surprised to find a prophet from God talking about future events? Perhaps the surprise would be if the prophet from God talked only about past events! Perhaps the surprise would be if Joel was sent to proclaim just a textbook about locusts!

I think Joel has another day in mind here in verse 15 - a day that had not yet come, but a day that was near.

## Joel Lesson 9

### Joel 1:15, Continued

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

Our big question last week was whether the day of the Lord in verse 15 is the locust invasion or something else that was coming after the locust invasion, and we looked at the best arguments for each option.

And which option is the **better** option? Last week, I gave the edge to the second possibility - that the day of the Lord in verse 15 was not the locust invasion but was instead a future event that had not yet come but that was near. "For the day of the LORD is near!"

So does that mean that this locust invasion was **not** a day of the Lord? No. All it means is that Joel does not *explicitly* call this locust invasion a day of the Lord (at least not here in verse 15).

So am I suggesting that Joel somehow *implicitly* calls the locust invasion a day of the Lord? Yes, I am. I think that is what Joel is doing in verse 15.

This whole chapter so far has been about the locust invasion, and we will see that same topic continue in the remainder of the chapter as well. Verse 4 set the stage for the locusts, and we have been seeing the destruction they caused ever since.

But why? Why has Joel been so concerned about these locusts? I think verse 15 answers that question. Joel is focused on the locust invasion because that terrible event was pointing toward and foreshadowing a later, even more terrible event.

One thing we have said so far about the day of the Lord is that it is a wake up call. It wakes people up from their drunken stupor. And, in fact, that is the very first word we hear from Joel after he tells us about the locusts in verse 4 when he commands the drunkards to "awake" in verse 5. Those locusts were a wake up call.

And what does that fact tell us about this locust invasion? It tells us that it was not just a natural

accidental occurrence. Alarm clocks don't work that way. Alarm clocks go off at a predetermined time and for a predetermined purpose. And likewise with these locusts - they arrived at a time predetermined by God and for a purpose predetermined by God.

Back in verse 9, we found a hint from a Hebrew verb stem that this locust invasion was caused by God. I think we find an even stronger hint of that here in verse 15. This locust invasion arrived at a set time and for a set purpose.

Was the locust invasion itself a day of the Lord? Well, it certainly seems to fit our working definition of that phrase: a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before.

We again need to remember the first thing Joel said after he described this locust invasion: Awake!

And how better for God to foreshadow a coming day of the Lord than with another day of the Lord? How better to wake people up to the reality of a coming day of the Lord than by sending them another day of the Lord to sound the alarm? How better to convince the Jews that the day of the Lord was not just for other people than by sending them their own day of the Lord?

But is that the only possibility for this locust invasion? No, it is not.

Perhaps this locust invasion did happen just by accident, and perhaps Joel then saw these locusts as an opportunity to teach the people a lesson about what was coming. Maybe Joel was looking for the perfect illustration, and then he found that perfect illustration in the world of nature with the ever fascinating life-cycle of the locust.

Maybe - but I don't think so. Why not?

First, we had that hint back in verse 9 with the very unusual Hebrew verb stem describing the cutting off of the daily offerings. Those offerings were not just cut off, but they were **caused** to be cut off. Who caused it?

And second, we don't see many things happening by accident in the Bible.

Yes, I know that today we view natural disasters as just that - events that happen randomly in a world subject to natural laws. We experience earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, famines, and plagues, and while God could stop them, God does not intervene because those events are just a part of the natural world that God has created for us to live in.

Under that view, God is a passive observer who wound up the natural world and now just watches along with the rest of us as natural events in that natural world come and go. God created the watch; God wound the watch; and now God watches the watch.

Is that how our world operates today? That is an interesting question that we can save for another day - but one thing we can say now about that view of the world is that it is most certainly **not** the view of the world that we find during the time of the Bible.

God is certainly not presented to us as a passive observer in the book of Joel or, I think we can say, anywhere else in the Old Testament.

**Amos 3:6** - Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?

**Exodus 4:11** - Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?

Does that sound like something a passive observer would say?

We don't see God as a passive observer in the New Testament, either. And when we are listing the things for which we are thankful, that one should be very near the top of our list. We should very thankful that God is not a passive observer! John 3:16 is not describing a passive observer!

For now, what we need to note is that there is no indication in Joel that this locust invasion was just one of those things that happens, but instead there is every indication that it was not. These locusts arrived at a specific time prior to some other event and for the specific purpose of warning the people about that other event.

What is that other event? Is it the end of the world?

Many commentaries on Joel have a lot to say about the *eschatology* of Joel. Eschatology is the study of end times, and many commentaries think Joel has a lot to say on the subject of the end times.

Does he? We will see, but for now let's ask that same question about verse 15. Is the day of the Lord in verse 15 the end of the world?

After all, we know that Peter describes the end of the world as the day of the Lord in 2 Peter 3:10. Is that day of the Lord in 2 Peter 3:10 and this day of the Lord in Joel 1:15 the same day of the Lord?

Some say yes, but don't we immediately see a big problem with that view? This day of the Lord is said to be **near**? And this locust invasion is a warning to these people about this other event that is near.

Was the end of the world **near** during the time of Joel? I think the answer is no, no matter how we date the book and no matter how we *reasonably* define "near."

But what if we *unreasonably* define "near"? What if we say that "near" means "far"? What if we say that an event that is at least 2500 years and counting after the days of Joel could still have been considered "near" to the people who first heard Joel 1:15?

Well, yes, if we were to do that, then this day in verse 15 could be the end of the world. But then we would have another problem - we would have the problem that language would have lost all meaning! If "near" means "far," then what other words in the Bible mean the opposite of what they say? I don't think any of us want to go down that road!

But, some may object, maybe I should have read a few verses earlier in 2 Peter.

**2 Peter 3:8** - But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Doesn't that verse mean that the word "near" in Joel 1:15 could be thousands of years? No. It does not.

2 Peter 3:8 tells us something we likely already knew - that God does not experience time the way

that we do. But God is not talking to himself in Joel 1:15. God is talking to people. And so which time frame do we think God would use when talking to people? I think God would use our time frame. And for man, one day is definitely not the same as a thousand years.

No one listening to Joel, having just experienced a terrible locust invasion, and then hearing that something worse was “near,” would have thought to himself: “Wonderful! That means I don’t have to worry about that other terrible event! It won’t happen for thousands of years!” I don’t think anyone would think that way.

And there is another problem if we say that “near” means “far.” If Joel had told the people that the day of the Lord was a long way off, I doubt anybody would be arguing otherwise (then or now). But when Joel tells them that the day of the Lord is near, many argue today that he really meant a long way off.

And they say that even though elsewhere God does tell us that something was a long way off. In Daniel 8:26, Daniel was told to seal up his vision. Why? Because “it refers to many days from now.” And how long was “many days” in Daniel 8:26? It was about 400 years.

What does Daniel 8:26 confirm for us? It confirms something we already know - it confirms that when God wants to tell us that something is a long way off, God says that. And what about when God wants to tell us that something is a short way off? Again, I think God says that.

And do you want to the know most amazing thing about this issue? Those who need the most convincing that “near” means “near” are the same people who like to brag to us that they take every word of the Bible literally! What about the word “near”? Is that literal?

But what if “far” means “far” and “near” also means “far”? Where would that leave us?

If that view is correct, then how could God have ever told us that the event really was near? If God said it was near, we would take that to mean far. And if God told us that it was far, we would also take that to mean far!

I know that God can do the impossible, but that really creates a conundrum! I guess God could have said, “the day is near, and when I say near I don’t mean far, I really mean near, as in not far.”

Here’s a suggestion: let’s not twist verse 15 to make it fit some theory we have about the end of the world by arguing that “near” really means “far”! I think the better approach is to simply understand “near” to mean “near.”

But maybe saying that the day is near just means that we should all live our lives as if it was near - that we need to be ready for it.

An immediate problem with that view is that the verse doesn’t say that. Saying an event is near is different from saying that we should live our lives as if it could come at any time. The former statement says that we know something about when the day will come, but the latter statement says that we don’t know when that day will come but we should assume it will be soon to make sure that we are ready whenever that day comes.

Can we think of a good illustration showing that difference? How about a thief coming to rob your house during the night? What if I said, “A thief will rob your house tonight.” How is that different from this statement - “a thief could rob your house tonight - so you should be ready in case that happens”?

With the first statement, you are likely seeing me as the thief or an accomplice of the thief based on my inexplicable knowledge about when you will be robbed. But with the second statement, you are likely seeing me as an alarm system salesman!

And isn’t that the same illustration the Bible uses for the final day of the Lord?

**1 Thessalonians 5:2** - For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like **a thief in the night**.

**2 Peter 3:10** - But the day of the Lord will come **like a thief**, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and



dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Those statements are very different from saying that the day is near.

We sometimes read or hear that the apostles mistakenly thought that Jesus would return in their life times and that those mistaken beliefs are sometimes evident in the New Testament. That is completely wrong!

We cannot teach that the Bible is inspired and inerrant while simultaneously teaching that the New Testament writers mistakenly wrote that Jesus would return in their life times.

While the apostles may have lived as if Jesus could return at any moment, the apostles did not mistakenly write or teach that he would do so. In fact, Paul taught the opposite.

**2 Thessalonians 2:3-4** - Let no one deceive you in any way. **For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first**, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

That is Paul telling the Thessalonians that Jesus could not come again until something else happened first. Why not? Because that other event had been prophesied, and that prophecy had to be fulfilled before Jesus could return.

But what was the prophesied event? We talked about it in our study of Daniel, and we won't take the time to discuss it in detail now - but one fact about that event is important for our purposes here: that other event was fulfilled in the first century.

So, let's review. True or false - when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, Jesus could return at any moment? False. We just read the opposite from the pen of Paul: "For that day will **not come**, unless the rebellion comes first."

True or false - now, after the first century, and after the fulfillment of that other event, Jesus could return at any moment? True. We cannot say that Jesus is coming soon (despite the fact that we often sing it!), but we can say that we should all live as if Jesus is coming soon - and we can pray that Jesus will come soon if that is our desire.

So, back to verse 15 - does that verse tell us that this day of the Lord was near or just that the people should live as if it was near? Verse 15 says the day was near. "For the day of the LORD **is near**."

And if that event in verse 15 was *near* during the time of Joel, then that event has certainly by now already happened. So rather than asking what it is, we should be asking what it *was*.

So, what *was* that other event? And does the fact that it was *near* in Joel's day help us date his book?

As we recall, we are keeping three different dating possibilities in mind as we study the book of Joel - the early view, the pre-exile view, and the post-exile view.

So far, those three views have been running neck and neck, but I think one of those horses has just edged ahead of the other two with verse 15. That is not to say that the others might not catch up, but for now I think one of those views has an edge over the other two.

Which view has an edge now that we have seen verse 15? The pre-exile view, which is the view that Joel was written in the 7th century, after the fall of Israel in 722 BC but before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC.

If that is when this book was written, then this day of the Lord that is near in verse 15 is almost certainly the fall of Jerusalem to King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC.

But why doesn't Joel mention Babylon? Why doesn't Joel mention the specific sins that we know led to that exile? Why doesn't Joel ever point to the northern kingdom as an example of what coming for Judah? Why does Joel mention Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia?

Well, I never said that the pre-exile view was the winning horse - but only that it had edged ahead in

the race! We need to keep all three options on the table for now.

But if the other two dating options are to remain on the table, we must be able to answer a question about each of them: what is the day of the Lord that was near in verse 15 if that view is correct about when the book of Joel was written? If we can't answer that question about a particular option for the date of Joel, then we need to scratch that option off our list.

### What about the early view for when Joel was written?

Recall that, under the early view, Joel was written during the reign of King Joash toward the end of the 9th century BC.

If that was when the book was written, what was the day of the Lord that was near in verse 15?

It could be the **Assyrian** invasion of Judah that occurred about a century later.

But I thought the Assyrian invasion of Judah was thwarted by God when he sent an angel to kill 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in Isaiah 37:36? Yes, that is true - but that happened after God heard Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah 37:14-21. Absent that prayer of repentance, the prophesy of Isaiah 8 would have come to pass.

**Isaiah 8:6-8** - "Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, **the king of Assyria** and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, **and it will sweep on into Judah**, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel."

So do you mean to say that God changed his mind about that day of the Lord? Yes, that is what we see in the Bible. Isaiah said it would happen, Hezekiah

repented and prayed that it would not happen, and so God prevented it from happening.

Like Deuteronomy 28, Isaiah's prophecy was also conditional - if the people persisted in their rebellion, then the Assyrian invasion would happen. But the people turned back to God, and so the invasion did not happen.

We will soon see something very similar in Joel.

**Joel 2:11-14** - The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. **For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?** "Yet even now," declares the LORD, **"return to me with all your heart**, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. **Who knows whether he will not turn and relent**, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

So, yes, the Assyrian invasion of Judah could have been the day of the Lord that was near in Joel 1:15 even though God spared Judah.

### What about the post-exile view for when Joel was written?

Recall that, under the post-exile view, Joel was written after the return from exile in 539 BC, after the temple was rebuilt in 515 BC, and after the wall was rebuilt following Nehemiah's return in 445 BC.

If that was when the book was written, what was the day of the Lord that was near in verse 15?

It could be the **Greek** persecution of Judah in the second century BC under Antiochus Epiphanes. We talked about that persecution at great length in our study of Daniel.

A potential problem with that view is that it might be stretching the meaning of the word “near” in verse 15 a bit too far. In fact, in Daniel 8:26, as we saw earlier, Daniel was told that the Greek persecution was **not** near when it was about 400 years away.

Daniel received that vision about 100 years before Nehemiah rebuilt the wall. And so, either 300 years is near while 400 years is not near, or perhaps Joel was written much later than in the days of Nehemiah.

Neither option is particularly compelling, and so perhaps we should reject the post-exile view - but let's keep it in the list for now.

So where are we?

- If the **early view** for the date of Joel is correct, then the most likely event for the day of the Lord that was near in verse 15 is the **Assyrian** invasion of Judah.
- If the **pre-exile view** for the date of Joel is correct, then the most likely event for the day of the Lord that was near in verse 15 is the **Babylonian** invasion of Judah.
- If the **post-exile view** for the date of Joel is correct, then the most likely event for the day of the Lord that was near in verse 15 is the **Greek** persecution of Judah.

Each of those events threatened the very existence of Judah. The Assyrians threatened to scatter them as they did with Israel. The Babylonians threatened to assimilate them as they tried to do with Daniel and his friends. And the Greeks likewise threatened to assimilate them as they did with the Hellenistic Jews who turned away from God.

If that was all we had to go on, we would likely choose the second option - the pre-exile view. But that is not all we have to go on, so let's continue to look at all three options for now.

Besides, this entire issue is premised on the day of the Lord in verse 15 being something other than the locust invasion. I still think that is correct, but if that day in verse 15 is the locust invasion, then all three of the dating options go back to being equally likely. So, I think it is much too early to start crossing any dating options off our list.

**One more point about verse 15:** We have seen some wordplay so far in our study of Joel, but perhaps the best example of wordplay in Joel may be the wordplay that we find here in verse 15.

“As **destruction** from the **Almighty** it comes!”

The Hebrew word used here for “destruction” is the Hebrew word “shod,” and the Hebrew word used here for “the Almighty” is the Hebrew word “Shaddai.” This “shod” is from “Shaddai!”

Here is how one Hebrew scholar describes verse 15:

“One perk for those who can read the Old Testament in Hebrew is the enjoyment of all the special sound effects that abound in the text, especially in the Hebrew prophets.”

Why is that wordplay used here? Most likely to emphasize the surprising message that this destruction would come from God. These people may have thought they were right with God, but they were not right with God - and the alarm bells were ringing! God was warning them - first with the locusts and later with something else.

But although the locusts were the first warning in the book of Joel, they were not the first warning in the Bible. We also find a warning back in Deuteronomy 28 where God lists the blessings that these people in Joel had once enjoyed and lists the curses that they were now experiencing and would soon experience if they did not return to God. The people had received many warnings prior to Joel.

Now, before we move on to verse 16, let's pause and look more closely at the day of the Lord - a phrase that is the central theme of Joel and that we find for the first time in Joel here in verse 15.

What can we say about the day of the Lord in the Bible?

First, let's remember the working definition that we have been using so far in our study of Joel: **a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves**



**those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before.**

And, second, with that possible definition in mind, let's look at how that phrase is used elsewhere in the Bible.

The Handout for Lesson 9 shows every verse where the phrase "day of the Lord" is found in the ESV translation of the Bible.

For an exhaustive study, we would need to also consider verses where the concept is described without the use of the exact phrase "day of the Lord." For example:

**Isaiah 2:12** - For **the LORD of hosts has a day** against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low.

**Lamentations 2:22** - You summoned as if to a festival day my terrors on every side, and on **the day of the anger of the LORD** no one escaped or survived; those whom I held and raised my enemy destroyed.

**Zechariah 14:1** - Behold, **a day is coming for the LORD**, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst.

And we could give other such examples, but for now let's just look at the verses that include the exact phrase "day of the Lord" - and there are 23 such verses, all of which are shown on the handout - 18 from the Old Testament and 5 from the New Testament.

What facts about the day of the Lord can we glean from those 23 verses?

First, as we saw with the examples from Joel, these other examples are also future-oriented. The day is near; the day comes; the day is hastening fast.

Second, the day of the Lord is used to describe different Old Testament judgments.

Referring to the 23 verses on the handout, we see **Babylon** in verses #1 and #2 (light green); we see **Egypt** in verses #4 and #6 (blue); we see **Judah** in verses #5, #16, and #17 (red); we see **Israel** in verses #12 and #13 (yellow); and we see **Edom** in verse #14 (dark green).

Third, the "day" of the Lord is not always a 24-hour day.

Sometimes the day of the Lord refers to an event that lasted longer than a literal 24-hour day. In fact, that may be true of all of these judgments.

Although some key events may have occurred on a single day, the invasions and sieges themselves typically took much longer. In fact, as we have seen from the articles on the previous handouts, the locust invasion itself almost certainly lasted more than a single 24-hour day.

Fourth, sometimes the day of the Lord is described using figurative, cosmic, universal language even though the literal judgment was localized.

The judgment of Babylon in Isaiah 13 is a good example. We know from Isaiah 13:17 that Isaiah is describing the defeat of Babylon by the Medes, and we know from Daniel 5 that Babylon fell very quickly to the Medes. But listen to the language used in Isaiah 13 to describe how God saw that event.

**Isaiah 13:10** - For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

**Isaiah 13:13** - Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

We sometimes see such vivid, cosmic, apocalyptic language used to describe the day of the Lord.

Fifth, we know from the earlier examples that the phrase does not always describe the end of the world, but sometimes the day of the Lord is used to describe the end of the world. We see that, for



example, in verses #20, #21, #22, and #23 from the handout.

And, while we see many different days of the Lord in the Bible, I think we can say that this final day of the Lord is unique. That is why Paul can write what he does about it to the Thessalonians.

**2 Thessalonians 2:2** - Not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

## Joel Lesson 10

### Joel 1:15, Continued

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

We have been looking at verse 15 for several lessons, and we still have a few more things to say about it.

But before we do that, let's briefly look again at an issue we discussed last week - the meaning of the word "near."

As I said last week, in my opinion, we should interpret the word "near" to mean just that - "near." And although it does not seem that such an opinion should be controversial, it is. Why? Because the word "near" in the Bible very often creates a conflict with our preconceptions about the Bible.

And what should we do when there is a conflict between the text of the Bible and our preconceptions about the Bible? Do we change or twist the text or do we change our preconceptions? We all know the answer to that question!

One thing I said last week was that the New Testament writers never wrote that the end of the world was near. But, we might ask, what about verses such as these?

**1 Peter 4:7** - The end of all things is **at hand**.

**James 5:8** - You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is **at hand**.

**Hebrews 10:37** - For, **yet a little while**, and the coming one will come and will not delay.

**Revelation 22:20** - He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming **soon**." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

We will not take the time to do a deep dive into those verses now, but perhaps we will have an opportunity to do that later. Meanwhile, here are some things to consider in a study of those and similar verses.

First, as we said, we cannot simultaneously hold that those verses teach that the end of the world was "near" in the first century and that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, unless we are willing to twist the word "near" to the point that it becomes meaningless.

Second, last week we saw that Paul did not believe Jesus could return at any time in the first century - and Paul is not the only such example among the apostles.

The first verse that I just quoted was 1 Peter 4:7. Did Peter believe that Jesus would return in his lifetime? We sometimes hear or read that he did. But did he?

We know with absolute certainty that Peter did not believe that Jesus would return in his life time. And how do we know that? We know that because in John 21:18 Jesus told Peter "by what kind of death he was to glorify God." For that prophecy to be fulfilled, Jesus could not come again until after Peter had died.

Third, just as we have seen in the Old Testament, there are judgments in the New Testament that are also described with language that could also be used to describe the end of the world.

For example, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 is sometimes described with language that could also be used to describe the end of the world. Just read Matthew 24 and note that everything prior to Matthew 24:34 occurred during that first century generation. And, likewise, God's judgment of Rome (the first century Babylon) is vividly described in the book of Revelation.

And both of those events were "near" in the first century. Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, and two great Roman dynasties ended in the first century with the deaths of Nero and Domitian.

Fourth, it is possible that some or all of those verses are describing another first century event that was near.

We know that the end of the world will come on a day known only to God, and we know that a great judgment will occur at the end of the world. And we know now, 2000 years later, that the last great day was not near in the first century.

But there was another event coming for a person in the first century that also had a date known only to God, that also was a day of judgment, but that, unlike the end of the world, was near in the first century.

And what was that other event? It was death; it was that first century person's death. And the same is true for our death today.

We don't know when that day will occur, but we know it is near.

And we also know that we will be judged on that day. That was certainly true of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 - neither one of them had to wait until the end of the world to know their final destination. They were judged the moment they died.

Yes, each person's judgment will be declared at the end of time and the sentence (if any) will be imposed at the end of time, but that judgment will not come as a surprise to anyone who died prior to the Lord's coming. Neither the rich man nor Lazarus is waiting around to see how things turn out at the end of the world. They already know.

And, again, those are just some things we should keep in mind as we study what the New Testament has to say about the end of the world.

And, as for the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, I think we often make two mistakes. We either magnify that event to the point that we see it in places where we should not, or we minimize that event to the point that we fail to see it in places where we should. The first path leads to Max Kingism, and the second path leads to premillennialism.

And another thing - the prophecies in the Bible very often do not just tell us **what** would happen - but they also tell us **when** it would happen.

Daniel 2:44 is a great example - that verse tells us that the eternal kingdom of God would be established in the days of the first century Romans kings. But we dilute the amazing wonder of such

prophecies when we spread the time frame so thin that it covers thousands of years.

If I told you that the Texans would **soon** win the Super Bowl, but then they lost their first playoff game, what would you say? Would you say that I am a false prophet? Or would you say, "Well, if they win the Super Bowl some time in the next thousand years, I guess that would still qualify as **soon**!" A little common sense goes a long way in Bible study!

When we ended last week, we were listing some facts about the day of the Lord that we can learn from the verses on the handout for Lesson 9, and we were about to look at the fifth such fact when class ended.

Fifth, we know that the phrase "the day of the Lord" does not always refer to the end of the world, but sometimes "the day of the Lord" does refer to the end of the world. We see that, for example, in verses #20, #21, #22, and #23 from the handout for Lesson 9.

And, while we see many different days of the Lord in the Bible, I think we can say that this final day of the Lord is unique. That is why Paul could write what he did about it to the Thessalonians.

**2 Thessalonians 2:2** - Not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

We know that other days of the Lord had come - we can see them on the handout from last week. But the final day of the Lord had not come in Paul's day and has still not yet come in our own day.

That final day will be unique and different from the other such days. But how? How is it different?

- While we again see universal cosmic upheaval in those verses describing the final day of the Lord, this time the language is literal rather than figurative. Earlier days of the Lord were something like the end of the world to whatever group was being targeted, but the final day of Lord will be the actual end of the world for every group - and

the cosmic upheaval will be a literal cosmic upheaval.

- While some of the earlier days of the Lord were calls to wake up and repent, the final day of the Lord will be a call to wake up and be judged. The time for repentance will have ended.
- While some of the earlier days of the Lord were said to have been near, the final day of the Lord is said to come like a thief in the night, which suggests two things about such a day: we don't know whether or not it is near, and it will not be preceded with any signs.

The sixth fact we can say about the day of Lord from the verses on the handout for Lesson 9 is that Peter mentioned a great and awesome day of the Lord in Acts 2 on the day that the church was established.

We see that in verse #19 from the handout for Lesson 9, which quotes verse #10 from Joel 2. We also see that same phrase in verse #18 from Malachi, which Matthew 17:10-13 and Mark 9:11-13 tell us refers to John the Baptist. We will save that discussion for later, but for let's just note the similarity.

So those are six things we can learn about the day of the Lord from the verses on the handout. I think we will learn some more about it from the verses in Joel, and I also think we should look later at the verses that describe the day of the Lord without using that exact phrase.

What about the verses on the handout that are not highlighted?

As we know, the book of Joel has more to say about the day of the Lord than any other book in the Bible. Other than verse #10 (which we just mentioned), I have not highlighted the other verses from Joel. We will classify them later in our study of the book.

The other non-highlighted verse is verse #3 (Isaiah 58:13), which uses the day of the Lord to refer to the Sabbath day. That verse reminds us of another day of the Lord, which we see in the book of Revelation.

**Revelation 1:10** - I was in the Spirit on **the Lord's day**, and I

heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

The Sabbath was a day of the Lord in the Old Testament, and Sunday is a day of the Lord in the New Testament! And it is interesting to compare Sunday with our working definition of the day of the Lord:

"A sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before."

On the surface that does not sound much like Sunday, but don't we see some similarities?

When we gather on Sunday to worship God, isn't that an opportunity and a call for each of us to wake up and remember who we are and whose we are?

Aren't we reminded each Sunday that this world is not all that there is, that we are pilgrims, and, that we must love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength? And doesn't all of that prevent us from becoming self-satisfied and complacent throughout the next week? Sunday is **the Lord's day**!

Finally, let's circle back now and look again at that working definition of the day of the Lord that I quoted just a moment ago.

We have been calling that our working definition, but now that we have looked at how the Bible describes the day of the Lord, can we promote our **working** definition to our **actual** definition?

I think we can, but perhaps with some caveats.

If we look at the examples on the handout for Lesson 9, I think what we find are examples confirming our definition of the day of the Lord.

For example, consider the day of the Lord in Zephaniah, which we see in verses #15, #16, and #17 on the handout for Lesson 9. Those verses are directed to Judah, as are the verses we are studying in Joel.

Do we see **a sudden intervention by God**? Yes, we do.



**Zephaniah 1:4** - I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Do we see a sudden intervention by God **into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people**? Yes, we do.

**Zephaniah 1:12** - At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are **complacent**, those who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.'

Do we see a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people **that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before**? Yes, we do.

**Zephaniah 1:2-3** - I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the LORD. I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth, declares the LORD.

That's just one example, but I think if we checked the others we would find very similar descriptions. And so, I think we can be pretty confident in our working definition for the day of the Lord.

But what about that caveat I mentioned? The caveat is that sometimes the day of the Lord is directed at God's people (Judah or Israel) and at other times the day of the Lord is directed at the nations that have harmed God's people (Babylon, Egypt, Edom).

In the latter case, the emphasis is more on waking the people to face judgment than in waking them up to repent - but even there we should not rule out a focus on repentance.

Jonah, for example, was sent to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh to tell them that they would be overthrown in 40 days (Jonah 3:4) - but that did not happen.

Why not? Because the people repented (Jonah 3:5) and "God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them" (Jonah 3:10). That threatened event is not explicitly called "a day of the Lord," but it certainly looks like one.

And so, while there are some differences in the day of the Lord when it comes to Judah or Israel and when it comes to other nations, those differences may not be as pronounced as we might think.

We will, of course, have much more to say about the day of the Lord as we continue our study of Joel, but for now we need to move on to the next verse.

## Joel 1:16

**Joel 1:16** - Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?

Verse 16 is back to talking about the locusts and the drought - the food has been cut off, and joy and gladness have also been cut off from the house of God. That is what we were hearing from Joel back in verse 12.

Does that mean we were wrong about verse 15? Does that mean the day of Lord in verse 15 really was the locust invasion after all? No, it doesn't.

We still have that imperfect verb tense that we saw in verse 15. "For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it **comes**." The Hebrew word translated "comes" that we saw in verse 15 was an imperfect tense verb, which means that it was **not** describing some action that was completed in the past.

And how many imperfect verbs have we seen so far in Joel? Only that one.

The handout for Lesson 10 shows all of the perfect and imperfect verbs in the book of Joel. The verbs in the **perfect** tense are highlighted in **yellow**, and the verbs in the **imperfect** tense are highlighted in **blue**.

Note that this is not all of the verbs. There are also **imperative** verbs (like the verb "awake" in verse 5), and there are also **participles** (like the word "drinkers" in verse 5). Those other types of verbs are not highlighted on the handout.

There is something that immediately stands out when we look at the front side of the handout - we see a lot of yellow in chapter 1, and we see a lot of blue in chapter 2. In fact, as I said a moment ago, we don't see any blue at all in chapter 1 until we get to verse 15.

What can we conclude from that? Well, "conclude" may be a bit strong, but I do think we can see a very strong indication that we are looking at two different events in Joel 1 and Joel 2.

The event in Joel 1 is something that occurred and was completed in the past, and the event in Joel 2 is something that was either ongoing or yet future.

And verse 15? I think that the tense of the verb in verse 15 is the link between the event in Joel 1 and the event in Joel 2. That is, I think that the event in Joel 1 that had already occurred was pointing toward the event in Joel 2 that had not yet occurred.

But what then is the purpose of verse 16? Why does Joel mention the coming day of the Lord in verse 15 with the imperfect tense and then switch back to the perfect tense in verse 16? The answer is clear when we read verse 16.

The questions in verse 16 are rhetorical questions: Is not the food cut off? Is not the joy and gladness cut off? The answers, of course, are yes and yes. Those things were cut off, and everyone could see that they were cut off. There was no food. There was no joy. There was no gladness.

And verse 16 includes a very important phrase that I think by itself explains why we have verse 16: **before our eyes**. "Is not the food cut off **before our eyes**?"

Verse 16 is the **evidence** for what Joel said in verse 15. What the people could see with their own eyes in verse 16 establishes the truth of what they heard from Joel in verse 15.

In effect, Joel is saying: "The day of the Lord is coming. It is near. And can't you see the truth of that now? Hasn't such a day already arrived? How can you say now that such a day will never come to you?"

The locusts and the drought were a warning of something that was yet to come. They were intended to awaken the people to something yet to come.

And if anyone had been thinking that the day of the Lord was something that only **other** people should worry about - those locusts and that drought should have convinced them otherwise. Those things were evidence that the people could see with their own eyes.

And that phrase "before our eyes" also tells us that we are not looking here at the so-called prophetic perfect verb form. That is when a future event is so certain it is spoken about in a past tense. We see that used elsewhere in the Bible, but not here. And how do we know? Because only evidence from a past event could ever be described as something that is "before our eyes."

We have talked about verbs, but we also need to talk about pronouns.

We see something here in verse 16 that we have not seen before in Joel - we see a first person plural pronoun. "Is not the food cut off before **our** eyes, joy and gladness from the house of **our** God?"

Joel has now taken his place among the people of God. Joel was also suffering from the lack of food ("cut off before our eyes"), and God was also Joel's God ("the house of our God").

Finally, we see something in verse 16 that might be very unexpected to modern readers - "joy and gladness."

Why might "joy and gladness" be unexpected to us? Because we usually don't associate joy and gladness with worship in the Old Testament. Instead, I think we often see Old Testament worship as daunting and bloody and grueling and monotonous.

**Deuteronomy 12:6** - And there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock.

But let's read the very next verse in Deuteronomy 12.

**Deuteronomy 12:7** - And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall **rejoice**, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has **blessed** you.

There has never been a time when the worship of God has been anything other than a joyous occasion for sinners to worship the one true God who has redeemed them, called them, and blessed them!

**Psalms 98:1-4** - Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

And if that was true under the Old Testament, how much more must it be true under the New Testament when we have been freed from the old law and when we can see the plan of God fully revealed through Jesus Christ!

Sometimes I fear that joy and gladness has been cut off again in the worship of God, but not by any locusts! I think we may sometimes cut it off all by ourselves. Our worship of God should always be filled with joy and gladness!

## Joel 1:17

**Joel 1:17** - The seed shrivels under the clods; the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down because the grain has dried up.

Verse 17 begins with the most difficult translation problem in the entire book of Joel. "The seed shrivels under the clods."

That English sentence is a translation of four Hebrew words, three of which are not found anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Also, in the Hebrew, the phrase translated "the clods" is actually "**their** clods."

Translations vary, and sometimes they vary very widely.

- For example, the Septuagint translates the phrase this way: "Heifers danced at their mangers."
- Another has this: "Beasts rot in their dung."
- Another has this: "The granaries have rotted from their plaster."
- And yet another has this: "The bottles of wine are decaying under their seals."

So what is the answer? The answer is that we don't know the answer. As one commentary explains:

"Barring further discoveries ... the first four words of the verse remain something of an enigma; it is not possible to establish their meaning with confidence."

However we translate that opening phrase, the verse itself seems to be describing the results of a drought. We have already seen some hints of that drought in chapter 1, but now we are seeing more than just hints. The people were suffering under a terrible drought.

What is the relation between the locust invasion and the drought?

I think verse 15 is telling us that both were sent by God as a warning and a wake up call.

Perhaps God sent them as separate events, with the drought compounding the disaster of the locusts. Or perhaps the drought was caused in whole or in part by the locusts as the defoliation lowered the water table and increased the dryness of the soil.

The storehouses are desolate, and the granaries are torn down. What does that mean?

It may just mean that the storehouses and the granaries are not maintained because they are no longer needed. There is nothing to store in them,

and so they are either left to rot or they are torn down.

But we should note that the storehouses and the granaries were there in the first place to be torn down or left to rot. That fact tells us that the date of Joel was not during the exile after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the city and before the city was later rebuilt.

But, of course, we had already deduced that fact from other evidence, so verse 17 does not really tell us anything new about the date of the book.

## Joel 1:18

**Joel 1:18** - How the beasts groan!  
The herds of cattle are perplexed  
because there is no pasture for  
them; even the flocks of sheep  
suffer.

“How the beasts groan! ... Even the flocks of sheep suffer.”

The Hebrew word translated “suffer” at the end of verse 18 refers to suffering as a result of punishment. These sheep are not just suffering; they are suffering due to punishment.

What does that tell us? It tells us at least two important things.

First, that the sheep are suffering punishment confirms that this locust invasion and this drought were, in fact, a punishment. They were not natural occurrences, but rather they were punishments sent by God.

Second, that the sheep are suffering punishment confirms something we already know about punishments in general - sometimes (and perhaps often) the innocent suffer when others are punished.

Think, for example, about the great flood. We know that many children must have suffered and drowned when that flood covered the earth. Were those children being punished by that flood? We know that they were not. But were those children suffering because of that flood? We know that they were.

I think we see the same thing here with these animals. They were not being punished, but they were suffering from the punishment of others.

And anyone who has ever seen an old Western movie knows that sheep eat much closer to the ground than cattle. What that means is that sheep are better than cattle at surviving harsh conditions. So if even the sheep were suffering, then we know the situation caused by the locusts and the drought must have been extremely dire.

Why do we see this concern in verse 18 for the beasts, the cattle, and the sheep?

We know that God cares for the welfare of all of his creatures, including animals.

**Luke 12:6** - Are not five sparrows  
sold for two farthings, and not one  
of them is forgotten before God?

But I think there is another even more important reason why we see these animals here in verse 18 - but let's save that second reason until we meet these beasts again in verse 20.



## Joel Lesson 11

When we ended last week, we had a question about verse 18: why do we see this concern for the beasts, the cattle, and the sheep?

We know that God cares for the welfare of all of his creatures, but I think there is another even more important reason why see those animals in verse 18 - but let's save that second reason until we meet these beasts again in verse 20.

### Joel 1:19

**Joel 1:19** - To you, O LORD, I call.  
For fire has devoured the pastures  
of the wilderness, and flame has  
burned all the trees of the field.

In verse 18 we saw animal life. Here in verse 19 we see plant life. And as with the animals, the plants are also suffering. The pastures have been devoured, and the trees have been burned.

But before we look at those plants in verse 19, let's look at the opening phrase of verse 19. **"To you, O LORD, I call."** There is something very important just beneath the surface in that short phrase - **idolatry**.

We haven't said anything so far about idolatry in our study of Joel, and the reason for that is simple: Joel hasn't said anything about idolatry (at least, so far) in his book.

But why not?

As we saw, Hosea had a lot to say about idolatry, even mentioning Baal by name several times. But not Joel. Why the difference?

Perhaps Joel doesn't mention idolatry because idolatry was not a big problem when the book of Joel was written.

But if that is the explanation, then when must the book have been written? When was idolatry not a big problem for Judah?

We could rule out the pre-exile date for Joel immediately because we know that idolatry was a major reason why the exile occurred.

**Jeremiah 16:13,18** - Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.' ... But first I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of **their detestable idols**, and have filled my inheritance with their abominations."

I think we could also rule out the early date for Joel. Why? Because it was during the reign of Joash that the princes of Judah "abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols" (2 Chronicles 24:18).

So, if it were true that Joel failed to mention idolatry because idolatry was not a big problem when Joel was written, then we could rule out the early date and the pre-exile date.

But what about the post-exile date? That date might work. Why? Because idolatry was never the problem after the Babylonian exile that it had almost always been prior to the exile.

Jeremiah 50:38 describes Babylon as "a land of images" and the Babylonians as "mad over idols." The people of Judah wanted idols - and so God gave them idols. As we have said, sometimes the worst punishment is when God gives us what we want! That happened with Judah, and it seems to have largely cured them of their idolatry.

So, does that mean the book of Joel has a post-exile date? No, not necessarily.

It would likely mean that **if** we could prove that Joel failed to mention idolatry because idolatry was no longer a big problem - but there are two problems with trying to prove that.

First, as we will soon see with verse 19, it is not clear at all that Joel did in fact fail to address idolatry.

And, second, there is another possible explanation (other than the explanation that idolatry was not a big problem) for why Joel either failed to mention

idolatry or perhaps just failed to say very much about idolatry.

Before we look at whether Joel did, in fact, say something about idolatry, let's look at that second issue - why else might Joel have failed to say much about idolatry?

We could expand that question a bit - why? Because idolatry is not the only sin that Joel fails to say very much about. In fact, when it comes to sin, Joel is pretty short on specifics.

Yes, the locusts came as a punishment, but a punishment for what? And, yes, the people needed to repent, but repent for having done what?

We today don't know for sure - but there was a group who did know for sure. The people who first heard this message from Joel certainly knew what they had done. They knew whether they had been idolatrous. They knew whether they had been complacent. They knew whether they had just been going through the motions in their worship of God.

And perhaps the reason why Joel doesn't list all of those sins is simply because his listeners already knew what they had done - and Joel did not feel the need to rub their faces in it given the terrible trauma they had just endured. Perhaps the mercy of God for suffering people is the reason why we do not find a list of sins in the book of Joel.

And if the people really wanted to see such a list, they could find one in Deuteronomy 28. That chapter describes exactly what was happening to them and explains the reason why it was happening to them.

But let's now get back to our first question: did Joel really fail to say anything at all about idolatry?

We still have most of the book ahead of us, but perhaps we can answer that question right now. Why? Because, I think verse 19 begins with a subtle reference to idolatry.

**"To you, O LORD, I call."**

In the original Hebrew, there is an important emphasis in that sentence.

If we want to emphasize something today in an English sentence, we would likely use vocal stress for a spoken sentence or punctuation for a written sentence.

- "I am **glad** you are here."
- "I am glad **you** are here."
- "I am glad you are **here**."

But we don't usually start moving words around the in our sentence. "Here, I am glad you are!"

Biblical Hebrew is different - it often denotes emphasis by the word order that it uses. Hebrew has a flexible syntax that allows words to more easily be moved around in a sentence.

In English, the usual order of a sentence is Subject-Verb-Object.

In Hebrew, the usual order of a sentence is Verb-Subject-Object.

But Hebrew can change that order to Object-Verb-Subject when needed to emphasize the object or to Subject-Verb-Object when needed to emphasize the subject.

We see that here in verse 19 with the opening phrase, which (as it turns out) has the same word ordering in Hebrew as in our English translation: to you, O Lord, I call. Not "I call to you, O Lord," but rather **"to you, O Lord, I call."**

If we were say that today with the same emphasis in mind, we could say, "I call **to you, O Lord**." And if I said that in that way, what question would immediately come to your mind? Who else would you call to? Who else were others calling to?

So why do we see the emphasis on the phrase "to you" in verse 19? I think the only answer is that some of the people were calling to someone else. And so Joel says, **"to you, O Lord, I call."**

And who was this other entity to which some of the people were calling?

The strongest candidate is Baal. Baal was considered the god of fertility. Baal was considered the god of rain. And so, now that both fertility and rain had been cut off, the natural inclination of some and perhaps many would be to call to Baal to send rain and restore fertility.

To Baal, they called. And so Joel says, **"To you, O lord, I call!"**

As we said earlier, if Joel says nothing about idolatry, then that third post-exile option looks better than the other two for when Joel was written.

But, if we are correct that Joel's word ordering here in verse 19 is an indirect attack against idolatry in general and against Baal in particular, then that third post-exile options does not look very good at all. Why not? Because, as we said, idolatry was not a big problem after the exile.

So where are we on the dating issue?

In my opinion, verse 19 does include an implied attack against Baal worship, and so, in my opinion, we have another reason (in addition to the word "near" in verse 15) to cast serious doubt on a post-exile date for the book of Joel.

But, again, for now let's keep all three options on the table.

Verse 19 continues: **"For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field."**

In verse 18, we saw animal life, but here in verse 19 we see plant life. And as with the animals, the plants are also suffering.

So far in chapter 1, we have seen locusts, and we have seen a drought. Are we also seeing a terrible fire here in verse 19?

Perhaps, but I don't think so. Instead, I think we are seeing the locusts again here in verse 19.

Let's think back to that 1915 *National Geographic* article that we looked at for Lesson 5 (and that is still available at [www.studyjoel.com](http://www.studyjoel.com)).

That article included a photo of an olive orchard that showed how it looked after the locust invasion, and here is what the caption for that photo said:

The natives all spoke of how the orchards looked as if they had been attacked by fire, calling to mind Joel's words, "The flame hath burned all the trees of the field."  
(Joel 1:19)

I think what destroyed the pastures and the trees in verse 19 was the locust invasion, and I think the devastation caused by those spreading locusts is

described in verse 19 exactly as it appeared to those who witnessed its aftermath - like destruction caused by a spreading fire.

Before we leave verse 19, I think we should pause and note an important lesson for us today. When this terrible crisis came, Joel called out to God.

To whom do we call? Do we call out to God in times of trial and trouble, or do we blame God in times of trial and trouble?

Trials are a test of our faith.

**James 1:12** - Blessed is the man who remains **steadfast under trial**, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

**1 Peter 4:12** - Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you **to test you**, as though something strange were happening to you.

Trials test our faith. Trials can tell us whether our faith is fragile or firm. Trials can tell us whether we are unreliable or steadfast.

Am I a follower of Christ **when** the going gets rough - or am I a follower of Christ **until** the going gets rough? We know what Jesus demands.

**Luke 9:23** - And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

**Revelation 2:10** - Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. **Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

Am I doing that - not just being faithful, but being faithful unto death. Is that the road I'm on?

We find out the answer to that question when we face trials and tribulations. We learn about our faith when our faith is tested. And God also sees what our faith is like.

**Genesis 22:10-12** - Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, **for now I know** that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

For now I know! Abraham was tested, and Abraham passed the test. And here, Joel was tested, and Joel passed the test.

And what about me? What about us? Will we pass the test when the trials and trouble come? Will our faith grow, or will our faith shrink?

**Hebrews 10:38-39** - But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

We have a song about such a faith:

Oh, for a faith that will not shrink,

Though pressed by every foe,

That will not tremble on the brink

Of any earthly woe!

That will not murmur nor complain

Beneath the chast'ning rod,

But, in the hour of grief or pain,

Will lean upon its God.

A faith that shines more bright and clear

When tempests rage without;

That when in danger knows no fear,

In darkness feels no doubt.

Lord, give me such a faith as this,

And then, whate'er may come,

I'll taste, e'en here, the hallowed bliss

Of an eternal home.

Am I the only one who misses singing songs like that!

## Joel 1:20

**Joel 1:20** - Even the beasts of the field pant for you because the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

In verse 18 we saw animals suffering, and in verse 19 we saw plants suffering. Now in verse 20 we again see both animals and plants suffering.

The beasts of the field are panting because the springs have dried up, and the pastures are devoured by the fire, which, as we said, is likely a description of the devastation left behind by the locusts.

What is going on in these closing verses of chapter 1? Where are the people? Why do we see this focus on plants and animals?

As we said before, we know that God is concerned about the animals that he created, and I think the same could be said for the plants. God created them, and so God does not want to see them suffering or being destroyed for no reason.

But I think there is something deeper than that going on here. I think there is a reason why we see in these three verses a focus on the animals and the natural world instead of the focus we might have expected - a focus on the suffering of the people and on the cessation of the temple offerings.

And what is that reason? I think that these closing verses of chapter 1 are showing us a breakdown of the created order. The animals are dying, and the plants are dying. The good order of seed time and harvest has been disrupted. It is as if creation itself is being reversed.



The animals were created on the sixth day - but now the animals are suffering and dying.

The plants were created on the third day - but now the plants are suffering and dying.

God created order out of chaos on the first day, but now chaos is returning.

We are seeing an undoing of what God had done.

But why? Why do I think that what we are seeing here is an undoing of God's creation? Because we will see that same theme again later in Joel.

**Joel 2:10** - The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

**Joel 3:15** - The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

And we see that same theme with other days of the Lord in the Bible (as shown on the handout for Lesson 9).

**Amos 5:18** - Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light.

**Zephaniah 1:3** - "I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

Those verses are all describing an undoing of what God did when he created this world. Is it literal? No, it is not.

Yes, God once literally undid his creation with a great flood so that he could start over. And, yes, God will one day destroy his creation on that last great day of 2 Peter 3:12. But this destruction of the creation in Joel is not a literal dismantling of the world.

Instead, what we are seeing here is something we see elsewhere with the day of the Lord in the

Bible - we are seeing the great upheaval of that day described with cosmic, universal language.

Isaiah 13 is a good example of that. That chapter is describing the judgment of Babylon at the hands of the Medes (Isaiah 13:17), an event that occurred in Daniel 5.

And how did God view that judgment of Babylon?

**Isaiah 13:9-10,13** - Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. ... Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

What did God do with Babylon? He dismantled their world, and he started over with the Medes and the Persians. God had created their world, and God destroyed what he had created. That is how God saw it. And how do we know that? We know that because Isaiah 13 tells us that.

Likewise in Joel, I think we see God figuratively dismantling and destroying what he had created. The people, the animals, the plants, the sun, the moon, and the stars - we have seen or we will see all of them destroyed or hidden by God in this short book of Joel.

And what does that show us? It shows those things no longer performing their intended function.

- The people were here to worship God, but the temple offerings have been cut off.
- The animals were here to serve and feed the people and to be offered to God, but the animals are groaning and panting and dying.
- The plants were here to feed the people and be offered to God, but the plants have been

devoured by the locusts and have dried up in the drought.

- The sun and the moon and the stars were here to light man's world, to keep the days and the seasons, and to show us the power and divinity of God, but now those lights are darkened.

And what is the message of all that?

I think it is the same message we saw with Babylon. When God's creation is no longer serving its intended function, God will dismantle that creation and start over.

We see that all throughout the Bible.

- God literally did that with the great flood.
- God will someday literally do that again when Jesus comes to claim his own and to judge and destroy the world of the ungodly.
- But we also saw God do that figuratively to Babylon in Isaiah 13.
- And I think we see that happening again in Acts 2 when God replaces the kingdoms of men with the eternal kingdom of Christ (Daniel 2:44).
- And we certainly see that in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 that Jesus described in Matthew 24.

Listen to the language Jesus used:

**Matthew 24:29** - Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

But isn't that the end of the world? No, it is not. We know it is not. How do we know that? We know that because when we read Matthew 24 we didn't stop at verse 29. We also read verse 34 of that same chapter.

**Matthew 24:34** - Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass

away until all these things take place.

Matthew 24 is another example of what we are seeing here in Joel and of what we see in Isaiah 13 and elsewhere in the Bible. When something is no longer serving its intended purpose, God dismantles its world and starts over. In Isaiah 13, it was Babylon. In Matthew 24, it was Jerusalem.

But if we start applying each example of that in the Bible to the end of the world, then we will quickly make a mess of the entire Bible! Just ask any premillennialist!

They like to tell us that they take everything in the Bible literally. Isaiah 13 told us that the earth would be shaken out of its place and the stars would not give their light when Babylon was conquered by the Medes. Did that literally happen? We have studied all about that event in Daniel 5 - does anyone remember the world ending in Daniel 5? I don't. As I have said, a little common sense goes a long way in the study of the Bible.

One more point about verse 20 before we move on to chapter 2.

There is an incredibly beautiful phrase here that we must not overlook: "Even the beasts of the field pant **for you**."

These beasts of the field are not panting for water - they are panting for God! Yes, we can be certain that they were thirsty for water, but verse 20 tells us they were thirsty for God!

These animals knew something that many of the people did not. They knew that they had been created by God and that their deliverance could come only from God. We are reminded of some equally beautiful verses from the Psalms.

**Psalms 104:21** - The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.

**Psalms 84:3** - Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.

**Psalm 148:7** - Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds!

Yes, we are seeing some poetry here, but isn't it a beautiful picture? All of God's creation looking to God for food and for rest? All of God's creation thirsting for God?

It is a beautiful poetic picture, but it is more than just poetry. It is a prophecy of the new creation; it is a prophecy of the church.

**Revelation 7:15-17** - Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

But that is just talking about blessings for the church in heaven after the end of the world, right? No. I don't think so. I think it certainly includes those blessings that we will experience after the world ends, but I don't think it is limited to those blessings. I think it also includes blessings for God's people right here and right now.

What did Isaiah prophecy?

**Isaiah 49:8-10** — Thus says the LORD: "In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, 'Come

out,' to those who are in darkness, 'Appear.' They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture; **they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them**, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.

That sounds a lot like Revelation 7:16, doesn't it? In fact, it is almost a word for word quote. And when was that promise from Isaiah 49 fulfilled? Paul tells us.

**2 Corinthians 6:1-2** — Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

What Paul is telling us there is that the prophecy from Isaiah 49 (which he quotes) was pointing to the salvation that came through Jesus Christ. **Now is the time! Now is the day!**

And didn't Jesus tell us the same thing?

**John 6:35** — I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

If we are hungering and thirsting today, God can remove that hunger and God can quench that thirst. "Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

And when can we receive that great blessing? "Behold, now is the day of salvation!" Yes, we will enjoy these blessings in heaven, but we can also enjoy them now in Christ Jesus! Now is the day!

Do we know where to go when we are hungering and thirsting? In verse 20 even the animals know the answer to that question. Do we?

**Matthew 5:6** - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

## Introduction to Joel 2

What is the greatest day in the history of the world?

While there are multiple candidates for that honor, there is one thing we can say with absolute certainty about each of those candidates - they each involve Jesus! Whether we are looking for the greatest day or the greatest days in the world's history, we know that day or those days will all be a day of the Lord!

- Perhaps it is the day when Jesus was born.
- Or perhaps it is the day of the transfiguration.
- Or perhaps it is the day when Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross.
- Or perhaps it is the day when Jesus arose from the grave.
- Or perhaps it is the day when Jesus ascended back to the Father.
- Or perhaps it is the day yet to come when Jesus will return to claim his own and judge this world.

Those are all certainly among the greatest days in the history of the world, and they all involve something Jesus did or will do, but there is one more great day in the history of this world that we must not forget: the day described in Acts 2 on which the eternal kingdom of Christ was established.

What can we say about that great day?

That great day is described all throughout the Bible, and so we can say many things - but one thing we can say about that great day is the same thing that Peter stood up and proclaimed when that great day occurred.

**Acts 2:14-24** - But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are

not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. **But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:** 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

**"But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel."**

Peter quoted Joel on that great day and told his listeners that **this is that**. But what is this? And what is that?

We will save those and other questions until we get to that great prophecy at the end of Joel 2, but, for our purposes now, we can say that Peter's statement in Acts 2 tells us something very important about Joel 2 - Joel 2 is one of the great "church chapter 2's" of the Bible!

The handout for Lesson 11 lists twelve such chapters. Acts 2 describes the day on which the



church was established. And each of the other chapter 2's contains either a prophecy about the establishment of the church (such as Joel 2) or contains a beautiful description of the church after its establishment.

Can we conclude anything from the fact that these great descriptions of the church are all in a **second** chapter in the Bible? Is there some figurative meaning of the number two?

Yes, the number 2 is sometimes used figuratively in the Bible, but no, that is not what is going on here. We know that because, except for the Psalms, the other books the Bible were not divided into numbered chapters until long after they were written. (And, technically, the Psalms are not chapters.)

But I do think there is something we can conclude from the fact that so many books in the Bible discuss the church in their second chapter - I think we can conclude that the church must be extremely important in God's plan of redemption.

God has many things to tell us in the books of the Bible shown on the handout - but, in each case, one of the very first things God tells us is something wonderful about the church! It is as if God can't wait to tell us about it!

- There are 150 Psalms, but we don't get past the second Psalm before we read about God's holy hill, which is the church.
- There are 66 chapters in Isaiah, but we don't get past the second chapter of Isaiah before we read about the mountain of the LORD, which is the church.
- There are 12 chapters in Daniel, but we don't get past the second chapter of Daniel before we read about the stone that was cut from a mountain by no human hand, which is the church.
- We just studied the 14 chapters of Hosea, but we didn't get past the second chapter of Hosea before we read about God's promise that "I will betroth you to me forever," which is a prophecy about the church.

It seems that God never misses an opportunity to talk about the church.

Do we? Do we emphasize the church as much as God does in the Bible? Is the church at the top of things for us to talk about, or is the church at the bottom of our list?

Are we embarrassed by the church? Are we afraid that we might offend a member of some man-made church if we were to talk about the one church made without human hands?

If that is our view of the church, then we need to understand that it is most certainly not God's view of the church.

God tells us something about the church in every book of the Bible - and God very often does that near the very beginning of those books.

The denominations around us downplay the significance of the church. Do we? Are we following their example, or are we following God's example?

- The church is the blood-bought body of Christ.
- The church is the eternal kingdom of Christ.
- The church is the household and dwelling place of God.
- The church is the beautiful bride of Christ.

That is how God sees the church. Is that how we see the church? If not, then we need to open our Bibles - and Joel 2 is a good place to start!

We need to be distinctive in a world of religious confusion, and if we want the Lord's church to be seen as different from the man-made churches that surround us, then the first thing we need to do is proclaim to the world what the Bible teaches about the one church that Christ established.

If we see ourselves as just another church on the block, then that is all we will ever be. But that is not God's plan for the kingdom of his beloved Son.

## Joel Lesson 12

### Introduction to Joel 2, Continued

Last week, we saw that Joel 2 is one of the great church “Chapter 2’s” of the Bible, and we looked at what all of those chapter two’s tell us about God’s view of the church and about what our view of the church must be if we are going to be the people that God wants us to be.

Before we launch into our verse-by-verse and word-by-word study of Joel 2, let’s list some of the questions that we will need to address in our study of this wonderful chapter.

These questions are also listed on the Handout for Lesson 12 so that we can all think about them during the week as we read the book of Joel in our own personal study.

- (1) Is the first half of Joel 2 about something more than locusts or about nothing more than locusts?
- (2) If the first half of Joel 2 is about something more than locusts, then who or what is that something more?
- (3) What is the day of the Lord in verses 1, 11, and 31? Are they the same day or different days?
- (4) Is Joel 2 about the end of the world?
- (5) What is the Lord’s army in verses 11, 25?
- (6) Why is there a call to repent in verse 12? What had the people done?
- (7) What does the word “relent” mean in verse 13? Does God ever change his mind? And if he does, what does that tell us about God and about our own free will?
- (8) Who is the northerner in verse 20?
- (9) Who or what are Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20? Is there a relation between Gog and Magog and Joel 2?
- (10) Why did Peter quote Joel 2 in Acts 2? Why did Peter end his quote of Joel 2 where he did?
- (11) Why does the book of Acts translate “afterward” as “the last days” when Peter quotes Joel 2:28? What period of time is “the last days”?

(12) If all we had was the Old Testament, what would we know about the Holy Spirit? What new things do we learn about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament? Does the Holy Spirit operate or manifest himself differently in the New Testament than in the Old Testament?

(13) Which Greek and Hebrew words are translated “Spirit” in the Bible? Are those words used for any other purpose in the Bible? If so, how can we tell when they are being used for the Holy Spirit?

(14) How and when was God’s promise in verses 28-29 to pour out his Spirit on all flesh fulfilled?

(15) Who is included or excluded in the phrase “all flesh”?

(16) What is the time frame of the prophecy? Is it a promise to “all flesh” for all time, or is it a promise to “all flesh” for a limited time?

(17) Why is that promise described using the word “pour”?

(18) Do we find that same promise anywhere else in the Old Testament?

(19) Which activities or manifestations of the Holy Spirit are included or excluded in that promised “pouring out” of the Spirit?

(20) How is the promised “pouring out” in the New Testament different from how God provided his Spirit in the Old Testament?

(21) What is the relation between this promised “pouring out” and the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Mark 1:8?

(22) What is the relation between this promised “pouring out” and the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38?

(23) What is the relation between this promised “pouring out” and miraculous gifts given through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands in Acts 8?

(24) What is the relation between this promised “pouring out” and the conversion of the Gentiles in Acts 10-11?

(25) What is the relation between this promised “pouring out” and the gospel?

(26) What are the boundaries between matters of the faith and matters of opinion when it comes to the Holy Spirit?

(27) Why was the church established on the day of Pentecost? Did a judgment of some sort occur on that day?

(28) Verse 31 says that “the sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” What is that great and awesome day? And what is meant by the darkening of the sun and moon that would occur before that day?

(29) In the final two verses of the Old Testament, Malachi says that God will send Elijah the prophet “before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes,” and that “he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” How is that day of the Lord in Malachi 4:5 related to the day of the Lord in Joel 2:31 and Acts 2:20? And what is the threatened “decree of utter destruction” in Malachi 4:6?

(30) Who escapes in verse 32, and when? Who survives in verse 32, and when? Who is called by God in verse 32, and when?

That’s a lot of tough questions! We have our hands full! And I’m sure we will come up with even more tough questions as we work through the second chapter.

Do you have a question that is not on that list? It may come up in our study, but if you want to make sure it comes up - please, send it to me!

And so, with all of those teasers, let’s start with verse 1!

## Joel 2:1

**Joel 2:1** - Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near,

One of the questions we just asked is whether Joel 2 is about the end of the world. What we said earlier about the word “near” also applies to verse

1, and so I think we can say that at least the first verse of Joel 2 is not about the end of the world. It is instead about something that was *near* when Joel was written.

I think verse 1 of Joel 2 confirms what we said about verse 15 of Joel 1.

For verse 15, we looked at two possibilities for the coming day of the Lord that was near. Either it was the ongoing locust invasion and drought, or it was something else that had not yet begun but that was about to happen soon.

Here in verse 1, we again see a coming day of the Lord that is near, but we also see something else in verse 1 - something that we did not see in verse 15. Or perhaps I should say we are *hearing* something that we did not *hear* in verse 15 - we are hearing a blowing trumpet and a sounding alarm!

If this day of the Lord is describing something in the past - or even something that the people were currently suffering in the present - then why blow a **warning** trumpet? Why sound a **warning** alarm?

But if there is something else that is coming - and if that something else is near - then it makes perfect sense to blow a warning trumpet and sound a warning alarm.

Tornado sirens are most useful **before** the tornado hits - not after it hits or while it is hitting.

This trumpet in verse 1 was the *shofar* - a ram’s horn. As one commentary explains:

“The wall-towers of an ancient city were manned by guards alert for enemy attack. Upon their keen eyes the security of the community within the walls depended. Should they spy a hostile force appearing, it was their duty to sound the alarm on a curved horn of ram or cow. ... The horn blast was thus the ancient equivalent of the modern air raid siren blaring its alert.”

We see an example of such a warning in Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 33:2-4** - Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If

I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and **blows the trumpet** and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.

But who is the watchman here in verse 1? The watchman in verse 1 is God speaking through the prophet Joel. It is God who sees what is coming and who has ordered this warning trumpet blast.

And, again, that sort of warning makes sense only for an enemy that is approaching from outside the walls. I do not think that we are seeing the locusts from chapter 1 here in chapter 2.

And that view is also supported by the grammar.

As we saw from the handout for Lesson 10, chapter 2 (unlike chapter 1) has many imperfect verb tenses, which are used for events that are ongoing or future. And I think the context here of this trumpet blast suggests that this event is future rather than ongoing. This enemy is near in the future, but this enemy has not yet arrived.

And we do see an imperfect verb here in verse 1, but it is not the verb “coming.” That verb in verb 1 is a participle, which means that it is functioning as an adjective - like “running” water.

The imperfect verb in verse 1 is the verb “tremble” (again as highlighted in blue on the handout for Lesson 10). That verb tense tells us that we are not looking here at a trembling that occurred in the past when the people saw the sky filled with locusts. Instead, I think we are looking here at a future trembling that is due to another enemy that has been spotted by the watchman on the walls (or perhaps to an ongoing trembling in anticipation of that future enemy).

We said earlier that Joel 2 is one of the great church “chapter 2’s” in the Bible. And the main reason for that, of course, is that Peter quotes the end of Joel 2 in Acts 2. But that is not the only reason.

I think we can see another reason here in verse 1 for why we might expect Joel 2 to be a church chapter. And what is that reason? It is because we see two common Old Testament descriptions of the church here in verse 1: Zion and my holy mountain.

Is verse 1 **directly** describing the church? No, it is not. Verse 1 is directly describing a coming assault against the **physical** city of Jerusalem, and we know that Zion and my holy mountain are used that way to describe physical Jerusalem elsewhere in the Bible.

**1 Kings 8:1** - Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers’ houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, **which is Zion.**

**Daniel 9:16** - O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, **your holy hill...**

But we also see something else in the Old Testament - we see the promise of a coming **spiritual** Jerusalem.

**Zechariah 8:3** - Thus says the LORD: I have returned to **Zion** and will dwell in the midst of **Jerusalem**, and **Jerusalem** shall be called the faithful city, and **the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain.**

Yes, verse 1 is talking about physical Jerusalem, but, by using these specific words and phrases I think verse 1 is also calling upon us to think about spiritual Jerusalem. The church is Zion. The church is the holy mountain of God.

**Hebrews 12:22** - But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, **the heavenly**



**Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven...

I think that the **beginning** of Joel 2 is already anticipating what we will see at the **end** of Joel 2.

So, where are we with verse 1? I think where we are is that verse 1 is telling the people that something terrible is coming - something that is different from the locusts that invaded back in Joel 1:4.

But what is it? What is it that is coming and that is near?

Is it more locusts? Many commentaries say yes.

Those commentaries agree that Joel 1 and Joel 2 are describing different events, but they say that those different events are just different locust invasions - one locust attack in the past, and another locust attack in the future.

And why do they say that? They say that (at least in part) because of the language we will see in Joel 2, which (as we will see) admittedly does at times sound a lot like a locust invasion.

For example, let's think again about those locust articles we looked at earlier on some of the handouts.

The article from Lesson 5 described a locust invasion in 1915, and it did so by quoting Joel 2.

"That Joel depicts [in Joel 2:20] faithfully, if not even mildly, the bad smell of the dead locusts, no one who has got even a whiff of their putrid masses can ever doubt."

And, the article from Lesson 8 described a locust invasion in 1874, and it also did so by quoting Joel 2.

"The second chapter of Joel contains a very fine poetical description of an invasion of locusts."

So, I don't think we can deny that some of the descriptions in Joel 2 sound a lot like a locust invasion.

But are they? Are they descriptions of a locust invasion?

Is Joel 2 describing a locust invasion using descriptions of a locust invasion, or is Joel 2 instead describing something else using descriptions of a locust invasion? That is our question, and, either way, we won't be surprised when we see things in Joel 2 that sound like a locust invasion.

So which is it? Locusts described as locusts, or something else described as locusts?

I think it is the latter. I think we are seeing something else in Joel 2 - something other than locusts. I think we are seeing a human army in Joel 2 that is described at times using descriptions of a locust invasion.

But, even before we look at the reasons why I think that is true, we need to address perhaps the biggest potential objection to that view.

And what is that objection? Let's read it:

**Joel 2:5** - As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, **like a powerful army drawn up for battle**.

**Joel 2:7** - **Like warriors they charge; like soldiers they scale the wall**. They march each on his way; they do not swerve from their paths.

Are those verses describing an army that is like a locust invasion? Or are those verses describing a locust invasion that is like an army?

It seems to be the latter, at least in the ESV translation - **like** a powerful army, **like** warriors, and **like** soldiers.

Doesn't that mean that whatever we are seeing in Joel 2 is not actually a powerful army, not actually

warriors, and not actually soldiers - but it is just **like** those things?

How can we explain that? Simple. The Hebrew preposition translated “like” in Joel 2 can mean either “like” or “as.” In fact, we saw that same Hebrew preposition back in Joel 1:15 translated not with the word “like” but rather with the word “as.”

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and **as** destruction from the Almighty it comes.

I don't think verse 15 was telling us that the coming day of the Lord would just be **like** destruction from God. Instead, I think verse 15 was telling us that the coming day of the Lord would be **as** destruction from God. That was what it would be - not just like what it would be.

In short, the Hebrew preposition translated “like” in these verses can either mean “like” (as it would for an close comparison) or it can mean “as” or “as especially” (as it would for an exact comparison).

Elsewhere we see examples of a close comparison.

**Psalms 1:3** - He is **like** a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

But elsewhere we also see examples of an exact comparison.

**Isaiah 1:7** - Your country lies desolate; your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence foreigners devour your land; it is desolate, **as** overthrown by foreigners.

In Psalm 1, the man is like a tree but he is not a tree, but in Isaiah 1 the comparison is exact - the desolation is the desolation caused by a foreign invasion.

If we translate Joel 2 that same way, we see something very different from what we see in the ESV.

**Joel 2:5** - As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, **as a powerful army drawn up for battle.**

**Joel 2:7** - **As warriors they charge; as soldiers they scale the wall.** They march each on his way; they do not swerve from their paths.

All we did there was translate that same Hebrew preposition in the same way that it was translated in Joel 1:15.

With that translation, what we see in those verses is a human army that looks something like a locust invasion rather than a locust invasion that looks something like a human invasion.

We will look more closely at those questions about verses 5 and 7 when we get to those verses, but for now let's just note that (despite how it might seem at first) this issue is not enough to derail us even before we get out of the gate!

That argument is likely the greatest objection to the idea that Joel 2 is describing a human army - but I think we have seen why that objection may not be a problem at all.

And now let's now look at things from the opposite perspective: What is the greatest evidence in support of the idea that Joel 2 is describing a human army?

I think **Joel 3** is the greatest evidence in support of the idea that Joel 2 is describing a human army.

Why? Because when we get to Joel 3 we will find God judging nations because of what they had done to his people.

If Joel 1 and Joel 2 are just about locusts, then why are those nations being judged in Joel 3? Are they being judged by God because of a locust invasion? Does that make any sense?

I do not think Joel 2 is still focused on locusts. Instead, I think the better view of Joel is this:

- Joel 1 describes a terrible locust invasion and says that another calamity is near.
- Joel 2 describes that other calamity that is near and tells us that it will be a human invasion that is something like that earlier locust invasion, but much worse. Joel 2 also promises a restoration and explains God's purpose behind that human invasion.
- In Joel 3, God judges the nations because of that human invasion and promises to defend his people against all future threats.

That outline of Joel has a logical flow, but that logical flow completely falls apart if Joel 2 is just about another locust invasion. Something is missing!

And I think we can also point to some reasons outside of Joel for why Joel's listeners might have expected to hear about a human invasion in Joel 2.

For example, we have Deuteronomy 28. In that chapter, God tells the people what will happen to them if they disobey him. And, as we have seen, one of those things is a locust invasion.

**Deuteronomy 28:38** - You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the **locust** shall consume it.

But that locust invasion in Deuteronomy 28 is followed by a human invasion.

**Deuteronomy 28:49-50** - The LORD will **bring a nation against you** from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.

We also see those same events in King Solomon's dedication of the temple.

**1 Kings 8:37** - If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence or blight or mildew or **locust** or caterpillar, if their **enemy besieges** them in the land at their

gates, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is...

Likewise, in Joel, I think we also see a locust invasion followed by a human invasion. And I think these other verses suggest that, after hearing about the locusts in Joel 1, the people would not have been surprised at all to then hear about a human invasion in Joel 2.

This much is certain: somehow we have to draw a line between the locusts in chapter 1 and the church at the end of chapter 2. That line is very hard to draw if all we have prior to the church is a bunch of locusts.

And that issue of the church may be why some of those commentaries are so anxious to see nothing but locusts in Joel 2. They don't think Joel 2 is about the church. They think Peter misapplied Joel 2 in Acts 2, and so, in their commentaries, they try to explain Joel 2 without ever looking at Acts 2.

In short, those commentaries try their best to trivialize Joel. And if Joel is just about locusts, then maybe they would have a point. But Joel is not just about locusts. Yes, we see locusts in Joel 1, but Joel 2 then moves on to other subjects - including the church at the end of Joel 2.

## Joel 2:2

**Joel 2:2** - a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

If we look at the Handout for Lesson 2, we see that Joel 2:1-2 is possibly a quotation from Zephaniah 1:14-15 (or vice versa).

**Joel 2:1a-2b** - Blow a **trumpet** in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is **coming**; it is **near, a day of darkness and**

**gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!** Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

**Zephaniah 1:14-16** - The great day of the LORD is **near**, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, **a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness**, a day of **trumpet** blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.

And we do see some strong similarities between those two passages. We hear trumpets; the day is near; and it is day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

But the message is not the only thing that is similar; the audience for the message is also similar - in fact, the audience is the same: Zephaniah is also talking to Judah and Jerusalem (Zephaniah 1:4).

But there is a difference between Joel and Zephaniah - unlike with the book of Joel, we know when the book of Zephaniah was written.

**Zephaniah 1:1** - The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, **in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.**

Josiah reigned in the 7th century from 640 to 609 BC - which is within the same time period as our pre-exile view for when Joel was written.

We know that Zephaniah was describing the coming destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. That event was very near when Zephaniah was written, but it had not yet happened.

Joel uses very similar language and sometimes the exact same language. Was Joel also describing the coming destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC? Possibly, but not necessarily.

We know from the handout for Lesson 9 that the various days of the Lord in the Bible are often described using similar language. And so we know that seeing similar language for two such events is, alone, not enough to conclude that two events are the same event.

But if our goal is just to choose among our three options to decide the date of Joel, then I think we have to admit that this similarity gives yet another edge to the **pre-exile** view.

The pre-exile view would say that Joel and Zephaniah were using the same or similar language to describe the same event - the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Before we looked at these verses, the pre-exile view was already leading the horse race over the early and post-exile views - and I think we can say that the post-exile horse was already trailing far behind.

But now, after looking at Joel 2:1-2, I think we can say that the horses are even further apart. I think the pre-exile view has become more likely, and I think the post-exile view has become even less likely.

How about the early view? I think all we can say at this point is that the early view is still somewhere in the middle. Let's continue to keep all our options open for now. We won't see the best dating evidence until we get to chapter 3.

Let's now look at the text of verse 2: **"a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!"**

I think that, prior to the locust invasion, the people would have been very happy to hear that a day of the Lord was coming.

Why? Because that day would be the day when all of those **other** people would get what's coming to them! For the people of God, the day of the Lord would be a day of vindication! A day of triumph!



But that is not Joel's message here. We do not see a day of brightness and joy, a day of sunlight and clear skies. Instead, we see a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

The people might have expected Joel to show up and say:

"Sorry about those locusts, but, you know, those things happen. But don't worry - that was not a punishment from God. Instead, God will show up very soon to deliver you and judge all of your enemies."

But that is not what Joel says. Instead, Joel says:

"God sent those locusts to wake you up! And if you think that army of locusts was bad, you haven't seen anything yet! Something else is coming and is near, and that something else is an army of warriors who will bring destruction from God! Things are not going to get better, but instead will get much worse!"

**"Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people."**

Is Joel talking about locusts here or about people? The text says **people**. "A great and powerful **people**."

The Hebrew word translated "people" in verse 2 is used 12 times in Joel, with this occurrence in verse 2 being the first. How else do we see that same word being used in Joel?

- 2:5 - Like a powerful **army** drawn up for battle.
- 2:6 - Before them **peoples** are in anguish...
- 2:16 - Gather the **people**.
- 2:17 - Spare your **people**, O LORD.
- 2:18 - Then the LORD ... had pity on his **people**.
- 2:19 - The LORD answered and said to his **people**.

- 2:26 - And my **people** shall never again be put to shame.
- 2:27 - And my **people** shall never again be put to shame.
- 3:2 - On behalf of my **people** and my heritage Israel.
- 3:3 - And have cast lots for my **people**.
- 3:16 - But the LORD is a refuge to his **people**.

Every other time that word "people" is used in Joel, it means people rather than locusts. I think the same is true right here in verse 2. I think "people" means "people." "There is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful **people**."

Yes, Joel 2 has some language that sounds like an invasion of locusts, but Joel 2 opens by talking about an invasion of **people**. And so, I think the natural way to see the remainder of Joel 2 is as a description of that same invasion of people.

## Joel Lesson 13

### Joel 2:2, Continued

**Joel 2:2** - a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

When we ended last week, we were considering the question of whether verse 2 is talking about locusts or people.

Although we will ask that question again as we move through the opening verses of this chapter, the answer seems pretty straightforward for verse 2 - the text says that we are hearing about "people." "Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful **people**."

As we said last week, the Hebrew word translated "people" in verse 2 is used 11 other times in Joel, and we looked at each example last week.

Every other time that word "people" is used in Joel, it means people rather than locusts. I think the same is true right here in verse 2. I think "people" means "people." "There is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful **people**."

Yes, Joel 2 has some language that sounds like an invasion of locusts, but Joel 2 opens by talking about an invasion of **people**. And so, I think the natural way to see the remainder of Joel 2 is as a description of those people - as a description of those human invaders.

And, yes, Joel 1:6 described the locusts as a "nation," but that word is a different word than "people." And, more importantly, I think verse 6 used that word "nation" so that we would start thinking about something else even while we were still hearing about the locusts. I think the "nation" in Joel 1:6 foreshadowed the "people" that we see here in Joel 2:2.

There is an interesting translation issue with verse 2.

The ESV translation says that this invasion is "like **blackness**" - but that English word "blackness" is the **exact opposite** of what the Hebrew text says!

Other translations of verse 2 are a much better translation of the Hebrew:

**Joel 2:2** [ASV] - A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, as the **dawn** spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong;...

**Joel 2:2** [KJV] - 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;...

**Joel 2:2** [NAS] - ...As the **dawn** is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and mighty people...

So we have two questions - what does that statement mean, and why does the ESV translation replace the Hebrew word for "dawn" or "morning" with the opposite word "blackness" in that statement? Let's start with the second question.

The reason the ESV changes "dawn" to "blackness" in verse 2 is that the two words are very similar in Hebrew. In fact, we have already seen that similar word in verse 2 - it is the same word translated "darkness" at the beginning of verse 2 - "a day of **darkness**." And, in Hebrew, that word for "darkness" is very similar to the word for "dawn."

But that similarity still doesn't answer our question - why would the ESV replace the Hebrew word for "dawn" with the similar Hebrew word for "blackness"? The Hebrew text in this phrase uses the word for "dawn" - it does not use the similar word for "blackness." So why the switch in the ESV?

The answer is that the ESV translators thought that the replaced version made more sense, and so they concluded that the similar word "dawn" must have been the result of a scribal error. They concluded that the original word must have been "darkness," but

somewhere along the line some scribe mistakenly copied that word so that it became “dawn.”

As I have said, I like the ESV for the most part, but it is translations like this one that cause me to say only for the **most** part! The ESV thinks there is a scribal error in verse 2, but there is no reason for the ESV to jump to that conclusion here.

Yes, I think that small scribal errors sometimes happened when the text was copied, but I think it was a rare occurrence given how carefully the scribes treated the text of the Bible. And I certainly don't think we should ever reach such a conclusion if the text as we have it makes sense (as we will see it does here).

And perhaps the biggest problem with what the ESV does here is that there is no footnote or any other indication that the translators have replaced a word in the text with its antonym! The only way we can know that is to look at the Hebrew text or to look at some other translations. That makes me wonder where else the ESV has done that!

So, what does the text of verse 2 mean if we use the original word “dawn”? “As the **dawn** is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people.”

Well, let's think about what it looks like for dawn to break over a valley surrounded by mountains. What can we say about that? What we can say is that it is both irresistible and widespread. Nothing can stop it from happening, and it covers every part of that valley. At one moment, all you see is darkness, but then dawn breaks - and all you see is light!

And we can add to that vivid picture the fact that ancient armies usually moved into position in the early hours just before dawn so that they could attack with the rising of the sun. That, for example, is what we see with Jericho.

**Joshua 6:15-16** - On the seventh day **they rose early, at the dawn of day**, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown

the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, “Shout, for the LORD has given you the city.”

In short, there is no reason to replace “dawn” with “blackness” in verse 2, and there are many reasons not to do so.

I think verse 2 is describing a massive, terrifying human army that is showing up at the break of dawn to attack the city.

**“Their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.”**

That statement is hyperbole.

And how do we know that? We know that because we are told something very similar about another event involving Jerusalem - the destruction of the city in AD 70 by the Romans - and such a statement cannot *literally* be true about more than one event. They both can't be the worse thing that ever happened and ever will happen!

Here are those similar statements about the destruction in AD 70.

**Daniel 12:1** - ...And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.

**Matthew 24:21** - For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

I think all of those statements are examples of hyperbole in the Bible.

And why would the Bible use hyperbole? For the same reason that we use hyperbole - for emphasis. Here, this hyperbole stresses just how terrible these events would be.

But, some might say, we should just take everything in the Bible literally. Yes, we sometimes use hyperbole ourselves, but God is not allowed to use hyperbole. If God says “their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the

years of all generations,” then we should just take that statement literally. Yes, God is all-powerful - but he can't use figures of speech!

So, some would say we should take this statement literally - or, as they sometimes brag, with rigid literalism.

To which I respond - no problem! If this army is the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar, then it is certainly *literally* true that no army like that had ever been seen before or would ever be seen again. The Romans, for example, were not Babylonians, and neither Vespasian nor Titus was named Nebuchadnezzar!

To which the rigid literalist will then respond - I didn't mean we should take it **that** literally! (I guess their rigid literalism is not so rigid after all!)

And one more point on this issue - if I am a rigid literalist, and if I think that Joel 2 is about locusts, then I really have a problem here! Why? Because of what God tells us about an **earlier** locust invasion.

**Exodus 10:14** - The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts **as had never been before, nor ever will be again.**

If we approach such statements with rigid literalism, then we will have all sorts of problems!

I think the better approach is to use our common sense to recognize hyperbole when we see it. We certainly see hyperbole elsewhere in the Bible.

**John 21:25** - Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

**Psalms 6:6** - I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.

And we use hyperbole *millions* of times each day! Are we really going to tell God that he can't use hyperbole when it suits his purposes? That God can't use hyperbole in John 21 to stress the many other things that Jesus did? That God can't use hyperbole in Psalm 6 to stress the magnitude of David's sorrow?

I think the end of verse 2 is just telling us that this coming human invasion was going to be very, very bad - and God uses hyperbole to emphasize that fact.

And if this invasion was, in fact, the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, then we know this description is entirely accurate. That invasion was very, very bad!

**2 Kings 25:1** - And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it. And they built siegeworks all around it.

**2 Kings 25:3** - On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

**2 Kings 25:7** - They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon.

**2 Kings 25:9-10** - And he burned the house of the LORD and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem.

Here in verse 2 we read that “their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.”



If that destruction in 587 BC is the event under discussion here in verse 2, then, while I think that description does employ some hyperbole, it doesn't employ very much! That Babylonian invasion was a terrible event that was, in fact, historically unique in many ways!

And what would this terrible event be under the early view for when Joel was written? As we said, it would be the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem that did not happen after the people repented and prayed to God.

I think that view has some problems here, but for now let's just say again that, while the early view is possible and better than the post-exile view, the early view is still trailing pretty far behind the pre-exile view for when the book of Joel was written.

## Joel 2:3

**Joel 2:3** - Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them.

We saw fire earlier in Joel 1:19-20, and there we said that it was likely a figurative description of the devastation left behind by the locusts, which we know from that 1915 *National Geographic* article looked a lot like the devastation that a fire would leave behind.

But perhaps there was another reason why that locust invasion in Joel 1 was described in terms of a fire - perhaps it was the same reason why the locusts were called a "nation" in Joel 1:6. Perhaps those terms "nation" and "fire" were used in Joel 1 to foreshadow the actual nation and the actual fire that would show up in Joel 2 with this coming human army.

And, yes, the fire here in verse 3, like the fire in Joel 1, may also be a metaphor - but this fire in verse 3 may not be a metaphor. "Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns."

We know that ancient armies very often used fire as a weapon. Archers would dip arrows in pitch or oil, set them alight, and shoot them at enemy

fortifications. Fire was also used to burn enemy supply lines or food stores. Invading armies often burned fields, crops, and cities.

And, again, if we are looking at the Babylonians, then what we see here is a perfectly accurate description of what King Nebuchadnezzar did to Jerusalem.

**2 Kings 25:9** - And he burned the house of the LORD and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down.

There is an interesting pronoun question in verse 3.

The ESV reads: "Fire devours before **them**, and behind **them** a flame burns," but the Hebrew literally reads "before **him** (or before **it**)" and "after **him** (or after **it**)."

If the intended pronoun is "it," then the ESV is likely correct in suggesting that the "people" in verse 2 is the intended antecedent of this pronoun in verse 3. Fire devours before the invading people, and behind the invading people a flame burns.

But what if the intended pronoun is "him?" Who then would the text have in mind?

Although King Nebuchadnezzar is a possibility, I think the much better answer is God. Fire devours before **God**, and behind **God** a flame burns.

Elsewhere we see fire going out before God to devour his opponents.

**Psalms 97:2-3** - Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. **Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around.**

And the clouds and thick darkness in that Psalm reminds us of the clouds and thick darkness that we just saw in the previous verse.

Elsewhere we also see an association between fire and the day of the Lord.

**Zephaniah 1:18** - Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on **the day of the wrath of the LORD**. In the **fire** of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

So, verse 3 could be describing what God did rather than what this human army did, but either way, we know that this destruction is from God because this army was sent by God.

We know that from what we read in the previous chapter.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, **and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.**

And, if this army is the Babylonian army, we also know that from what we read elsewhere in the Bible.

**Jeremiah 27:6** - And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, **my servant.**

King Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant! This invading army is from God!

**"The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them."**

Outside of Genesis, the phrase "garden of Eden" is found only here and in Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 36:35** - And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like **the garden of Eden**, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.'

Back in chapter 1, we suggested that the plants and animals were mentioned in the closing verses of that chapter to show God undoing his work of creation, which is something that we also see

with other days of the Lord in the Bible. (See the Handouts for Lesson 9 and Lesson 13.)

I think verse 3 confirms that we were on the right track with that suggestion.

God was, in a sense, undoing his work of creation with that terrible locust invasion, and we see that same thing even more explicitly here with this human invasion as God turns the garden of Eden back into a desolate wilderness.

And, of course, that final phrase in verse 3 also reminds us of the garden of Eden: **"nothing escapes them."**

**Genesis 3:8** - And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, **and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.**

Starting with the very first couple, man has long tried to hide from God. People have very often tried to escape from God.

But whether verse 3 is talking about an escape from God or an escape from an army sent by God - neither attempted escape will be successful unless that way of escape is a way that God has provided.

**Hebrews 4:13** - And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

And we will, in fact, see a way of escape provided by God later in this same chapter of Joel.

**Joel 2:32** - And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. **For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape**, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

## Joel 2:4

**Joel 2:4** - Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run.

Locusts! Locusts! Locusts! Verse 4 has to be all about locusts, right? No. Not right. Let's look a bit more closely at verse 4 before we starting holding up a photo of a locust alongside a photo of a horse.

First, have we seen anything so far in Joel 2 that would make us think we are looking at locusts here? I say no. The invader in Joel 2 was identified as a great and powerful **people** in verse 2 - not as insects.

Second, even if we were to admit that a locust looks something like a horse, I don't think there would be any basis for such a comparison comparison here. No one who saw a locust invasion on the horizon would ever scream, "Oh, no! We are being attacked by an army of tiny horses!" Locusts were terrifying because they looked like locusts - not because they looked like horses.

Third, while a locust might in some way **look** like a horse, there is no way in which a locust **runs** like a horse! And yet, verse 2 says "like war horses they run."

Fourth, I think verse 4 explains itself once we understand what the Israelites thought of war horses - in short, they were terrified of them!

They had been chased out of Egypt by horses.

**Exodus 14:9** - The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea...

And God had then warned them that they would later meet such horses again.

**Deuteronomy 20:1** - When you go out to war against your enemies, **and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own**, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you,

who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

And that happened in Joshua.

**Joshua 11:4-6** - And they came out with all their troops, a great horde, in number like the sand that is on the seashore, **with very many horses and chariots**. And all these kings joined their forces and came and encamped together at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel. **You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire.**"

And while Solomon had horses and chariots (1 Kings 10:26), for most of their history the Jews relied on infantry rather than cavalry - and that proved to be the better choice when the fight was waged in the hills rather than on the plain.

**1 Kings 20:21-23** - And the king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and struck the Syrians with a great blow. ... And the servants of the king of Syria said to him, "Their gods are gods of the hills, and so they were stronger than we. But let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they."

But, for the people, the sight of an invading army on horseback was one of the most frightening things they could ever imagine.

**Jeremiah 4:13** - Behold, he comes up like clouds; his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles — woe to us, for we are ruined!

And who is that person who was coming in Jeremiah 4:13 with horses swifter than eagles? It was King

Nebuchadnezzar. And Habakkuk also describes those same Babylonian horses.

**Habakkuk 1:8** - Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour.

And that description of horses, much more than locusts, sounds like what we read in verse 4: "Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run."

But what about the word "like"? They look **like** horses, and they run **like** horses. Doesn't that mean that they were not really horses? We have already looked at that Hebrew preposition, and we will have more to say about it in the next verse. But, for our purposes here, we can just make a simple observation: whether verse 4 is about locusts or about people, neither is a horse!

And as for locusts looking like horses, I think that they do. I think we can see that when we look at them, and I think the Bible tells us the same thing elsewhere.

**Revelation 9:7** - In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle...

But that comparison runs both ways - those horses also look like locusts!

**Jeremiah 51:27** - Bring up horses like bristling locusts.

And so, once again, we are left with the same question: are we seeing locusts that look like a human army, or are we seeing a human army that (at least, at times) looks like locusts?

I think the evidence better supports the second option. I think we are seeing a human army in Joel 2 that, in some ways, reminds us of the locusts we saw in Joel 1.

Many people see these horses in verse 4 as strong evidence of a locust attack, but I think the opposite

is true. I think these horses are strong evidence that we are **not** seeing locusts here. Why?

Let's again recall what happened in Chapter 1. When the prophet Joel arrived, the people had just experienced a terrible locust invasion. And that invasion was so bad that Joel could ask, "Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?"

So let's assume for a moment that Joel 2 is also about locusts. Let's assume that Joel is telling the people that another locust invasion is coming soon. I don't think that is correct - but let's assume it is correct for a moment.

Now, with that assumption about Joel 2, let me ask a question: **Why would anyone need a metaphor to describe something they had just personally experienced?**

Why would Joel need to tell them that this second locust invasion would be like the attack of a human army with rumbling chariots? Why would Joel need to tell them what the locusts would look like horses? Why would Joel need to tell them that the locusts would sound like a crackling fire?

Do we really think that there were people in Jerusalem who didn't know what a locust invasion was like? Who didn't know what those locusts did? Who didn't know what those locusts looked like? Who didn't know what those locusts sounded like?

Many of us here today have lived through more than one terrible hurricane. I still remember when the eye of Hurricane Alicia went over our house in 1983. What if another hurricane was coming today and was near, and what if I was in charge of warning you all about that approaching storm? Is this what you would expect me to say?

Something is coming that's like a massive, roaring blender the size of a city. Trees will crack and fall like matchsticks, and anything not secured will fly through the air like a Frisbee. Water will gush like there is a giant sponge in the sky that is being wrung out all at once.

If I said that to you, how would you respond? Wouldn't you think that was a rather odd way for



me to warn Houstonians about a hurricane? A massive, roaring blender? A flying Frisbee? A giant sponge?

We all know what a hurricane is! We all know what they are like! We don't need a bunch of analogies to explain what we will see and hear when another hurricane arrives! And the same is true for these locusts when it comes to the people listening to Joel!

In short, if Joel 2 is just about more locusts, then why all these descriptions? Couldn't Joel just have said, "The locusts are coming back!" What more would need to be said to people who had just lived through the worst locust invasion any of them had ever experienced?

But what if Joel 2 is about something different? What if Joel 2 is about a human invasion that the people had not already experienced? Then we would need these vivid descriptions to understand it - and naturally some of those vivid descriptions of the human army that was coming would be based on the locust invasion that had already come.

Joel 2 is describing a human invasion, not a locust invasion.

## Joel 2:5

**Joel 2:5** - As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle.

Verse 5 would have been terrifying to those who first heard it.

And I think we can imagine how they felt. Just think about waking up one day and seeing a huge army of war horses and chariots stretched out across the horizon as far as the eye can see. And then you hear it - the rumble of the chariots! It is coming! The army is now so near that you can both see it and hear it!

And again in verse 5 we see a devouring fire. As we said, I think that fire can be either literal or figurative, or perhaps both literal and figurative.

We know that ancient armies used fire as a weapon, but we also know that a fast moving fire is like a fast moving army - both are terrifying, inescapable, and destructive. They both create feelings of great fear and helplessness.

### **"Like a powerful army drawn up for battle."**

As we said when we looked at verse 1, this phrase is Exhibit A for those who think Joel 2 is about nothing more than locusts. Most of them agree that the verb tenses require a different event in Joel 2, but they believe that different event is just a different locust attack.

And they point to verse 5 as proof - the villain in Joel 2 is not a powerful army drawn up for battle, but is just **like** a powerful army drawn up for battle.

On the surface, that argument seems pretty strong - but let's dig down a bit.

First, as we said when we looked at verse 1, the preposition translated "like" in verse 5 can be used either for an imperfect comparison or a perfect comparison. We saw an example of that latter usage back in Joel 1:15, and I think we are seeing it again here. The "people" from verse 2 are not coming "like" a powerful army, but rather they are coming "as" a powerful army.

To add a bit to what we said earlier, we can look at what the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* says about this Hebrew preposition. That lexicon says that the Hebrew preposition is sometimes used "to compare an object with the class to which it belongs, and express its correspondence with the idea which it ought to realize."

I think that is how we see the word used in Joel 1:15 and in Isaiah 13:6.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and **as** destruction from the Almighty it comes.

**Isaiah 13:6** - Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; **as** destruction from the Almighty it will come!

Those verses are not saying that the day of the Lord is not a coming destruction from God but

rather is just **like** that. Instead, those verses are telling us this day is coming as “a veritable, or ideal, destruction” from God (again, quoting the lexicon). The comparison is giving us a true, real, and genuine example. It is an exact comparison.

In short, those verses are telling us that if we want to see the perfect example of destruction from God, then we should look at this day of the Lord!

Likewise, here in verse 5: if we want to see the perfect example of a huge terrifying army from God, then we should look at what is coming over the hill!

We see that same usage elsewhere in the Old Testament.

**Zechariah 14:3** - Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations **as when he fights on a day of battle**.

**Ezekiel 26:10** - His horses will be so many that their dust will cover you. Your walls will shake at the noise of the horsemen and wagons and chariots, when he enters your gates **as men enter a city that has been breached**.

So the Hebrew grammar in verse 5 does **not** mean that we are still looking at locusts (even though the English grammar in the ESV might cause us to think otherwise before taking a closer look).

## Joel Lesson 14

### Some Comments About the Handout for Lesson 14

My goal with this handout was to collect all of the direct evidence that we have about the Holy Spirit, where by “direct” I mean those verses in the Bible that *directly* name or otherwise *directly* refer to the Holy Spirit. Of course, we need to consider the Bible in its entirety, but perhaps these verses are the ones that we should consider first when we want to learn about the Holy Spirit.

Absent the verses on the Handout for Lesson 14, I think we would all be like the people in Acts 19:2 who had “not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

How did I compile these verses?

- First, I pulled out all of the verses in the ESV that contain the word “Spirit” with a capital S. That process gives us all of the verses that contain either the Hebrew or Greek word translated “spirit” and that the ESV translators believed was a reference to the Holy Spirit (as opposed, for example, to the spirit of man or the spirit of the world).
- Second, I repeated that process for another translation and compared the two lists. That exercise gave me the 8 additional verses that are listed at the bottom of the first page of the handout.
- Third, I added a few verses in which the Holy Spirit is referred to as “he” or by some word other than “Spirit” (such as “Helper” in John 16:7-8).

That process yielded the 252 numbered passages on the Handout. Let me know if you spot any verses that I missed.

Also, if you really want to “geek out” on this subject, I created and uploaded a complete concordance of these 252 verses so that you can pick any word in these verses and then very quickly look at how and where that word is used in every verse from the list that contains the word.

Why did I do all of this?

One reason is the same reason that any lawyer looks at all the evidence prior to a deposition or trial - to avoid surprises! Theories that don’t consider all the evidence tend to be very fragile theories!

A second reason I created this list is to avoid the problem described in the famous parable of the blind men and the elephant.

That parable tells of several blind men touching different parts of an elephant and describing it based only on what each can feel. One feels the trunk and says it’s like a snake, another the leg and says it’s like a tree, and so on. Each man is convinced that his view is correct, but none of them gets it right because none of them considers the entire elephant. If we want to properly and thoroughly understand any topic in the Bible, we need to consider all the evidence that we have about that topic in the Bible.

And a third reason I created this list is because I need it in my own study of the Holy Spirit as I prepare for the upcoming lessons on that topic. As you recall from the questions on the Handout for Lesson 12, a number of our questions about Joel 2 are questions about the Holy Spirit. I need this list as I work through those questions, and I suspect that you may find it helpful as you do the same in your own personal study.

And the best way to use this handout is to carefully review the content of these verses, while looking them up when you need to read the entire context.

But, as I printed these handouts, it struck me that we can perhaps learn something important about the Holy Spirit, not just from the *content* of the verses, but from the *location* of the verses.

Think for a moment about question #17 from our list of questions on the Handout for Lesson 12: Why is that promise of the Holy Spirit in Joel 2 described using the word “pour”?

When we use the word “pour” we often use it to refer to something large and gushing. The rain was *pouring* down! He *poured* out his heart to her. The crowds *poured* into the stadium.

But how does the location of these verses help us understand why God used the word “pour” when it comes to this promise about the Holy Spirit?

Turn to the last passage on the last page of the handout - what number is it? It is number 252.

Now turn to verse #73 on the second page of the Handout. That verse is the final verse from the Old Testament. What that means is that only 73 of the 252 passages on this Handout are from the Old Testament. The other 179 passages are from the New Testament.

In fact, if you are looking for the exact phrase “Holy Spirit” in the Old Testament, you will find it in only two places: (#36) Psalm 51:11 and (#51) Isaiah 63:10-11.

The New Testament makes up about 25% of the Bible. But when it comes to passages about the Holy Spirit, that statistic flips. Over 70% of the passages about the Holy Spirit in the Bible are from the New Testament.

I think what that tells us is that something very important happened with regard to the Holy Spirit in the move from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

Was that important event perhaps the pouring out of God’s Spirit on all flesh? Is that why we see this explosion of spirit verses in the New Testament?

Perhaps we will see when we get to end of Joel 2, but for now please use this handout in your own studies, and please hang on to it for upcoming lessons - we will need it (and especially the numbers) later!

## Joel 2:5, Continued

**Joel 2:5** - As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle.

Last week, we looked at the word “like” in verse 5, and what we found is that the underlying Hebrew word in verse 5 does **not** mean that we are still looking at locusts (even though the English word might cause us to think otherwise before taking a closer look).

Instead, we can translate that word “like” with the word “as.” So rather than these “people” from verse

2 coming in verse 5 “**like** a powerful army drawn up for battle,” they are instead coming “**as** a powerful army drawn up for battle.” There is no reason for us to see locusts in verse 5.

A second reason why we should not leap to locusts in verse 5 is the strength and pervasiveness of the military descriptions that we see in this second chapter of Joel.

The description of a “powerful army” that we see at the end of verse 5 is not standing alone in this chapter. Instead, we find military descriptions all throughout these opening verses.

- Verse 1 - Blow a trumpet; sound an alarm.
- Verse 2 - There is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people.
- Verse 3 - Nothing escapes them.
- Verse 4 - Like war horses they run.
- Verse 5 - The rumbling of chariots.
- Verse 5 - Like a powerful army drawn up for battle.
- Verse 7 - Like warriors they charge; like soldiers they scale the wall.
- Verse 7 - They march each on his way.
- Verse 8 - They burst through the weapons and are not halted.
- Verse 9 - They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls.
- Verse 11 - The LORD utters his voice before his army.

As one commentator said, “the military language throughout this chapter is too strong to be accidental or to be dismissed as metaphor.” (And, as we said last week, people who had just lived through a locust invasion hardly needed any analogies to describe another locust invasion!)

And a third reason why we should not see only locusts in Joel is that we do not see only locusts in Deuteronomy. Instead, in Deuteronomy 28 we see a locust invasion followed by a human invasion. Likewise, in Joel, I think we are seeing a locust invasion followed by a human invasion.



In short, I think the evidence is overwhelming that we are not seeing a locust invasion here in Chapter 2. I think we are seeing a human invasion.

But why all the confusion? Why do so many people still see nothing but locusts in Joel 2?

I think the answer is simple - the locusts in Joel 1 were a foreshadowing of what was yet to come. I think that is what Joel 1:15 told us. The locusts were not the big event; the locusts were the warm-up act for the big event!

And so what then do we expect Joel to do in Chapter 2? Do we expect Joel to forget all about those locusts when he starts telling us about this invading army of people? Or do we expect Joel to somehow link the two events?

I think we would expect Joel to stress the connection between the two events. In fact, that is why God tells us about the locusts in the first place. The theme of this book is not the day of the locust. The theme of this book is the day of the Lord - and those locusts were pointing toward that day of the Lord (Joel 1:15).

The locusts were sent by God for a purpose - to awaken the people to what was coming. And how did the locusts do that? They did that by being similar in some ways to what was coming - both events are described as devastating invasions.

Here is how one commentary describes what the book of Joel is doing:

We misread Joel if we think the text demands we exclusively see either locusts or a human army. On the contrary, Joel consciously drew the two ideas together here so that an army is described under the metaphor of a locust invasion. He spoke of chariots, armies drawn up for battle, and the scaling of walls, but the picture of the locust plague from Chapter 1 still prompts and to some degree determines the descriptions. Thus the fact that a locust swarm may sound like wildfire and look like horses does not contradict but

contributes to the vision of the fury of the northern army. The locusts were both the symbol for that army and its precursor, and Joel used language that projected both pictures into the readers' minds. To use an example from the modern world of computer-aided multimedia, it is as if we see the locusts of Chapter 1 'morphing' into soldiers and cavalry before our eyes.

So, if we read verse 5 and think about locusts, I think that is what God intends for us to do. The locusts are certainly still lurking in the background of Chapter 2.

But, if we read verse 5 and think **only** about locusts, then I do **not** think that is what God intended for us to do.

God was telling us about locusts in Chapter 1, but God has moved on to another subject in Chapter 2 - and we need to keep up! The locusts are in the background of Joel 2, but the locusts are no longer in the foreground.

## Joel 2:6

**Joel 2:6** - Before them peoples are in anguish; all faces grow pale.

In verse 2, we were told about "a great and powerful people" that was spread upon the mountains. Here in verse 6, we are told about "peoples" who are in anguish and growing pale in the face of that great army.

The Hebrew word for "people" is the same in both verses 2 and 6. Are we really intended to conclude that some, but not all, of the people in Joel 2 are not really people but instead are locusts?

It seems that if the people are people in verse 6, then the people in verse 2 should also be people. I think the word "peoples" in verse 6 confirms what we said about the word "people" in verse 2 - we are seeing a huge **human** army in these verses.

Why do we see the plural "peoples" in verse 6?

One commentator says that “it could be argued that there is no perfect English equivalent for the plural noun” translated “peoples” in the ESV. The Hebrew word is a general word that refers to a group of people in any number of different settings. Some translations use the somewhat odd English word “peoples” while others just use the already plural word “people.” Some suggest that the word “nations” should be used here, which would again suggest that we are seeing a human invasion that affects more than just Jerusalem and Judah. But most likely, the plural word just means that all sorts of groups will tremble in view of the coming army. We saw such groups in Chapter 1 with Joel’s messages to elders, drunkards, farmers, and priests.

And what happens when that huge human army arrives? What happens is just what we would expect to happen - the people are in anguish; the people are terrified.

There is a translation issue in verse 6 with the phrase “all faces grow pale.” Here are some other proposed translations:

- “every face is like a scorched pot”
- “all faces are covered with a coating of black like a pot”
- “all faces shall gather blackness”
- “every face will be like a burnt earthen pot”
- “all faces have withdrawn their color”
- “all faces gathered a glow”
- “every face gathers heat”

Literally, the phrase means “all faces gather in *parur*,” where the Hebrew word *parur* is found only twice in the Bible.

Which translation is best? I think that perhaps Isaiah 13 can help us answer this question. Not because Isaiah 13 uses the same Hebrew word, but because Isaiah 13 gives us a similar description about another day of the Lord.

**Isaiah 13:7-8** - Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. They will be dismayed; pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish

like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; **their faces will be aflame.**

I think Joel is likely telling us the same thing about how the people would react to this day of the Lord - that it would cause their faces to be aflame. Their faces would be flush with fear and with anguish.

Such reactions by the people are extremely intense, and I think that intensity is more evidence of what we are seeing here.

Yes, locusts showing up to eat your crops is a terrible event - but those locusts are not going to eat you. They are not going to burn your house down. They are not going to assault you. They are not going to tear down your walls. They are not going to carry you off into exile.

I think the intense reactions that we are seeing in Chapter 2 is further evidence that we are seeing something other than locusts here. This threat is much worse than the threat of the locusts.

As one commentator rightly (but tersely) concludes about the subject of verse 6, “locusts as such are by no means meant.”

## Joel 2:7

**Joel 2:7** - Like warriors they charge; like soldiers they scale the wall. They march each on his way; they do not swerve from their paths.

Once again, verse 7 reminds us of something that we have already concluded - this book of Joel was not written during the exile. Either Joel was written before the exile, or Joel was written after the days of Nehemiah.

And how do we know that? We know that because there are still walls around the city of Jerusalem in verse 7. Whether these soldiers are soldiers or locusts, they are scaling walls. That tells us either that Nebuchadnezzar had not yet torn down those walls or that Nehemiah had already rebuilt those walls.

What we said about the word “like” in verse 5 applies here again in verse 7. I think what this

verse is telling us is that “**as** warriors they charge” and “**as** soldiers they scale the wall.”

And, again, it is okay to read these descriptions and think about locusts. In fact, I think we are intended to read these descriptions and think about locusts. I think the mistake happens if we read these descriptions and think **only** about locusts.

I think that instead we should be seeing human warriors and human soldiers marching and scaling these walls. And I think that is the natural way to read this verse given that it never uses the word “locust,” but instead uses the words “warriors” and “soldiers.”

When the locusts showed up in Joel 1, what word did Joel to describe them? He used the word “locust” in verse 4.

And now in Joel 2, what word does Joel use to describe this new threat? Does Joel call them locusts? No. Joel calls them people. He calls them a powerful army. He calls them warriors. He calls them soldiers. He never calls them locusts.

As one commentary explains, verse 7 is describing “a highly trained, effective military force.”

These warriors and soldiers are disciplined, and they do not break rank or lose that discipline even when they are attacking. That they are scaling the walls tells us that they know how to conduct a siege. And that they are charging tells us that they are powerful and fearless.

And notice that the walls are being *scaled*. That is very different from locusts clinging to the walls.

And locusts did most of their damage out in the fields rather than inside the city walls. But not so with human soldiers. That they are scaling the walls means that the last defenses of the city have been breached and the people are about to be slaughtered.

Is this army the Babylonian army? It is if the pre-exile option is the correct view for when the book of Joel was written.

Is this description in Joel 2 an accurate description of the Babylonian army? Was the Babylonian army disciplined, skilled, powerful, and fearless?

Yes, it was. And we know that from historical accounts both in and out of the Bible. As for those historical accounts in the Bible, we can read about the Babylonian army in the book of Habakkuk.

**Habakkuk 1:6-11** - For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own. They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour. They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand. At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!

Jeremiah also describes the Babylonian army.

**Jeremiah 6:22-25** - Thus says the LORD: “Behold, a people is coming from the north country, a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth. They lay hold on bow and javelin; they are cruel and have no mercy; the sound of them is like the roaring sea; they ride on horses, set in array as a man for battle, against you, O daughter of Zion!” We have heard the report of it; our hands fall helpless; anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labor. Go not out into the field, nor walk on the road, for the enemy has a sword; terror is on every side.



Those descriptions are terrifying even now! Can we imagine how terrifying it was for the people who met that Babylonian army in person?

## Joel 2:8-9

**Joel 2:8-9** - They do not jostle one another; each marches in his path; they burst through the weapons and are not halted. 9 They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls, they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief.

Now those two verses sounds just like a bunch of locusts. And if we don't believe it, we can just read any newspaper article about a locust invasion. Whenever such articles quote Joel, they most often quote these two verses.

But that should not surprise us no matter how we view Chapter 2.

If we (like many) take Joel 2 to be all about locusts, then naturally these verses look like locusts. But if (as I think is correct) we think Joel 2 is about a human army, then we have already said that Joel is describing that army at times by looking back at the locust invasion that the people had just endured. Either way, it is not surprising that these verses look like locusts.

But, again, we have the same question we had before: which is it? Are we seeing locusts looking like locusts, or are we seeing people looking like locusts?

Didn't verse 2 answer that question? "Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful **people**." When Joel 1 opened, Joel used the word "locusts." When Joel 2 opened, Joel used the word "people."

I think we are still looking at those same people here in verse 9, but Joel is describing that great and powerful army in a way that reminds his listeners (and us!) of a great and powerful *locust* invasion.

And those two armies do have much in common!

- Both look unstoppable - "they burst through the weapons and are not halted; they climb

up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief."

- Both look very disciplined - "they do not jostle one another; each marches in his path."
- Neither has any trouble defeating the city's defenses - "they leap upon the city, they run upon the walls."

And again, what I think Joel is saying is that if they thought the locusts were bad, then they hadn't seen anything yet. What was coming would be much worse than those locusts, and what was coming was not a long way off - it was near!

But what about the many who see locusts here in these two verses? Don't verses 8-9 *prove* that this chapter is about locusts? No. In fact, I think the opposite is true. I think verses 8-9 show that this chapter is **not** about locusts!

First, let's look at the *position* of these two verses. Verses 8-9 are the climax of this description of the invading army. Verses 1-7 have been building up to verses 8-9 as their conclusion.

So what does that tell us? What does it tell us that the climax of the destruction in verse 9 is the entry of something into the people's homes? It tells us that that something is not a locust!

Yes, locusts entered people's houses, but entering your home was not the ultimate goal of those locusts and entering your home was not the worst place of the devastation left behind by those locusts. The locusts were after the crops, the devastation of the locusts was the destruction of those crops, and that devastation took place in your fields rather than in your house.

Yes, it was inconvenient to have locusts in your house - but those locusts were not killing the people inside that house. And I suspect that if anyone had been given a choice between locusts in their house and locusts in their fields, they would have thrown the doors of their house wide open to invite those locusts inside.

But not so with this army. This army seems to have those houses as its ultimate goal. This whole description has been leading up to the horror of having this terrible invading army entering your



own home. “They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls, they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief.”

In Joel 2 the climax of the attack is the invasion into homes. That is not true of a locust invasion, but it is true of a human invasion.

And, in fact, that is precisely what we see with Nebuchadnezzar’s attack of Jerusalem.

**Hababbuk 1:6** - For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, **to seize dwellings not their own.**

**Jeremiah 52:13** - And he burned the house of the LORD, and the king’s house and **all the houses** of Jerusalem; **every great house he burned down.**

And when did Nebuchadnezzar enter those homes? Was it the *first* thing he entered? No. He first had to go through those fields that were outside, and then he had to get over the walls, but he eventually ended up inside the homes. And that is the same order of events that we find here in Joel 2.

And that is also what we see in Isaiah 13 with God’s judgment of Babylon.

**Isaiah 13:15-16** - Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; **their houses will be plundered** and their wives ravished.

And, again, that entry into homes occurs at the end of the invasion. That entry into homes was the goal of the invasion.

And think back to Chapter 1. Yes, that chapter mentioned a house - but it was the Lord’s house. The devastation in Joel 1 was not what happened to the people’s houses, but rather was what happened to their fields and their crops. “The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain

is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes.” (Verse 10)

But Chapter 2 is different. It not only describes what happens to the people’s homes, but it describes that event as the climax of the terrible invasion.

I think Joel 2 is about a human invasion. And rather than proving the opposite as some suggest, I think verses 8-9 are instead perhaps some of the best evidence that what we are seeing here is a **human** army.

## Joel 2:10

**Joel 2:10** - The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

Up until verse 10, things in Joel 2 have been pretty straightforward. Yes, we might disagree about whether we are seeing an invasion of locusts or an invasion of people, but we know we are seeing an invasion of something.

But then suddenly things get complicated here in verse 10. An earthquake? Trembling heavens? A darkened sun and moon? Stars not shining? What is going on here?

Some might say that it is all just smoke from the fires that we saw back in verse 3. Maybe this smoke is what darkened the sun and moon. Maybe this smoke is what kept people from seeing the stars. But then how do we explain the earthquake? How do we explain the trembling of the heavens? How could either of those things be caused by a fire?

So what then is happening in verse 10? I think the answer is pretty simple when we think about what is going on here, and when we look at other similar descriptions in the Bible.

Let’s start with something similar that we often see today in the secular world.

What happens when a football team first runs onto the field at the beginning of a big game? What happens when a famous rock star first comes out from behind the curtain at the beginning of a big concert? What about Elvis? Did Elvis just walk out

and start singing, or did something else happen first?

What happened first was a grand entrance! Long before we ever saw Elvis emerge in his jumpsuit, the lights would dim and the music would build to a crescendo.

And do you know what? Elvis was not the first one to ever do that! I think that what we are seeing and hearing in verse 10 is a grand entrance!

We are in verse 10 now. Look quickly at who we will see in the very next verse - "The LORD utters his voice before his army!" Verse 10 is what happens just before God shows up in verse 11.

Let's read verse 10 again with that thought in mind: "The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining."

Has there ever been any other grand entrance like that one? That is what happens when God walks out onto the stage!

Yes, I know that many people read verse 10 and think that we must be reading about the end of the world, and maybe they would have a point if the book of Joel consisted only of verse 10. But it does not. There are a bunch of other verses in Joel, and when we read verse 10 in its context we know that we are not reading about the end of the world here. We are instead reading about an invasion that was coming and that was near when the book was written.

Verse 10 is God's grand entrance. Do we see such a grand entrance anywhere else in the Bible? Yes, we do.

Listen to how King David describes God's grand entrance in his great song of deliverance in 2 Samuel 22.

**2 Samuel 22:7-11** - In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I called. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry came to his ears. **Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations of the heavens trembled and quaked,** because he was angry. Smoke

went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens **and came down**; thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew; he was seen on the wings of the wind.

The earth reeled and rocked. That word "rocked" in 2 Samuel is the same word translated "tremble" in verse 10.

We see something similar with God's judgment of Babylon in Isaiah 13.

**Isaiah 13:13** - Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

And we see something similar with Jesus' judgment of Jerusalem in Matthew 24.

**Matthew 24:29-30** - Immediately after the tribulation of those days **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.** Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and **they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.**

But that has to be the end of the world, right? Wrong. In fact, we know with certainty that Matthew 24:29-30 happened in the first century. How do we know that? We know that because we have read verse 34.

**Matthew 24:34** - Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Yes, some day Jesus will return and the sun, moon, and stars will literally darken. On that last day, the heavens will literally be shaken. But all throughout the Bible we see those same events being used figuratively to describe earlier times when God came in judgment - for example, in Joel 2 for a judgment against Judah; in Isaiah 13 for a judgment against Babylon; and, in Matthew 24 for a judgment against Jerusalem.

## Joel Lesson 15

### Some Comments About the Handout for Lesson 15

When we get to the end of verse 13, we are going to find one of the most difficult and debated phrases in the entire Bible: **“He relents over disaster.”**

What does it mean when the Bible tells us that God relents? What does that statement tell us about God? What does that statement tell us about ourselves and about our free will? What does that statement tell us about time and the future?

My plan is for us to spend about two classes looking at these and other questions about verses 13-14.

Why so much time? Because these are very hard questions, and we can't tackle very hard questions from the shallow end of the pool! If we are going to investigate these questions, then we need to take the time to do it right!

So, what then is the purpose of this handout? Why do we have this long list of Scriptures?

This long list of Scriptures is the evidence that we will consider in answering these questions. The long list of verses on the Handout for Lesson 14 was the evidence for our upcoming study of the Holy Spirit, and the long list of verses on this Handout for Lesson 15 is the evidence for our upcoming study of these difficult questions about God.

These lists are homework! We all need to read them and study. And why is evidence important? Because no one who purports to teach the word of God should ever just say you can take my word for it.

“Just believe me - the Hebrew here is on my side! I'm not going to mention any Hebrew words, or tell you what the lexicons say, or show you where those same words are used elsewhere in the Bible. Just trust me! I'm right! We don't need to look at any evidence.”

That is not the way to teach God's word - or anything else for that matter. We should never just take some

Bible teacher's word for something - and no Bible teacher should ever ask us to do that.

In the New Testament, the disciples reasoned from the Scriptures - they used evidence! And if anyone ever asks you to just take their word for something about the Bible - don't fall for it! That is how religious error begins and spreads, both in and out of the church.

Instead, we all need to examine the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so (Act 17:11). That is why we have these long handouts - the Bereans would have loved my handouts!

And the handout I have planned for next week will be another big list about the Holy Spirit to help us get ready for the closing verses of Joel 2.

### Joel 2:10, Continued

**Joel 2:10** - The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

As we discussed last week, verse 10 is God's grand entrance prior to his arrival in verse 11 to utter his voice before his army.

And we also saw some other places in the Bible where similar language is used for the same purpose. For example, we saw similar language in Isaiah 13 for God's coming in judgment against Babylon, and, we saw similar language in Matthew 24 for Christ's coming in judgment against Jerusalem.

But why does God use such cosmic-sounding language to describe these times when he came in judgment? I think there are several possible reasons, any or all of which might be correct.

- First, this vivid language reminds us of the final judgment yet to come. This figurative destruction of the heavens reminds us of the day on which “the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Peter 3:10). The figurative destruction may point to the final literal destruction yet to come.



- Second, this vivid language reminds us of the severity of these judgments. I think all of those affected by them would agree that their world came to an end in some way on that day of judgment. Everything changed for them. Nothing was the same after that day. God effectively brought their world to an end. And so perhaps God describes such events using that same kind of language - bringing the entire world to an end.
- Third, this vivid language fits well with a theme that we have been seeing ever since the end of Joel 1 - the theme of God undoing and unwinding his creation so that he can start over. We saw that theme with the plants and animals in Joel 1, and we saw that same theme with the reference to the Garden of Eden earlier in this chapter. Perhaps we are now seeing that same theme with the sun, the moon, and the stars in verse 10.

One thing is certain. The only one who can shake the heavens is the one who made the heavens. The only one who can do these things to his creation is the Creator. What we are seeing in verse 10 is the power of God, the majesty of God, the glory of God, and the judgment of God.

And, in the next verse, we will hear the **voice** of God!

## Joel 2:11

**Joel 2:11** - The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?

In verse 11, God steps out from behind the curtain.

So far, we have seen some hints that God is behind all of this - with some of those hints being stronger than others.

Back in Joel 1:9, we saw a strange verb stem that caused us to think that God might be the cause of all this.

And then, in Joel 1:15, we were told that the coming destruction would be "as destruction from the

Almighty." But even there, we wondered whether perhaps it just meant that the destruction would be "like" destruction from God.

And, yes, this coming event is called day of the Lord, and yes, the locusts were sent as a wake-up call for this coming event, but where is the verse that very plainly says that this coming event is a judgment sent by God?

That verse is right here. That verse is verse 11. "The LORD utters his voice before **his** army." Yes - **HIS** army!

So, I guess that means this army can't be the Babylonian army, right? That army was **Babylon's** army, right? That army was **Nebuchadnezzar's** army, right? Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

The great king Nebuchadnezzar might have thought that he was in charge of this army, but he was not in charge. Nebuchadnezzar was working for someone else.

**Jeremiah 27:6** - And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, **my servant**.

King Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant! And Babylon?

- Babylon was a golden cup in God's hand! (Jeremiah 51:7)
- Babylon was sent for by God! (Jeremiah 25:9)
- Babylon was raised up by God! (Habakkuk 1:6)

The Babylonian army was **God's** army, God used **his** army as he saw fit to punish his people, and God eventually judged and punished **his** army.

"The LORD utters his voice before **his** army, for **his** camp is exceedingly great."

If the pre-exile view for the date of Joel is correct, then that exceedingly great army of God is the Babylonian army that God used to punish his own people.

And, yes, God sent his Babylonian army against his own wayward people, but that is not the only way

that God used his great Babylonian army. God also sent his great army against Egypt.

**Ezekiel 30:25** - I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall. Then they shall know that I am the LORD, **when I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon** and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt.

“When I put **my sword** into the hand of the king of Babylon.” And, yes, God is the one speaking there. The king of Babylon fought with the sword of God in his hand!

And, again, I think the pre-exile is now the most likely view for when this book was written, which would mean that we are in fact looking at Babylon here.

But if the correct view is instead the early view, then this great army would be the Assyrian army, and what we said about the Babylonian army would also apply to the Assyrian army.

**Isaiah 10:5** - Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury!

And the post-exile view? That view is looking less and less likely as we work through the text of Joel, but if that view is correct, then this great army would be the Greeks.

And if there is ever any doubt about who the Greeks were working for, then we just need to study the life of Alexander the Great. There is no way to explain Alexander apart from God. And, in fact, we find prophecies about Alexander the Great and his successors in Daniel 8, Daniel 11, and Zechariah 9. (We have studied each of those chapters in earlier classes.)

Verse 11 continues: **he who executes his word is powerful.**

Sometimes I think we picture God as telling us what will happen and then just sitting back with us and watching it all happen. Under that view, God is like a weather forecaster on TV who tells us what

the weather will be and then watches that weather come and go. (But, of course, very much unlike our TV weathermen, God always gets things right!)

But that is not the view of God that we see here in verse 11 or, I think we can say, much of anywhere else in the Bible.

Here God does not speak and then **watch** it happen - but rather God speaks and **makes** it happen! “He who executes his word is powerful.” (And we will look in a moment at whether that pronoun “he” refers to God or to someone working for God - but, either way, God is the one behind this execution of his word.)

Rather than picturing a weatherman who says it will rain but who does not make it rain, I think we should instead be picturing Babe Ruth, who pointed his bat at center field and then hit a home run to center field. Unlike that weatherman, Babe Ruth said it would happen, and then he made it happen.

I think this verse tells us something very important about how prophecy works.

I think we often picture prophecy as God watching a movie with the ability to skip to the end of that movie whenever he wants to. And so, when God wants to tell us something about the future, God just fast forwards to see what will happen and then God rewinds back to our time to tell us all about the end of that movie.

And perhaps there is some truth to that view. We know that God stands apart from time, and we know that we are not able to understand what it is like to stand apart from time.

As the old saying goes, “we don’t know who first discovered water, but we are pretty sure it wasn’t a fish!”

We exist in time just like that fish exists in water. And just like that fish has trouble considering things outside of water, so do we have trouble considering things outside of time.

But I think we can say that the “movie watching” view of prophecy does not seem to be what is described to us here in verse 11.

The picture here is not of God watching a movie and fast forwarding to the end, but instead the picture

here is of God producing the movie and creating whatever ending he wants. "He who executes his word is powerful."

We are reminded of what God said in Isaiah 46.

**Isaiah 46:9-10** - Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, **declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done**, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and **I will accomplish all my purpose.**'

Who is it in verse 11 who is powerful and who executes God's word? Is it God or someone working for God?

We know that those things are certainly true of God.

**Psalms 29:4** - The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

But (under the pre-exile view) God was using Babylon here to execute his word, and we know that Babylon was very powerful. So does this "he" in verse 11 perhaps refer to Nebuchadnezzar or Babylon instead of to God?

Once again, however we answer that question, we end up at the same place.

Even if verse 11 is telling us that Babylon was executing God's word with power, we know who was pulling Babylon's strings. We know that Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant, and we know that the sword in Nebuchadnezzar's hand was the sword of God. And we know that the power of Babylon was power given to them by God.

So, whichever way we jump on this question, we end up at the same place. God is the one executing his word.

Verse 11 continues: **For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome.**

For those keeping count, this is the third time we have seen the phrase "the day of the Lord" in the

book of Joel. We saw that phrase earlier in Joel 1:15 and Joel 2:1, and we will see it later in Joel 2:11 and Joel 3:14. And almost everyone agrees that "the day of the Lord" is the central theme of Joel.

And what can we say about that day of the Lord based on verse 11? We can say that the day is great and very awesome! That is what verse 11 tells us here.

We will see the same phrase later in verse 31: "The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the **great and awesome** day of the LORD comes."

And we also find that same phrase in the next to last verse of the Old Testament.

**Malachi 4:5** - Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the **great and awesome** day of the LORD comes.

Are those days in verse 31 and in Malachi the same day as the one we are seeing here in verse 11? No, they are not.

And how do we know that? We know that because we never ignore time frames!

- The time frame for verse 11 is, in a word, "near." This day in verse 11 was **near** to those who first heard about it. We saw that fact back in Joel 1:15.
- The time frame for verse 31 (as we will see when we get there) is during or perhaps after the first century AD. We know that because Peter quotes Joel 2:31 in Acts 2. (The uncertainty about whether it is in the first century or after the first century comes from the word "before." We will talk about that issue later.)
- And the time frame for Malachi 4:5 is also during or perhaps after the first century. We know that because Jesus told us in Matthew 17 that the reference to Ezekiel in Malachi 4 was a reference to John the Baptist.

So what does that tell us? One thing it tells us is that two different days of the Lord can be described the same way - as great and awesome.

Just because two days of the Lord are described using the same or similar language is not enough for us to conclude that those two days of the Lord are in fact the same day. We would have to dig deeper to show that.

Why is a day of the Lord great and awesome?

Now there is a question that answers itself! The day of the Lord is great and awesome because it is a day of the Lord! Would we ever expect a day of the Lord to be anything other than great and awesome?

Verse 11 continues: **Who can endure it?**

Now that is the million dollar question! The day is coming. The day is near. Who can endure such a day?

In a sense, this question is rhetorical, and the answer is that no one can endure such a day.

For many, and sometimes for all, such a day is devastating and horrible beyond imagination. It changes everything about the world that existed before that day. No one is left unchanged after that day has come and gone.

But I think in another sense the question is not just rhetorical.

Why? Because while no one can endure such a day apart from God, it is possible to endure such a day with God on our side.

We often see that God provides a way of escape for his faithful people - either a way to escape when that day comes, or perhaps, in some cases, a way to prevent that day from ever happening at all.

We see the former situation with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. In that case, the day came, but God provided a way of escape for his faithful people (Matthew 24:15-22).

And we see the latter situation with the threatened destruction of Jerusalem by Assyria. In that case, the day never came at all because God destroyed the Assyrian army (Isaiah 37:36) after the king turned to him in prayer (Isaiah 37:15).

And, of course, God has provided a way of escape for the final day of the Lord at the end of the world. That day cannot be prevented from coming, but

God has provided a way of escape for all who obey the gospel.

**1 Thessalonians 4:17** - Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

What about this day of the Lord in verse 11 that was coming and that was near? Could it be stopped from ever happening? And, if so, how? God answers those questions next.

## Joel 2:12-13

**Joel 2:12-13** - "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

Verse 11 ended with a question - who can endure it? I think verses 12-13 answer that question.

And the answer to that question begins with one of the most wonderful words in the Bible - the little word "yet."

How often does the Bible describe some terrible seemingly hopeless situation where that description is immediately followed with the little word "but" or the little word "yet"?

Think about the opening chapters of Romans that describe the seemingly hopeless situation of our sin-soaked world.

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

Such a short word, but such an important word! Such a beautiful word! All of our hopes are in that little word "but."



Absent Christ, Romans 6:23 would be God's last word to us all - "For the wages of sin is death." Period! But those are not God's last words to us. Instead of a period, we see a comma! "**But** the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." That is why Jesus came and died.

Likewise here before Joel 2:12, the situation looks hopeless. The locusts have done their terrible work, and now something else is coming that will be much worse. And that something else is near. As verse 11 asks, who can endure it?

"**Yet** even now," declares the Lord! If that statement is beautiful to us as we read it today, can we imagine how beautiful it was to those who first heard Joel say it?

Absent the love of God, the book of Joel would have ended with verse 11. But because of God's love, we have verse 12, and we have all of the promised blessings that follow verse 12 in the book of Joel - including promises about the Holy Spirit and the church!

If we have been looking for the **hinge** in the book of Joel, then I think we can quit looking. I think the word "yet" at the beginning of verse 12 is that hinge.

Prior to that little word, God has been showing his wrath, but after that word, God shows his love. That little word changes everything we are seeing in the book of Joel, as it changes everything in our own lives.

**Romans 5:8** - **But** God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And what must we do to enjoy those great blessings? If we want to endure that coming day of the Lord, what must we do?

We know the answer to that question in our own day. We, like the people who heard Joel, know that a day of the Lord is coming. It is not the same day of the Lord that was near in the time of Joel, but it is a day of the Lord that is coming. It is the day when Jesus will return to claim his own and to destroy the world of the ungodly.

Who can endure it? What must we do?

That is the precise question asked by those who heard Peter quote Joel 2 in Acts 2. And so we today have the answer to that question.

**Acts 2:37** - Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, **what shall we do?**" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

But what about the people in Joel's day who were facing another day of the Lord - one that was near and one that would involve a terrifying invading army?

Who could endure it? What must they do? God answers that question for them in verses 12-13.

"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments."

And the first thing they are told to do is the same thing that those in Acts 2 were told to do. That same first step has never changed. Return! Repent!

Who can endure that day? No one can endure that day absent repentance. No one can endure that day without first returning to God. Those who persist in their rebellion and who trust in themselves can never endure that coming day of the Lord.

Those locusts in Joel 1 were a warning of something else that was coming, but the fact that God gave them a warning tells us something very important and very wonderful about what was coming - it could be stopped or avoided!

There is no need to sound a warning alarm for an event that can be neither stopped nor avoided. And yet Joel 2 starts off with the sound of an alarm.

What that tells us is that there must have been something that could be done by those who heard

and heeded that alarm. And verses 12-13 tells us what that something was.

I think we see a similar warning in Luke 13 - not with locusts, but with some other terrible events that happened.

**Luke 13:1-5** - There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you **repent**, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you **repent**, you will all likewise perish."

Were those events in Luke 13 warnings from God? Did God cause those events to happen? Jesus does not answer that second question, but Jesus does answer that first question - yes, they were warnings. "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Likewise today, we hear about such disasters all the time. How should we see those tragedies? How should the world see those tragedies? Jesus tells us in Luke 13 - "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

We do not know when Jesus will come again - it may be near, it may be far. But there is a day coming that we all know is near - the day when we will die and be judged by God. The day when we will close our eyes in this world and open them in the next. None of us knows how long we have on this earth.

And whether it is locusts, or Pilate, or a falling tower, or a falling airplane, God's warning in the same: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." If we want to endure that day, we first must repent. That is always the first step.

Listen again to verse 12:

"Return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and  
with mourning"

What is involved with repentance? What does it mean to repent? How can we know that repentance has occurred? I think these verses help us answer those questions.

And the first thing we see is that a **flippant** repentance is not true repentance.

I think we can state that as an axiom: whenever we are commanded to do anything by God, our response must never be flippant or thoughtless. It should go without saying that thoughtless worship is an oxymoron. And the same is true of a flippant repentance.

This repentance in verse 12 is not the repentance that occurs when a parent tells a child to apologize to his sibling. That sort of forced apology is almost always lacking in sincerity!

God is not commanding the people to **say** that they are sorry. Instead, God is commanding them to **be** sorry.

God commands them to "return to me with **all your heart**." This repentance involves more than just what they say; this repentance involves everything about them - it involves all their heart.

But isn't that always true? Isn't that always what God demands? Do we think God would ever accept a partial or half-hearted repentance? "Yes, I'm sorry about those sins over there, but I plan to continue with these sins over here." That is not repentance! That is not a return to God!

When we sin, and whatever that sin may be, our sin is an indication that we are not following the "great and first commandment."

**Matthew 22:37-38** - And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."

And so what must I do when I repent of that sin?  
I must renew my efforts to love the Lord my God  
with all my heart and with all my soul and with all  
my mind.

If I hold anything back, then I have not repented. It  
is impossible to love God with just some of my  
heart and with just some of my soul and with just  
some of my mind. That is not love!

That is why the command in verse 12 is to “return  
to me with **all** your heart.” That is the only way  
anyone can ever return to God. As the song says,  
“true-hearted, whole-hearted, faithful and loyal!”  
That must always be true about the people of God!

## Joel Lesson 16

### Joel 2:12-13, Continued

**Joel 2:12-13** - “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

Verse 11 ended with a question - **who can endure it?** As we saw last week, God answers that question in verses 12-13.

And, as we also saw last week, that little word “yet” at the beginning of verse 12 is the hinge of the book of Joel. Before that word, there is judgment and wrath, but after that word, there is hope and restoration.

The first thing God tells the people to do in verse 12 is to **return** or **repent**. We looked last week at what it means to repent. It is not just saying, “I’m sorry,” but rather it is truly turning back to God with everything about you — with your whole heart, as we read in verse 12.

God does not command the people to just say they are sorry or even just **be** sorry, God commands them to **show** that they are sorry.

And how do we know that such repentance has occurred? We can know by looking at the evidence.

Yes, only God can see our hearts, but everyone can see the evidence of our hearts. Our lives will show whether or not our repentance is genuine.

God commands both the inner change and the outer evidence of that change. But, of course, those changes do not occur independently. When the first change occurs (the commanded change to **be** sorry), then the second change will always follow (the commanded change to **show** that you are sorry).

True repentance will always be accompanied by external evidence.

**Matthew 3:8** - Bear fruit **in keeping with repentance**.

**Acts 26:20** - ...that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds **in keeping with their repentance**.

And what are those deeds? What is that evidence? Here in Joel 2 that evidence is fasting, weeping, and mourning.

And what do those three actions all have in common? They all involve **sorrow**.

While we know that fasting was not always associated with sorrow, we know that sometimes it was.

**2 Samuel 1:12** - And they **mourned** and **wept** and **fasted** until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

**Nehemiah 1:4** - As soon as I heard these words I sat down and **wept** and **mourned** for days, and I continued **fasting** and praying before the God of heaven.

I think that is also why we see fasting here - as an indication of sorrow.

And why do we see such sorrow? Because it shows that the people who are repenting here are aware of the depth and magnitude of their sin.

They are aware of what they have done to God, and they are sorrowful because of what they have done. They understand that they are presently living through the curses of Deuteronomy 28 because they have turned their back on God and on their covenant with God.

When we return to God, we experience great joy, but that great joy is preceded by great sorrow - what the Bible calls “godly grief.”



**2 Corinthian 7:9-10** - As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a **godly grief**, so that you suffered no loss through us. For **godly grief** produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

This sorrow in verse 12 is not worldly grief - this sorrow is godly grief. It is the grief that produces repentance and that always accompanies that repentance.

And, once again, we have a link with Acts 2, something we have already seen in Joel 2 and will certainly see again in Joel 2. Here the link with Acts 2 is this sorrow. We see this same sort of godly grief in Acts 2.

**Acts 2:37** - Now when they heard this **they were cut to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

And we also see that godly grief in another great prophecy involving Acts 2.

**Zechariah 12:10** - And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Pouring out a spirit of grace? Mourning and weeping bitterly? We see both of those things in Joel 2 and in Acts 2! Let's keep Zechariah 12 in mind as we proceed. (See [www.studyjoel.com](http://www.studyjoel.com) for a complete set of notes on Zechariah.)

Verse 13 continues this same thought: "**rend your hearts and not your garments.**"

What God is telling us here is that true repentance is something that happens on the inside rather than just on the outside.

While it is easy to put on a show and rend our garments, it is not as easy to rend our hearts. But God requires that we rend our hearts when we turn back to him. Our change must be on the inside, not just on the outside.

We are reminded of what God said through Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

**Jeremiah 4:3-4** - For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds."

**Ezekiel 36:26** - And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

These verses are all telling us the same thing: repentance is impossible for those with a hard heart.

**Jeremiah 5:3** - ...They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent.

**Psalms 51:17** - The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Verse 13 continues: **Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.**

What would the people find when they returned to God? Would they find someone who was reluctant to forgive them? Someone who wasn't really all that

sure he wanted them back at all? Someone who would enjoy telling them, “I told you so!” Someone with his hand on a trapdoor just looking for their next mistake?

No. Not at all. Instead, they would find a God who is gracious, who is merciful, who is slow to anger, and who is abounding in steadfast love.

And, of course, the same is true today.

**Hebrews 4:16** - Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

When someone returns to God, God runs to meet him!

**Luke 15:20** - And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And that is not just the God of the New Testament, as we sometimes hear. There is one God - and that one God is both the God of the New Testament and the God of the Old Testament. God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love - and that has always been true of God and will always be true of God.

**Malachi 3:6** - For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

We can learn about God from his word, and we can trust that what we will learn about God in the Bible has not changed and will not change. God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Verse 13 concludes: **And he relents over disaster.** Let's combine that phrase with verse 14 and consider them both together.

## Joel 2:14

**Joel 2:13b-14** - And he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

The end of verse 13 tells us that God relents over disaster. What does that mean?

The Hebrew word translated “relents” is the word *naham*. Let's start our investigation by looking at some other verses that contain that same Hebrew word.

**Genesis 6:6** - And the LORD **regretted** that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

**Exodus 32:14** - And the LORD **relented** from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

**1 Chronicles 21:15** - And God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, the LORD saw, and he **relented** from the calamity.

**Jeremiah 15:6** - You have rejected me, declares the LORD; you keep going backward, so I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you — I am weary of **relenting**.

**Jeremiah 26:19** - Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD **relent** of the disaster that he had pronounced against them?

**Amos 7:3** - The LORD **relented** concerning this: "It shall not be," said the LORD.

A moment ago we also read Malachi 3:6 - "For I the LORD do not change." How do we square that verse with the verses we just read, each which might suggest that God changed his mind about something?

Does God, who does not change, ever change his mind?

That is a tough question! But if we think that question is tough, things are about to get worse! What did God say to Samuel about King Saul?

**1 Samuel 15:11** - I **regret** that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.

But what did Samuel then say to King Saul about God?

**1 Samuel 15:28-29** - "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have **regret**, for he is not a man, that he should have **regret**."

If God never has regret, as we just read in verse 29 of 1 Samuel 15, then why did God say "I regret" in verse 11 of that same chapter?

As, I said, these are tough questions - really tough questions!

So, when faced with a tough question such as this one, here are our choices - we can tackle that question, or we can just skip over it. Which door should we choose? Door 1 or Door 2?

I have been a member of the Lord's church for over half a century, and do you know what my experience is? My experience is that we most often choose Door 2. When we get to a hard question, we just skip to the next verse. (If your experience has

been different, then that is wonderful, but mine has not.)

What is the biggest problem with skipping the hard parts when it comes to Bible study? In a word, the biggest problem is **credibility**. We lose credibility when we skip the hard questions.

I think most people understand that problem outside of a religious context. If you called a medical specialist for an appointment involving a difficult diagnosis, how would you react if you were told to call someone else because this particular specialist treats only easy diseases? How would you react to a tax lawyer who told you that he specializes in non-complicated tax questions?

If we spend all our time in the shallow end of the pool, people are going to start wondering whether or not we can swim! And maybe we can't if we never leave the baby pool!

And this is hardly a new problem. I think the writer of Hebrews faced this same problem long ago. In Hebrews 5, he was just about to answer all of our questions about the mysterious Melchizedek, but he didn't do that - why not?

**Hebrews 5:11-14** - About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

If we throw up our hands when we get to the hard questions, why should anyone trust our answers to the easy questions? When that medical specialist tells you to go elsewhere if you have a hard question - don't you think you would likely go elsewhere for **ALL** of your questions?

And do you know who will be the very first to question our credibility when we skip the hard questions? Our children.

In fact, very often they are the ones who are asking those hard questions. And when our children ask questions and get no answers, they will go elsewhere for answers - or worse, they will just quit asking those questions altogether!

So, I ask again - which door? The difficult door or the easy door?

Let's try that difficult door and do our best to rightly handle the word of truth! Isn't that what God **commands** us **all** to do?

**2 Timothy 2:15 - Do your best**  
to present yourself to God as  
one approved, a worker who has  
no need to be ashamed, rightly  
handling the word of truth.

So, then, once again, here is our question: **Does God ever change his mind?**

I think many people upon first hearing that question will immediately respond with an answer - either, "yes, of course God does," or "no, of course God does not."

Those in the "yes, of course" camp would likely point to verses such as the one we read earlier:

**1 Samuel 15:11** - "I regret that I  
have made Saul king..."

And that verse does seem pretty definitive!

But those in the "no, of course" camp would likely point to verses such as this one that we also read earlier:

**1 Samuel 15:29** - "And also the  
Glory of Israel will not lie or have  
regret, for he is not a man, that he  
should have regret."

And that verse also seems pretty definitive!

But maybe the answer is context. Are the contexts different? No. As we said a moment ago, those two verses are describing the same event in the same chapter. The context for each is the same.

We will look later at what I think is going on in those verses, but for now I think we can say this based on those two verses: this a difficult and complicated question, and a difficult and complicated question deserves much better than a knee-jerk, off-the-cuff answer such as "of course, he does" or "of course, he does not." Instead, we need to roll up our sleeves and dig deep in God's word.

Does God ever change his mind? We may after studying the Bible find that the answer is "yes" or we may find that the answer is "no," but I can guarantee that the answer to that question is not "yes, of course!" or "no, of course!"

And as we think about that one difficult question, we are quickly confronted with many other related and equally difficult questions:

- Does anything in the universe actually occur by chance, or is every event, no matter how seemingly minor, part of the preordained plan of God? I flip a coin - was the outcome of that coin flip determined before I was even born? Some would say yes.
- Does God know our actions and thoughts before we even do them or think them? If so, how long in advance does God know these things? Did God know all of my thoughts and all of my actions before I was born? Some would say yes.
- Do we have free will? Can a belief in free will be reconciled with a belief that every action and every thought we have ever had or will ever have were all known to God before we were born?
- Is it possible for God to create beings with free will and simultaneously know beforehand every action and every thought that those free will beings will ever do or think?
- And, most importantly, what does the Bible tell us about free will and God's foreknowledge? Does the Bible ever depict God as changing his mind? Does God ever speak about the future in terms of possibilities rather than in terms of certainties? Is God ever disappointed about how things turn



out? Does God ever experience regret? Does God ever experience surprise?

How are we to go about trying to answer those questions?

First, we must confront the possibility that some of these questions may be unanswerable.

We dislike labeling any question unanswerable, but it may be that we are just not in a position to answer some or all of these questions given what we are and where we are.

A famous mathematics book is entitled *Flatland*, and it deals with creatures that inhabit a two-dimensional world having width and height, but not depth. In effect, they are living on a sheet of paper. The book describes how such creatures would perceive other creatures such as ourselves who inhabit three spatial dimensions, and we quickly see in that book how there would be some things about the three-dimensional creatures that could never be explained to or understood by those two-dimensional creatures.

Now, I am certainly not suggesting that God occupies extra spatial dimensions because we know that God is spirit. But I am suggesting that we may be living in a **spiritual** flatland in which there are some things about the spiritual realm that can never be explained to us or understood by us while we live in this **physical** universe.

But, with that said, I think we need to avoid two pitfalls in looking for answers to these questions about God.

The first pitfall is **anthropomorphism**.

This pitfall leads to the danger of presumption. We tend to exaggerate our ability to understand God. We insist that God conform to our ideas about him and about his creation. We see God as being just like us.

The Bible condemns that view of God.

**Psalm 50:21** - These things you have done, and I have been silent; **you thought that I was one like yourself**. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.

The second pitfall is **agnosticism**.

This pitfall leads us to exaggerate our inability to understand God. We avoid studies such as this one because we view God as beyond all human thought.

The Bible also condemns that view. All throughout the Bible we find God telling us about himself through his word. We can know everything about God that is revealed to us in the word of God.

And, if it is possible to answer these questions, then those answers will be found only in the Bible. Not in science or philosophy or any human wisdom, but only in the word of God. If we are able to make any conclusions about these questions, those conclusions need to be based on chapter and verse.

Before we tackle the main question head-on (does God ever change his mind), let's start with a possibly easier related question: **what is free will?**

We are often told conflicting things about our free will. I think that most people would say that we have it, but some philosophers and theologians say that we do not.

The Texas criminal code certainly thinks that we have free will: "A person commits an offense only if he **voluntarily** engages in conduct, including an act, an omission, or possession."

But before we look at whether we have it, let's look at what it is - what is free will?

At the very least, free will requires an absence of external compulsion - my will must be **free**.

But free will requires more than just an absence of external compulsion. Free will also requires the presence of genuine alternatives.

I am perfectly free to live on any planet I want to live on!

Yes, but that decision has already been made for me, and there are no genuine alternatives. Living on planet earth is not my free will decision.

So what are we saying? We are saying this - to have free will, I must be able to act in a way that renders **definite** something that would otherwise be **indefinite**.

Choosing to live on planet Earth does not do that, but choosing to live in Houston does do that.

But now we are back to the big issue - what if everything is already **definite**? What if everything has already been determined? What if I am unable to render something definite that would otherwise be indefinite?

What if the fact that I live on planet Earth and live in Houston are in the same category? What if both were determined before I was even born as a part of some eternal unchanging plan? I think that is true of the "Earth" part. What if it is also true of the "Houston" part?

Then wouldn't I lack free will? Or at the very least, wouldn't my supposed free will just be an illusion?

**What does the Bible say about free will?** Do we have it?

Yes, we do. And I think we can see that by once again thinking about the Texas criminal code and comparing it with what we find in the Bible.

If I commit a voluntary action that is a crime in Texas, then I may face punishment for that action. Why? Because it was **voluntary**. I could have chosen not to do it. But I made the wrong choice and did it. And the state of Texas will hold me accountable for my voluntary actions.

What about God? Would God send me to Hell for effectively just reading a script that he wrote long before I was born? No. I think the Bible tells us that he would not.

**Ezekiel 18:20** - The soul who sins shall die.

**Romans 7:7** - What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet **if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin**. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

**Romans 4:15** - For the law brings wrath, **but where there is no law there is no transgression**.

**James 1:14-15** - But each person is **tempted** when he is lured and

enticed by **his own desire**. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

I sin when I am tempted by my desire to transgress the law of God and when that desire gives birth to that sin. That process in James 1:14-15 is describing a **voluntary** action, just like the Texas criminal code.

And it is that voluntary action that is the basis for the punishment. "The soul **who sins** shall die."

And we see that fact all throughout the Bible with many verses that directly call for people to make free will choices.

**Deuteronomy 30:19** - I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore **choose** life, that you and your offspring may live.

**Joshua 24:15** - And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, **choose** this day whom you will serve...

God commands me to choose? Do I have the ability to obey that command or not? If I do not have free will, then how can I choose anything?

God commands me to choose! How can that be the command if God has already made the choice for me?

But perhaps I just **think** that I have free will.

Perhaps the answer is that God knows everything I will ever do and ever think, but I don't know all of those things yet. So maybe it just seems to me that I have free will even though God has a hidden copy of the script that I am performing on the stage that he created.

In short, did God really create people with free will or did God just create people who think they have free will?

Is free will an illusion? Some would say yes, but how can free will be an illusion when Hell is not? We are

held eternally accountable for our choices in this life - how is that just if our free will is an illusion? How is that just if we, in fact, made no choices in this life because those choices had already been made.

Do we prosecute an actor for playing a criminal in a movie? How can God prosecute us if we are simply actors in a movie that he wrote long ago?

Well, maybe that question about free will wasn't as easy as we thought it would be! So let's come back to it later and look now at another issue - the omniscience of God.

And I think one thing we can say right from the start is that these issues are NOT about the omniscience of God. Everyone who believes the Bible agrees that God is omniscient.

**Psalm 147:5** - Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.

**Hebrews 4:13** - And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

**1 John 3:20** - For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, **and he knows everything**.

But what does it mean to be omniscient?

Yes, it means that God knows everything as 1 John 3:20 tells us, but I think that has to mean that God knows everything **that is knowable**.

And why must it mean that? Because if there are some things that are not knowable, then **by definition** God does not know those things, because if God knew them, then they would not be unknowable. God knows everything that is knowable.

Now, it may be the case that nothing is unknowable, but that is a different question. For now, I think we can say that God knows everything that can be

known - that is what it means to be omniscient. God knows everything that is knowable.

So, if we were to conclude that some future events are not knowable prior to their occurrence, then it would not contradict the omniscience of God to say that God does not know those **unknowable** future events.

Yes, God is omniscient, but God is also omnipotent. Can an omnipotent God create free will human beings who are able to sometimes surprise him with what they do or with what they think? Do we see any examples of that in the Bible?

I think we will see later that there are some suggestions of that in the Bible, but for now let's ask this question: why would there be such events? Why would there be unknowable future events?

About five years ago, I was walking in the parking garage at work very early in the morning, and I slipped on some painted concrete, breaking my wrist in several places.

Was it God's will that I brake my wrist that morning? I don't think so.

But I do know something that was most definitely God's will that morning - it was God's will that I live in a universe that operates according to the law of gravity.

And do you know what? There are consequences to the law of gravity, and one of those consequences is that we sometimes brake bones due to the effects of gravity.

I don't think my broken wrist was the will of God, but I do think it was a **consequence** of the will of God.

Now, that is what happens with God's creation of gravity. Let's look next at another of God's creations - free will.

God created an entire world that is now populated by billions of people with free will. Billions of people with an ability to make choices. Are there any consequences of that? Gravity has consequences. Does free will have any consequences?

We know that it does. Evil is a consequence of free will. Evil is not the will of God, but evil is a consequence of the will of God.

God could have created robots who would never make a wrong choice, but God did not do that. In fact, the Bible opens with a wrong choice made by the free will humans that God had just created - and there have been many more wrong choices after that one.

Those wrong choices were not the will of God - but they were a consequence of the will of God. God cannot make free will humans who lack free will! And once we have free will, wrong choices will follow as a consequence.

So, back to our question - why would there be unknowable future events? If there are such things, then perhaps they, too, are a consequence of free will.



## Joel Lesson 17

## Joel 2:13b-14, Continued

### Some Comments on the Handout for Lesson 17

Let's look at some fascinating statistics about the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

The book of Acts contains nearly 20% of all direct references to the Holy Spirit in the entire Bible. Think about that for a moment - one book contains one-fifth of all direct mentions of the Holy Spirit! And when we look at those words and phrases about the Holy Spirit that we saw in the Lesson 16 Handout, Acts contains nearly 25% of those as well.

But what about the books that never mention the Holy Spirit directly? While quite a few Old Testament books lack direct references (which I found quite surprising), only three New Testament books are silent on the Spirit: Philemon, 2 John, and 3 John. Of course, those are also the shortest books in the New Testament, so perhaps that's not too surprising.

Here's something that really caught my attention: 70% of those words and phrases about the Holy Spirit appear in only one passage in the entire Bible. Take words like "quench" or "glorify" - they appear in exactly one context when discussing the Spirit.

What does that tell us? I think it shows us that God rarely uses repetition when teaching us about the Holy Spirit. Instead, each passage seems to offer us a new way to look at the Holy Spirit's nature and work.

And what about the most common words used in relation to the Holy Spirit? The terms "speak," "spoke," "said," "says," and "saying" appear 19 times - but here's the fascinating part: every single one of these occurrences is in the New Testament, with Mark containing the first instance.

As we prepare to study Joel 2 and its connection to Acts 2, please continue studying the material on our Holy Spirit Handouts!

**Joel 2:13b-14** - And he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

Last week we started looking at that final statement in verse 13: "And he relents over disaster."

And we started with a tough question: Does God ever change his mind? We saw some verses that might suggest yes, and we saw some verses that might suggest no.

Related to whether God ever changes his mind, we looked at some other tough questions: Does anything happen by chance or is everything predetermined by God? Does God know all our thoughts and actions in advance? Do we have free will, and if so, how does that square with God's foreknowledge?

So what about free will? What is it? We said last week that free will requires at least two things: an absence of external compulsion and genuine alternatives from which to choose. Many verses show that God expects us to make real choices, which means that we must have free will. Our eternal destiny depends on our free will choices in this life.

We also looked at God's omniscience. To be omniscient means God knows everything that is knowable. So if future free will choices are inherently unknowable, then that would not negate God's omniscience. Evil and unknowable future events may be consequences of free will, just as broken bones are consequences of gravity.

Yes, God knows everything that is knowable, but what if God has created a universe for his free will creatures in which the future actions and future thoughts of those free will creatures are not knowable, or at least not always knowable, before they occur?

Do such events exist? Events that are unknowable before they actually occur? Is that what it means to have free will?

What does the Bible say?

In answering that question, we will find that there are two primary viewpoints about what the Bible teaches on the subject: the Closed View and the Open View.

Let's start with **the Closed View**.

The Closed View of the future says that the future consists exclusively of things that are settled.

Under the Closed View, the definiteness of every event - the fact that it will occur this way and not any other way - eternally precedes the actual occurrence of that event.

Under the Closed View, the future contains no possibilities but instead contains only certainties. It may look to us that the future contains possibilities, but that is only because of our limited knowledge.

Under the Closed View, God is unchanging in every respect. Not only his nature and his character, but also his will, his knowledge, and his experience - they are all unchanging. They are all what they are from all eternity, and so God's knowledge of the future is likewise unchanging - under the Closed View, God can learn nothing new because to do so would mean that God had changed.

Under the Closed View, whatever takes place in history, from events of great significance to the buzzing of a fly, must take place exactly as God eternally foreknew it would take place before the universe was ever created.

Under the Closed View, the reason we do not know the future is not that it cannot be known but rather only because we are not in a position to know it.

Here is how one author describes the Closed View:

"In **one unchangeable glance** God contemplates every being, every truth, every possible real object. This knowledge is an eternal intuition before which the past and the future are as real as the present, but each for that portion of time in which it really exists. God encompasses all time and therefore can know the future

as infallibly as he knows the present."

And listen to what John Calvin wrote:

"We call predestination **God's eternal decree**, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death."

God's eternal decree? One unchangeable glance? That is how the Closed View is described.

And, yes, that was Calvin's view - but let's not taint it with that association, at least not yet. Maybe Calvin got something right!

Our question about the Closed View is this - does that view of God and the future agree with how God and the future are described in the Bible?

Do any scriptures support the Closed View?

Proponents of that view answer yes, and they point to verses such as these:

**Isaiah 46:9-10** - Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'

**Isaiah 48:3-5** - "The former things I declared of old; they went out from my mouth, and I announced them; then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. ... I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you..."

**Psalm 139:16** - Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Proponents of the Closed View also point to the many examples of God's foreknowledge in the Bible.

- Josiah and Cyrus were described and even named prior to their births (1 Kings 13:2-3; 2 Kings 22:1; 23:15-16; Isaiah 44:28).
- Peter was told that he would deny Christ three times, and he was also told how he would die (Matthew 26:34; John 21:18-19).
- Jesus knew from the first that Judas would betray him (John 6:64).
- Jeremiah and Paul were set apart prior to their births (Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15-16).
- Daniel includes remarkable detailed prophecies in Daniel 11 about what would occur in the six hundred years between his time and the first century.

And, of course, there are many other detailed prophecies in the Bible. But there is a logical problem with this argument. These verses are not sufficient to establish that the Closed View is the correct view.

Why not? Because if we reject the Closed View, then that does not mean we believe that nothing in history is foreknown by God. The Bible very clearly teaches just the opposite - we just listed some examples of God's foreknowledge of the future, and we could have listed many more.

But that does not mean the Closed View is the correct view. Why not? Because the Closed View goes far beyond just saying that God can foresee future events. Under the Closed View, it is not just that **some** future events are foreknown by God, but rather it is that **everything** that happens is foreknown by God. And, logically, that proposition cannot be established just by showing that **some** things are foreknown by God.

That passage from Isaiah 46 that we just quoted is a good example of the difference. Immediately after telling us in Isaiah 46:10 that he declares the end from the beginning, God tell us that he will accomplish his purposes.

One way that God knows that certain future events will occur is because God knows his purpose to bring those things about. Isaiah 46:11 (the very next verse, which I did not quote earlier) is even more emphatic: "I have spoken, and **I will bring it to pass**; I have purposed, and **I will do it**."

What these verses tell us is something we already knew - the future is settled to whatever extent God decides to settle it.

**Romans 9:15-16** - For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

God is not at the mercy of random chance or free will. If God wants to step in and determine some future event, then that event will happen precisely as God has determined that it will happen.

But is that true of **every** future action? Is that true of everything I will ever do and everything I will ever think? Is that true of every choice I will ever make? Will they all happen precisely as God determined that they would happen before I was born? All pre-determined, pre-known, and pre-ordained by God?

The Closed View says yes, but the Open View says no.

Under the Open View, God pre-determines some, but not all, future events.

If God foreknows a future event (and there are many such examples in the Bible), then I think we can say that the event will come to pass either because God will step in and make that event come to pass or because that event is an inevitable result of prior events. Either way, that event can be foreseen by God and proclaimed in advance by the prophets of God.

And I think we have examples of each in the Bible.



The establishment of the kingdom of Christ in Acts 2 is an example of a future event that occurred because God stepped in and did it. God told us when it would happen (Daniel 2), where it would happen (Isaiah 2), and how it would happen (Joel 2). And that event happened in Acts 2 where, when, and how God had told us it would happen.

And I think we also have an example of an event that happened as an inevitable result of prior events.

Can anyone read the Old Testament and then come away surprised when the first century Jews rejected and killed Christ? Hadn't the Jews done the same thing to the prophets? Didn't they, in fact, admit that themselves?

**Matthew 23:29-31** - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

Yes, it was certain that Jesus would be crucified (Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53), but we know that the Jews were not forced by God to do that. We know that they instead did that of their own free will.

And how do we know that? We know that because those who crucified Jesus were charged by Peter with that crime in Acts 2:36, and some of them repented for having done it.

It is a bit beyond our topic here to discuss whether God ever overrides our free will, but there is some evidence in the Bible that such might have occurred. But I think we can say that if God has ever done that, God would not then hold that person responsible for what God forced that person to do.

And so, was Judas forced to betray Christ? Was Peter forced to betray Christ? Were the Jews forced to crucify Christ? I don't see how if Judas, Peter, and the Jews were charged with those sins. And we

know that some of them repented - why repent for something you were forced to do?

That they were charged with sin and repented of sin tells us that what they did was a voluntary action on their part. And yet that voluntary action was pre-known and pre-determined by God.

But if God did not force them to crucify Christ, then how could that event have been pre-known and pre-determined? I think it was because that event was an inevitable result of prior events.

We need to remember that God made us. God knows us better than we know us. God knows every thought we have ever had and every action we have ever done. And I don't think we are that hard to predict! And especially so when we work as a group. Do we think there ever was any doubt or uncertainty about how the Pharisees as a group would respond to Christ?

And so, let's say it again, if God foreknows a future event, then I think that occurs either because God has determined that the event will happen in a certain way or because that event is an inevitable result of prior events.

Either way, I think we can say that the future is settled when it comes to such events. But again, we are back to our earlier question - does every future event fall into one of those categories? Is every future event settled? Not just as to what the Pharisees as a group would think and do, but as to what each particular Pharisee would think and do? What I will think and do? What you will think and do? Was that all settled before creation?

The Closed View says yes. The Open View says no.

The Open View says that the future consists of both unsettled possibilities and settled certainties.

Under this view, if God does not know our future free actions, then it is not because God's knowledge of the future is in some way incomplete, but rather it is because there is nothing definite yet for God to know. It is because those future free actions are not yet knowable.

The central thesis of the Open View is that God experiences some events of the world that he created as those events happen rather than all at once in some sort of timeless, eternal perception.



Under the Open View, our future actions and thoughts are at present not knowable (even though as an individual I may be quite predictable, and as a group we may be perfectly predictable).

Otherwise, the Open View says, the idea of free will is meaningless. It doesn't exist, and so we don't have it. We are instead effectively just acting out a script that was written by God long ago.

That is what the Open View says, but what does the Bible say?

Does God know my thoughts **before** I think them? Or does God know my thoughts **when** I think them?

**Luke 5:21-22** - And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" **When Jesus perceived their thoughts**, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts?"

**Mark 2:8** - And immediately Jesus, **perceiving in his spirit** that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts?"

What do those verses tell us? That Jesus knew their thoughts **before** they had them? Or that Jesus knew their thoughts **when** they had them? I think it is the latter. Luke tell us that Jesus **perceived** their thoughts.

That tells us that Jesus knew what they were thinking as soon as they starting thinking it - even before those thoughts reached their lips (Psalm 139:4). Jesus was able to look into their minds and perceive their thoughts. We can't do that, but Jesus could do that.

But if Jesus already knew those thoughts, then why do those verses use the word "perceive"? I may think that I know the sun has risen today, but the only way I can perceive the rising of the sun is by looking at its light or by feeling its heat. That is was it means to perceive something.

And what about all of those conditional prophesies and promises in the Bible?

Under the Closed View, there could never be a truly conditional prophecy because God must have known at the time of every conditional prophecy which path would be taken.

Under the Closed View, for example, God knew all along that Nineveh would repent when Jonah came and preached to them.

But is that what the Bible says? Is that how the Bible describes what happened? In a word, no. It is not.

**Jonah 3:10** - When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Did you catch it? "When God **saw**." When God perceived! God changed his mind about Nineveh **when** he **saw** what they did. Is there any other way to read Jonah 3:10?

But, some might say, that is just how the Bible uses our own experience and understanding to try and explain to use the mysterious working of God. He doesn't really see anything or change his mind about anything, but the Bible uses language like that because we cannot understand how God really operates.

I have two responses to that objection.

First, we can understand anything about God that is revealed to us in the word of God. Yes, there are some thing about God that I cannot understand or know, but I can both understand and know everything revealed to us in the Bible about God. And Jonah 3:10 is a verse in that Bible.

And second, if the Closed View is correct, then it is very difficult for me to understand how or why Jonah 3:10 would have been written that way in an attempt to explain the Closed View to us. Why? Because the language in Jonah 3:10 is the opposite of the Closed View!

The Closed View tells us that God never learns anything, but Jonah 3:10 tells us that he does.

The Closed View tells us that God never changes his mind about anything, but Jonah 3:10 tells us that he does.

If the intent of Jonah 3:10 was to explain the mysterious working of a God who never learns anything and never changes his mind, why would the verse do that by showing us a God who sometimes learns things and sometimes changes his mind?

Under the Open View, the difference between the past and the future is that, while the past is entirely definite, the future is only partially definite. The future is partially open and partially closed. The closed part is definite and knowable, but the open part is not.

And, as for the closed part of the future, God, of course, knows all there is to know about it. God knows all that is knowable about the past and about the future. But while everything about the past is knowable, that is not true about everything in the future. Our thoughts, for example, are not knowable before we have them.

And, again, that is a consequence of God's creation of free will just as much as broken bones are a consequence of God's creation of gravity.

And we should emphasize that the word "unknowable" is important here.

The Open View is not saying that God could know the future actions and thoughts of his free will creatures, but that instead God has chosen to remain ignorant of certain future events. That view would contradict the omniscience of God. For God to be all-knowing, God must know all that is knowable, and any idea of selective divine ignorance would mean that God does not know all that is knowable.

We have looked at Jonah, but now let's expand our scope a bit. What else does the Bible say? What does the Bible tell us about how God views and experiences the future?

**The Bible tells us that sometimes God regrets how things turn out.**

In Genesis 6:5-6, we see that God once regretted that he made man at all.

**Genesis 6:5** - The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

Doesn't the fact that God regretted the way things turned out - even to the point of starting over - suggest that it was not a foregone conclusion at the time of creation that man would fall into such a terrible state of wickedness?

Isn't that what it means to regret an earlier decision? If we regret an earlier choice then doesn't that mean that things turned out different from what we had expected or hoped?

And look at the end of Genesis 6:6 - "it grieved him to his heart." Was that true or not? Was God really grieved to his his heart by how things had turned out?

Why do I ask? I ask because I don't see how the Closed View could ever be reconciled with that statement about God! How could God ever grieve about anything under the Closed View? He wrote the script! He planned every detail long before any of it ever occurred! How can he grieve about it?

If God never wanted to experience regret or grief, then he could have created programmed robots without free will, but that is not what God did. Instead, God created free will beings, and in doing so God, as a consequence of his creation, gave up some control.

Yes, I know that we sometimes sing a song entitled "Lord, Take Control," but we shouldn't sing it. Why not? Because when we sing that song we are asking God to take back his great gift of free will.

Listen to the words: "My heart, my mind, my body, my soul, I give to you, take control. I give my body, a living sacrifice. Lord, take control, take control." Is that really our prayer to God? Please make me a robot? Jesus, take the wheel?

Yes, 2 Corinthians 5:14 says that the love of Christ controls us, but that is better translated "compels us" or "presses us," but however it is translated

being motivated by the love of Christ is very different from asking God to take control.

In fact, when we search the Bible for the word “control,” we find that word used 23 times in the New Testament to describe our own self-control. We are commanded to control ourselves. So why then are we asking God by that song to control us?

And why is it that we are able to control ourselves? Free will. That’s why. That’s how. We have been given free will by God. Let’s not ask God to take it back! Instead, let’s use our free will to control ourselves and make the choices that God wants us to make.

### **The Bible tells us that God sometimes asks questions about the future.**

In Numbers 14:11, God asks Moses, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?”

In 1 Kings 22:20, God asks, “Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?”

Some suggest that these questions are just rhetorical, and perhaps they are. But is that true of all of God’s questions? Or does God sometimes wonder about the future actions of his free will creatures?

Under the Open View, it is possible for God to genuinely wonder and ask about how things will turn out - as evidenced by numerous questions in the Bible where he appears to do exactly that.

### **The Bible tells us that God sometimes confronts the unexpected.**

In Isaiah 5:1-5, we read that God once planted a vineyard and was surprised to find that wild grapes had grown up inside it.

**Isaiah 5:1-5** - Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes,

but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? **When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?** And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

Did God look for that vineyard to yield good grapes or wild grapes? Listen to it again: “When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?” How could God ever have looked for it to yield good grapes if he knew before he even planted the vineyard that it would yield wild grapes?

Don’t we see surprise? Don’t we see something unexpected? God planted one thing, but got something else. And God wonders why. “When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?”

Don’t those verses tell us that the sad state of Israel at that time was not a preordained certainty, but instead was a possibility that did not become a certainty until the free will decisions of Israel made it so?

And if the future is entirely in the mind of God in every respect, then wouldn’t it follow that God made a mistake when he expected things to occur other than how they actually occurred? If God knew the vineyard would yield wild grapes, then how could God ever have expected or even hoped that it would do otherwise?

### **The Bible tells us that men sometimes did things that had never even entered the mind of God.**

Yes, I gave you free will, but I never thought you would do that! In fact, it never even entered my mind that anyone would ever do that!

Does God ever think that way about us? The Bible says that he does.

**Jeremiah 7:31** - And they have built the high places of Topheth,



which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, **nor did it come into my mind.**

**Jeremiah 19:5** - And have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, **nor did it come into my mind.**

**Jeremiah 32:35** - They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, **nor did it enter into my mind**, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

How are we to understand those verses?

Are they simply idioms of some sort intended to show us the terrible extent of man's depravity, or did the depths of man's depravity in sacrificing their own children by burning them alive truly not enter God's mind when he made mankind?

Look at those verses again. Don't we see shock and surprise by God at what people would do? "Nor did it come into my mind."

Yes, I created you with free will - but it never entered my mind that you would choose to murder your own children! That you would burn them alive as a sacrifice to a false god! I never thought that you would do such a thing!

How can those verses possibly be reconciled with the Closed View of the future? How can something not have entered the mind of God if it was, in fact, in the mind of God from all eternity?

**The Bible tells us that God sometimes gets frustrated.**

In Exodus 4:10-15, Moses tells God that he cannot go to Egypt and do what God wants because he is

slow of speech. And, in verse 14, we see where the anger of God was kindled against Moses.

Did God know beforehand how Moses would respond? If so, wouldn't God's anger have also occurred beforehand? In fact, if Moses' response had been known to God prior to the creation of the world (and, in particular, prior to the creation of Moses), then why was God angry at all in Exodus 4?

In Ezekiel 22, we read where God sought for a man to stand in the gap, and yet could find no such person.

**Ezekiel 22:30** - And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.

God says that he "sought for a man among them." Could God have sincerely sought for someone to stand in the gap if he already knew that none would be found? Why look for something that you already know is not there?

And, if God already knew that such a person did not exist, then why not just say that? What not say, "I know that there is no such person among you who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land." Why instead say, "I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land."

I mean, if the Closed View is the correct view, then why does God explain things in the way that he does? Why look for people? Why get angry after they say something? Why say that what they did never entered his mind? Why say that he has changed his mind and will not do what he earlier said he would do?

Under the Closed View, all of that is just God's way of telling us that he knew all of those things all along. But then why not say that? Is that so hard to understand that we need some obscure anthropomorphisms to understand it? Why not just tell us that he had known it all along and so was not really surprised or angry when it happened?

**The Bible tells us that God sometimes speaks in terms of what may be or may not be.**



In Exodus 4:1-9, God told Moses that the Egyptians might listen to him.

**Exodus 4:8-9** - "If they will not believe you," God said, "or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

Notice that God twice says "if they will not believe you." Under the Closed View of the future, shouldn't God have said "**when** they will not believe you"? How can there ever be any "if" in the mind of God under the Closed View? And yet God sometimes says "if" in the Bible.

**The Bible sometimes shows God speaking about the future in conditional terms.**

In Exodus 13, God chose a certain route for the exodus because of what the Israelites might have done otherwise.

**Exodus 13:17** - When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "**Lest the people change their minds** when they see war and return to Egypt."

Don't we see God in that verse considering the **possibility** - but not the **certainty** - that the Israelites would change their minds if they faced battle?

God made similar statements to both Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

**Ezekiel 12:3** - As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. **Perhaps they**

**will understand**, though they are a rebellious house.

**Jeremiah 26:3** - It may be they **will listen**, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may relent of the disaster that I intend to do to them because of their evil deeds.

When God gave Jeremiah and Ezekiel their assignments, doesn't it seem from those verses that there was at least a **possibility** that the people would heed their warnings? If not, then how do we explain these statements by God to the contrary?

"Perhaps they will understand." "It may be they will listen." Are those statements true or not? Perhaps they will understand? They may listen?

Under the Closed View, whether or not they would listen or understand was pre-determined by God and known by God before the world was created - how then could God say "they may listen" if in fact he already knew that they would not listen?

Did God tell the prophets these things just so that they would not be discouraged? "Ezekiel, go preach even though no will understand you." "Jeremiah, go prophecy even though no one will listen to you." Did God give them a glimmer of hope even though he already knew how their message would be received?

That seems to be the only option under the Closed View, but I think that option runs afoul of something else we know about God - "it is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18).

**The Bible tells us that God does not want anyone to perish - and yet many will perish.**

2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

How can God wish for something to be one way if God has known for all eternity that it will be some other way? How can God's will be my salvation if my damnation has been known to him from before the dawn of time?

Why, as Paul writes in Romans 10:21, does God ever say, "all day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people"? Why is

God holding out his hands to people whom he has predestined to Hell?

The Bible also suggests in Revelation 3:5 that some will have their names blotted out of the book of life.

How can the book of life ever be changed if the Closed View of the future is the correct view? Under the Closed View, isn't the book of life written with indelible ink? And weren't those names written in that book long before the creation of the world? How that can book be changed under the Closed View?

**The Bible tells us that God sometimes changes his mind or at least considers changing his mind.**

This is the question that got us started, and I think we now know the answer to it. Yes, God sometimes change his mind. And how do we know that? We know because God tells us. And we know that because we can see examples of it in the Bible.

In 2 Kings 20:1-6, God told Hezekiah that he would not recover from his illness but that he would instead die. Hezekiah pleaded with God, and God changed his mind and added 15 years to Hezekiah's life.

**2 Kings 20:1-6** - In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, **for you shall die; you shall not recover.**'" Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, "Now, O LORD, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: **I have heard your prayer; I have seen**

**your tears. Behold, I will heal you.** On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, and **I will add fifteen years to your life.** I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake."

Jeremiah later encouraged the fatalistic Israelites by reminding them of this very event.

**Jeremiah 26:19** - Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster upon ourselves.

If God cannot change his mind, then how can we possibly explain these verses?

Was God not sincere when he told Hezekiah in verse 1 that he would die soon. Look again at what God said to him: "Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover."

You shall die. You shall not recover. Was that God's will in verse 1 or was it not? And, if it was, then didn't God change his will in response to Hezekiah's prayer? God told Hezekiah that he would not recover, and yet Hezekiah recovered. God told Hezekiah that he would die, and yet he did not die at that time.

How else can we explain that?

Some might say that verse 1 was a conditional statement - you will die unless you ask me to save your life. But where is that in verse 1? "You shall die; you shall not recover."

And if God always knew that Hezekiah would live another 15 years, then how could God tell Isaiah in verse 6 that he would **ADD** 15 years to Hezekiah's life? Doesn't that word "add" tell us that the day of Hezekiah's death had been determined by God in verse 1? And that God then **added** 15 years to that date?

And there are many other examples:

**1 Chronicles 21:15** - And God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, the LORD saw, and he **relented** from the calamity.

**Exodus 32:14** - And the LORD **relented** from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

**Jeremiah 26:2-3** - Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the LORD all the words that I command you to speak to them; do not hold back a word. It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may **relent** of the disaster that I intend to do to them because of their evil deeds.

And we looked at the example in Jonah earlier.

**Jonah 3:10** - When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God **relented** of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

And we could point to many other examples.

- In Ezekiel 4:9-15, God changes his mind with regard to a source of fuel in response to a request from Ezekiel.
- In Amos 7:1-6, God changes his mind with regard to judgments against Israel in response to a request from Amos.

## Joel Lesson 18

### Joel 2:13b-14, Continued

**Joel 2:13b-14** - And he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

We are now in our third and final class about the short but difficult phrase at the end of verse 13 - "and he relents over disaster."

Does God ever change his mind? That is the question we have been looking at very carefully, and last week we saw that there are two main views: the Closed View and the Open View.

Under the Closed View, whatever takes place in history, from events of great significance to the buzzing of a fly, must take place exactly as God eternally foreknew it would take place before the universe was ever created.

But, under the Open View, God pre-knows some, but not all, future events. Under the Open View, there are some future events that are not knowable in advance, and so God does not know them. That is what it means to be unknowable - no one knows them. If there are such events, then perhaps they are a consequence of the free will that God has given each of us.

When God does foreknow a future event, then that is either because God will step in and make that event come to pass or because that event is an inevitable result of prior events.

We talked about all of that last week, and when we ended we were looking at many verses in the Bible that seem very hard to explain under the Closed View - such as God regretting that he had made man or that he had made Saul king, such as God changing his mind about Nineveh, such as God extending Hezekiah's life 15 years after he had earlier told Hezekiah that he would not recover, and such as God saying that the possibility of child sacrifice had not even entered his mind.

How does the Closed View crowd explain these examples?

They say that these verses are just figurative and should not be taken as literal descriptions of God - and yet what is the basis for that conclusion?

Where in the Bible do we ever see any indication that we cannot learn about the nature of God from reading about how God operates in this world? If we can learn about God from his creation (Romans 1:20), then of course we can learn even more about God from his word.

But with regard to the Closed View, there is a very important issue we must consider at this point. What about those verses that say God does not or perhaps cannot change his mind?

**1 Samuel 15:29** - And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.

**Malachi 3:6** - For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

**Hebrews 13:8** - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Aren't those verses a problem for the Open View? Aren't those verses a problem for the idea that God sometimes changes his mind?

To answer those questions, let's look at the context of those verses.

As for that verse from 1 Samuel 15, the immediate context shows God regretting that he had ever made Saul king at all. In fact, in 1 Samuel 15:11, God said "**I regret** that I have made Saul king."

What happened next after God said that? What happened next is that Samuel prayed all night in response to what God had just said about King Saul, seemingly in an attempt to change God's mind.

But when the morning came, I think Samuel understood that God would not change his mind about Saul - not that God **could** not change his mind, but that God **would** not change his mind.



Yes, a man might have had changed his mind about Saul some evening, but then might have forgotten about it the next morning - or perhaps might have changed his mind back the next morning. But that is what a man might have done - that is not what God would do. God would not change his mind one day and then change it back the next day like a man might have done.

I think when we read 1 Samuel 15:29 in the context of 1 Samuel 15:11, we can see that that is what verse 29 is telling us. I think the message of that verse is that, unlike with men, God cannot be cajoled into changing his mind on a whim. When God changes his mind, God does so only for reasons that are consistent with God's unchanging character.

And I think other verses support that view. For example:

**Ezekiel 24:14** - I am the LORD. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. **I will not go back; I will not spare; I will not relent;** according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord GOD."

In that verse, God says that he will not change his mind. But doesn't the need for God to make that statement suggest that God **could** change his mind? God does not say, "I **cannot** relent." Instead, God says, "I **will not** relent."

I think the point of these verses is not that God is unable to change his mind, but rather is that God is totally unlike men. Unlike men, God does not change his mind when it is profitable or change his mind for the sake of convenience - both of which were common for the false prophets and are still common today. That is how men operate, but that is not how God operates.

Finally, Hebrews 13 does tell us that Jesus is always the same - but how are we to understand that verse when we see all of the things that Jesus did throughout his life here on earth and when we read about Jesus' changing roles as he ascends back to Heaven to reign over his kingdom and one day deliver that kingdom to God?

Yes, Hebrews 13:8 tells us that Jesus is always the same, but Hebrews 5:8 tells us that Jesus "**learned** obedience through what he suffered." We need to understand both verses in a way that is free of contradiction.

What never changes about Jesus and what can never change about Jesus is Jesus' holy and divine character. We can trust Jesus because we know that his word to us and his love for us are unchanging. We can rely on Jesus because we know that his character and his nature will never change. I think that is the point of Hebrews 13:8.

There is another passage from the Bible that we should consider in this study, and that is Jeremiah 18:1-12. Those verses provide a remarkable commentary on the issues we have been considering.

In those verses, we read where Israel had heard that God was planning on punishing them for their wickedness, and so they had then wrongly assumed that there was no hope. If God had said that he would punish them, then they reasoned that there was nothing they could do about it - so why not just then continue in their wickedness?

To correct that false fatalistic thinking, God told Jeremiah to go to a potter's house to watch a potter at work.

**Jeremiah 18:3-10** - So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. **If** at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and **if** that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from

its evil, I will **relent** of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And **if** at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and **if** it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will **relent** of the good that I had intended to do to it.

Paul later picks up this same analogy.

**Romans 9:21-23** - Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory

Many who adopt the Closed View of the future read those verses to say that God exercises unilateral control over us, but that is precisely the opposite of what is being said in Jeremiah 18 and Romans 9. As the potter is willing to revise his plans after his first plan is spoiled, so God is willing to revise his plan when the circumstances call for it.

Yes, there are certainties in the future. It was certain that Christ would come and die; it was certain that his church would be established; it is certain that this world will someday end with a day of judgment.

But that there are certainties in the future does not mean that every future event falls into that same category. God is the potter; we are the clay. And God is willing to continue working with us until we become what he wants us to become.

And, how do we explain prayer under the Closed View of the future?

If every outcome is already recorded somewhere, then what good does it do to pray for some specific outcome?

If the outcome is known to God before we pray for it to occur otherwise, then how could God ever be said to answer our prayer one way or the other? How could our prayer ever change anything?

Under the Closed View, wouldn't our prayers be like someone watching a Shakespearean tragedy written 400 years ago and praying to God that it will have a happy ending? "God, please let Hamlet live!" Does that make any sense?

Is that how prayer is described in the Bible? I don't think so. The Bible tells us that God sometimes reverses his planned course of action based on prayer. We certainly saw that with the 15 years added to King Hezekiah's life.

And what about Elijah?

**James 5:17-18** - Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Were that drought and that rain going to happen whether or not Elijah prayed for them to happen? If so, then in what way is Elijah a great example of the power of prayer?

So where are we? What can we conclude about these issues?

Where we are is still in Joel 2:13-14!

"And he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?"

And the question that started this off remains - does God ever change his mind?

The answer is simple under the Closed View. If God does not and cannot change in any respect, then, of course, God does not ever change his mind.

But I think that view is wrong. I think the Bible tells us that God does sometimes change his mind. I think that is what we have seen in the verses we have just studied. And I think that is what we see here in Joel 2:13 - "And he relents over disaster."

And if God changes his mind, doesn't that tell us that there are some things about the future that are unknowable before they happen - such as the thoughts of free will human beings? Isn't the only reason to change your mind because you have learned something new - something you did not know earlier?

Either way we go with this question, I think we need to avoid simplistic answers. There is nothing simple here. As we said at the beginning, we cannot answer these questions from the shallow end of the pool. Let me give two complicated examples to demonstrate that fact.

If you spend much time thinking about these issues, it is examples such as these two that will keep you up at night!

**The first complicated example involves God's rejection of King Saul, which we looked at last week.**

We know that God chose King Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Samuel 10:1). And we know that King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Samuel 9:21). And we also know God's promise to King Saul through the prophet Samuel.

**1 Samuel 13:13-14** - And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. **For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.** But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

Samuel said, "For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever." But how then do we explain God's earlier promise to Judah through his father Jacob?

**Genesis 49:10** - **The scepter shall not depart from Judah**, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

How could the scepter never depart from the tribe of **Judah** if the royal line would be from the tribe of **Benjamin** forever? That's a good question! Let's come back to it later.

**The second complicated example is no easier, and it involves God's extension of King Hezekiah's life, which we also looked at last week.**

In 2 Kings 20:1, God said to Hezekiah, "Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover." But Hezekiah prayed to God, and, as a result, he did recover, and God added 15 years to his life. Keep that number 15 in mind.

After those 15 years were up, Hezekiah died in 2 Kings 20:21. And who reigned next?

**2 Kings 21:1** - Manasseh was **twelve** years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem.

Manasseh was one of the most evil kings who ever lived, even to the point of burning his son as an offering to his false gods in 2 Kings 21:6.

But notice how old he was when he started to reign - he was 12 years old. What that means is that Manasseh would never have been born had Hezekiah not had those 15 years added to his life.

Now we might say that is lesson about watching we ask for, but let's not be too quick to say that. Why? Because not only would we have missed out on Manasseh, we would also have missed out on Manasseh's grandson - Josiah!

In the annals of godly teenagers, King Josiah deserves a place along side Daniel, another godly teenager who was born not long after Josiah. When

Josiah was 16, 2 Chronicles 34:3 tells us that “he began to seek after the God of David his father.”

Josiah’s repairs to the temple led to the re-discovery of the law by Hilkiah the priest. That find led to a time of great religious reform in Judah.

But where is the complication, you ask? It is right here:

**1 Kings 13:1-2** - And behold, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the LORD to Bethel. Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make offerings. And the man cried against the altar by the word of the LORD and said, “O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, **Josiah by name**, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.’”

That prophecy from 1 Kings 13 that refers to King Josiah **by name** was made 300 years before Josiah was born! And Josiah would never have been born had God not extended his grandfather’s life by 15 years!

**As I said, there is nothing simple about these issues!**

How does the Open View explain such complicated examples as those two?

These may just be examples of the sort we have already seen - examples where God steps in and makes something happen as he needs for it to happen to accomplish his purposes.

God must have known that at some point he would switch the kingship from Benjamin to Judah, and so he did so when King Saul disobeyed his command. Had Saul not disobeyed God, then that change to Judah would have happened at some later time. But we know it was going to happen eventually because of the great promise in Genesis 49:10. And perhaps we even know it would have happened in the days of David given his connection with Ruth.

So, yes, God does sometime change his mind - but sometimes God knows all along that he will change his mind at some point.

Likewise, if Hezekiah had died when he was originally told he would die, God could have raised up a Josiah from someone else in the royal line. The prophecy was just that there would be a good king named Josiah - God could have found someone else to fill that role.

**So what then is the answer? The Closed View or the Open View? Which is a better fit with what we read about God in the Bible?**

I think the Open View is better than the Closed View at explaining what we read in the Bible. In fact, in my opinion, the Closed View sometimes contradicts what we read in the Bible. And the fact that the Closed View was John Calvin’s view doesn’t help it.

So am I saying that the Open View is the correct view? No, I am not. What I am saying is that the Open View is the better view - it is better than the Closed View.

But we also saw some potential issues with the Open View when we looked at God regretting that he had ever made Saul king and when we looked at the prophecy about Josiah.

As we said at the beginning of our study, we may be living in Flatland when it comes to these issues. We live in time the way a fish lives in water, and a timeless existence is not something we can really understand.

I am sure that the Closed View cannot explain all of the evidence in the Bible, and I suspect the same may be true of the Open View.

So this is where I have ended up: I reject the Closed View, and I lean toward the Open View. But I am keeping an open mind, and I plan to continue studying these difficult questions. Every time I do, I learn more about God from his word - and that is a very good thing!

In our detailed study of verses 13-14, we have looked at many examples from the Bible that teach us something about how God sees the future. Let’s look at one more example.



**Genesis 22:9-12** - When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, **for now I know** that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

Did you catch it? "For **now** I know."

When did God know that Abraham would not withhold his only son from God? "For **now** I know!" And if God had known that earlier, then why put Abraham through that terrible test?

Was it just so Abraham himself would know? That is not what the Bible says. The Bible says, "**for now I know** that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, **from me**."

I think what we find in the Bible is a God who is as creative and resourceful as he is wise and powerful and loving. God's plans are accomplished because God accomplishes them. God is active in this world, and God expects us to be active as well. God is not just sitting back and watching things happen, and neither should we.

We know that the character of God and the nature of God are unchanging. But that does not mean that God is like a photograph that forever remains fixed in time. That is not the description of God that we find in his word.

I think what we see in the Bible is that God is not a being who experiences the whole of reality in the isolation of a single timeless perception. I do not think that we see a God who is a detached observer. I do not think that we find a God who is unmoved and unmovable by the course of human history.

Instead, I think what we find in the Bible is a God who sometimes responds to events as they occur.

A God who sometimes rejoices, who sometimes sorrows, who is sometimes surprised, and who sometimes wishes things had turned out very differently from how they did turn out.

Can we ever understand all there is to know about such a God?

- God, who spoke the entire universe into existence, from the smallest particle to the furthest star?
- God, who made us in his image, with free will?
- God, who created time and who put eternity into our heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11)?
- God, "who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things" (Romans 8:32)?

When we think about just how great is our God, I think we must all end with the same statement that David had when he considered these same difficult issues.

**Psalms 139:1-6** - O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. **Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.**

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it!" That is where David writing by inspiration ended up, and I think that is also a good ending point for us.

**When we started this discussion we were in verse 14 of Joel 2, so let's go back there and finish looking at that verse.**

**Joel 2:14** - Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

“Who knows whether he will not turn and relent?”

God would turn and relent if the people repented and returned to him, but God would not turn and relent if the people persisted in their sin and rebellion.

So who knows whether God would, in fact, turn and relent? Did God even know at this time? Did God know what the people would decide to do? Did God know their thoughts **before** they had those thoughts, or did God know their thoughts **when** they had those thoughts?

Perhaps we now have a different perspective on those questions after we have looked at all of those examples from the Bible.

In any event, it seems that this terrible coming day of the Lord was not yet a certainty but was still only a possibility. It could be stopped.

And the people were the ones who could stop it by turning back to God. It was **their** will that would determine whether God relented. Would they repent or would they not repent? **The choice was theirs.** They had free will to make that choice.

It all reminds me of a favorite C.S. Lewis quote:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it.

And what would the people find if God did turn and relent? Verse 14 tells us. They would find a blessing. They would find a grain offering. They would find a drink offering.

Rather than the promised curses of Deuteronomy 28 that come from disobedience, they would find the promised blessings that come from obedience.

And rather than being unable to make offerings to God in the temple, they would once again be able to

make those drink and grain offerings because God would provide those blessings for them.

And, again, that is exactly what God had told them long before.

**Deuteronomy 30:19-20** - I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore **choose life**, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

**Choose life!** That choice was their choice. And it remains our choice today.

God has given us free will - how will we use it? Will we choose life? We know that it is God’s will that we be saved. Is it our will? Is it my will? Is it your will?

Yes, our free will is a tremendous gift from God. But, as with all such gifts, our free is also a tremendous responsibility. The choice is ours! And God wants us all to make the right choice.

And here in Joel 2, the people listening to Joel has been given a choice. The choice was their choice. God had not made that choice for them, and God would not make that choice for them. But God would turn and relent over the promised disaster if they made the right choice.

## Joel 2:15

**Joel 2:15** - Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly;

The word “Zion” appears seven times in the book of Joel.

We saw the first occurrence back in Joel 2:1 (“Blow a trumpet in Zion”), and the second occurrence is here in verse 15 (“Blow the trumpet in Zion.”)

We will see “children of Zion” in verse 23, and we will see Zion at the end of Joel 2 just **before** the point where Peter stopped quoting Joel 2 in Acts 2 (“For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.”).

What can we say about the word “Zion”? One thing we can say is that its meaning evolved somewhat over time.

- Zion was originally a stronghold of the Jebusites located in or near Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:7-9).
- The Temple Mount was sometimes called Mount Zion (Isaiah 8:18).
- And Zion was sometimes used to refer to Jerusalem more generally (Psalm 51:18, Isaiah 2:3).
- And Zion was also used to designate the people of God as a whole (Isaiah 51:16) (“and saying to Zion, ‘You are my people.’”).

In fact, we sometimes find Jerusalem, Zion, and Mount Zion used almost interchangeably in the Bible.

That final usage of “Zion” as the people of God carried over into the New Testament, where “Zion” is used to describe the church.

**Hebrews 12:22-23** - But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to **the city of the living God**, the **heavenly Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to **the assembly of the firstborn** who are enrolled in heaven...

And so, as we said earlier about verse 1, verse 15 is likewise talking about physical Jerusalem, but, by using this word “Zion” I think verse 15 is also calling upon us to think about spiritual Zion, the church. Again, as with verse 1, I think verse 15 is anticipating what we will see at the end of Joel 2 about the establishment of the church.

Not only do we see “Zion” in both verses 1 and 15, but we also hear a trumpet in both verses 1 and 15. What does the trumpet signify?

Back in verse 1, the trumpet was blown in Zion to sound an alarm. The people had awakened to find themselves surrounded by an enemy army, and so the watchmen on the wall had sounded the alarm.

This trumpet in verse 15 is different. It is not being sounded as an alarm, but rather it is being sounded as a call for the people to gather together in a solemn assembly.

And, like the trumpet, that solemn assembly is also something we have seen earlier in Joel.

**Joel 1:14** - Consecrate 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 out to the LORD.

## Joel Lesson 19

## Joel 2:16

### Joel 2:15, Continued

**Joel 2:15** - Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly;

Is this solemn assembly in Joel 2:15 the same solemn assembly that we saw in Joel 1:14?

As we recall, the solemn assembly in Joel 1:14 occurred after the locust invasion as an expression of the great sorrow over what had just happened to the people and to their city. And in Joel 1:15, they were told that something even worse was coming and was near. That was why that had a solemn assembly in Joel 1.

But I think this assembly in Joel 2 is different. Why? Because something has happened between Joel 1:14 and Joel 2:15 - and we saw that something in Joel 2:12 - “**Yet** even now!” That something was hope! That something was a possibility of restoration! The situation had changed, and so I think this solemn assembly in Joel 2 is different from the one we saw in Joel 1.

Yes, the people are fasting again. And yes, the trumpet is sounding again. And yes, the people are once again gathering in a solemn assembly. But this time there is a hope! This time their future is not just bleakness and despair.

God has called them to repent and to return in verses 12-13, and while a call to repent is a reminder of the sin that led to that call, that call to repent is also a reminder of the hope that always accompanies such a call.

If there was no hope of restoration, then there would be no need to repent. But that God was calling upon them to repent meant that they could be restored. And so, with this solemn assembly in Joel 2 following the call to repent, we see a hope of restoration. We did not see that hope with the assembly in Joel 1.

**Joel 2:16** - gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.

Verse 16 tells us something very important about this solemn assembly - it was to include everybody. Everyone was required to gather, and no excuses would be allowed for not gathering.

**Everyone was required to gather.** How do we know that?

We see that fact from the range of people who are commanded to gather - from elders to nursing infants. No one was too old to assemble, and no one was too young to assemble. Everyone from the very young to the very old was commanded to gather together in this solemn assembly.

**And no excuses would be allowed for not gathering.** How do we know that?

We see that fact in the final part of verse 16: “Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.”

If anyone would have had an excuse to skip this assembly, it would have been newlyweds on their wedding night! But even they are called to gather, and if they had no excuse to miss this assembly, then no one had an excuse to miss this assembly.

**Now, let’s pause for a moment and look at verse 15-16 in the context of what we all know is coming at the end of Joel 2.**

Peter told us in Acts 2 that the context of Joel 2 includes the establishment of the Lord’s church, which would happen many years later as described in Acts 2. We know that fact with complete certainty.

But **when** does that context begin in Joel 2? When does Joel 2 start telling us about the church?

We have already seen some hints of the church with the use of the word “Zion” in verses 1 and 15 and with the phrase “holy mountain” in verse 1. But is that it?



Do we see anything else here that might be pointing us to the establishment of the church? We know we will see that great event at the end of Joel 2 - do we see it anywhere earlier in Joel 2?

I think the answer is yes - I think we are seeing some hints of **Pentecost** right here in verses 15-16.

And, if that is true, then I don't think we should be surprised. As we know, the church was established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1), and Peter opened his great sermon on that day of Pentecost by quoting Joel 2. And so, I don't think we should be surprised at all if we see some hints about Pentecost in this chapter.

But where is Pentecost in these verses? Before we look at that question, let's back up and ask another question: Why was the church established on the day of Pentecost? Was that day just a coincidence or was there something special about the day of Pentecost that was related to the church?

I think we can rule out the coincidence theory immediately. There were no coincidences in God's plan to establish the eternal kingdom of Christ! Everything was planned out to the smallest detail! And if we ever have any doubts about that, then we need to go back and study Daniel 11 again. That chapter is one of the great prophecies of the Bible, and it describes the events that would occur between the days of Daniel and the days of Christ in great detail. God had everything planned out, and it all happened just as God said it would happen. So much so that liberal theologians are willing to lose their credibility by twisting or shifting the text of Daniel in their attempts to avoid the obvious conclusion that it contains prophecies from God.

God left nothing to chance when it came to the kingdom of Christ. And that was certainly true about the great and awesome day on which the church was established - the day of Pentecost.

But what is Pentecost? Why did God **choose** that day? Or, perhaps, we should ask why did God **design** that day the way that he did?

The word "Pentecost" comes from the Greek word *pentekostos* for "fiftieth" that was used to describe the Jewish Feast of Weeks.

Why 50? That number came from the fact that Pentecost was observed on the fiftieth day (seven weeks plus one day) after the Passover Sabbath.

**Leviticus 23:15-16** - You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count **fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath**. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD.

And what can we say about the "day after the seventh Sabbath"?

What we can say is what we can say about any day after a Sabbath day - that day is a **Sunday**. Sunday always follows Saturday! Pentecost was celebrated on a Sunday - the first day of the week.

And how many Jewish feasts always occurred on a Sunday? I think we are looking at it! I think Pentecost is the only such event. Most Jewish feasts were tied to certain days of the Jewish lunar calendar (such as the 15th day of the first month), which meant they could occur on any day of the week - but not Pentecost, it always happened "the day after the seventh Sabbath."

And although Pentecost was later celebrated to thank God for the giving of the Law, Pentecost was originally intended as a celebration of thanksgiving to God for the harvest.

**Deuteronomy 16:9-10** - You shall count seven weeks. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you.

And on the day of Pentecost, the Jews, even up until the present day, read the book of Ruth. Why?

One reason is that the setting for the book of Ruth is harvest time and Pentecost is a harvest festival.

But there is also another reason - the book of Ruth looked forward to a day when Jew and Gentile would worship God together. We see that when Ruth, a Moabite, comes to know and love God. And, of course, we also know that Ruth was the great grandmother of King David.

We also saw that same promise with the Feast of Tabernacles that we looked at earlier when we looked at Joel 1:11-12. Despite the great animosity that ran both ways between Jew and Gentile, the Jews had long looked toward a day when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together.

We also see that same great anticipation in one of the most remarkable prophecies found anywhere in the Bible.

**Isaiah 19:24-25** - In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."

There is no way to explain that prophecy apart from the church. Israel a third? Egypt and Assyria the other two thirds? Egypt, my people? Assyria, the work of my hands? All of them, "a blessing in the midst of the earth"? Again, **there is no way to explain that prophecy apart from the church.**

That great day in Isaiah 19:24 was the day of the church. That great promise was fulfilled by the peace that exists between Jew and Gentile in the church. That great peace was prophesied in Isaiah 2, and that great peace is described in Ephesians 2.

**Isaiah 2:4** - He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

**Ephesians 2:13-16** - But now in Christ Jesus you who once were

far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And the Feast of Pentecost looked forward to that day. We see that in the reading of Ruth, but we also see that in the description of what was done during that feast of Pentecost.

**Leviticus 23:16-17** - You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwelling places **two loaves of bread** to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked **with leaven**, as firstfruits to the LORD.

Why **two** loaves of bread?

Whenever we see **two** of something in the Bible (and especially in the prophets), we should ask ourselves whether we are looking at something about the church.

Yes, we know about all of those "Church Chapter Two's" that were listed on the Handout for Lesson 11 - but, of course, those chapter divisions did not come about until long after the Bible was written. I'm not talking about those two's - I'm talking about the two's that we see right here in the text itself.

It is remarkable how many times the one church is described in a way that involves two of something. (See the Handout for Lesson 19.)

- We see that in Ephesians 2:15 with **Jew and Gentile** - "by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances,

that he might create in himself one new man **in place of the two**, so making peace.”

- We see that in Revelation 21:3 with **God and man** - “Behold, **the dwelling place of God is with man**. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”
- We see that in 1 Peter 2:9 with the combination of royalty and the priesthood - “But you are a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.”
- We see that in Zechariah 6:13 with the crown placed on the head of the high priest - “It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be **between them both**.”
- We see that in Galatians 4:24 regarding the relationship between spiritual Jerusalem and physical Jerusalem - “Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are **two covenants**. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.”
- We see that in Hebrews 8:8 with the restoration of the united kingdom in the church - “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with **the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**.”
- We see that figuratively with the number 144,000 (12 times 12 times 1000) used in Revelation 7:4 to depict God’s faithful people, first under the old covenant (depicted by the number 12) and then under the new covenant (also depicted by the number 12) - “And I heard the number of the sealed, **144,000**, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.”
- We see that in Ephesians 2:20 with the foundation of the church - “built on the foundation of **the apostles and prophets**.”
- We see that in Zechariah 4:11-14 with prophetic descriptions of the church - “**two**

olive trees,” “**two** golden pipes,” and “the **two** anointed ones.”

- We see that in Revelation 11:3-4 with similar descriptions of the church - “And I will grant authority to my **two witnesses**, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the **two olive trees** and the **two lampstands** that stand before the Lord of the earth.”
- We see that in Hebrews 9:28 with the church on earth positioned between the two appearances of Christ - “so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear **a second time**, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”
- We see that in Revelation 21:1 with the victory of the church described as a new heaven and a new earth - “Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven.”
- We see that in Revelation 21:9 with the church described as the bride of the lamb - “Come, I will show you **the Bride, the wife of the Lamb**.”

In fact, when we study the book of Revelation we find a battle of the two’s! We find the royal priesthood of Christ arrayed against the royal priesthood of Rome. That is why Rome is pictured as two beasts in Revelation 13 - one for the royal side of Rome (Caesar), and one for the religious side of Rome (Caesar worship).

And, like the church, Rome could also be described using the number two. Rome had been founded in myth by the twins, Romulus and Remus. Rome had been built on the combination of Roman might and Greek philosophy. First century Rome was ruled by two dynasties ending with Nero and with Domitian. And Roman rule was based on a false royal priesthood based on Caesar worship.

And, of course, we know the outcome of that battle between the royal priesthood of Christ and the royal priesthood of Rome! The church was triumphant. And the message of Revelation is that the church will always be triumphant!



So, as I said, whenever we see two of something in the Bible, we should pause and ask whether we are seeing something about the church. It is certainly not always the case, but it is often the case.

But what about Pentecost?

As we read a moment ago, in Leviticus 23:16-17 God commanded the Jews to “bring from your dwelling places **two loaves of bread** to be waved.”

Why two loaves of bread? Is there something about the church here?

Yes, I think there is. The very next sentence in Leviticus 23:17 gives us an important clue: “they shall be baked **with leaven**.”

As far as I can determine, Pentecost is the only Jewish feast where leavened bread is used. Why? As we know, leaven often denotes sin in the Bible.

**1 Corinthians 5:7-8** - Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So what can we say about the two loaves of bread baked with leaven that were used in the Pentecost celebration?

I think what we are seeing **figuratively** in that command is the same thing we see **literally** in the book of Acts - both Jew and Gentile obeying the one gospel to have their sins forgiven and to be added by God to the one church.

I think Jew and Gentile are the two loaves of bread baked with leaven.

Just as the Feast of Tabernacles looked forward to the day when Jew and Gentile would be one in Christ, so I think Pentecost also looked forward to that same day. That is why the Jews read the book of Ruth, and that is why they baked those two loaves of bread.

And I think we also see that same thing again with the two lambs that were sacrificed on Pentecost - peace between Jew and Gentile in the church.

**Leviticus 23:19-20** - And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and **two male lambs** a year old as a sacrifice of **peace offerings**. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with **the two lambs**. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest.

And when did Pentecost occur? It occurred 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits. What do we find when we count back 50 days from the day of Pentecost in Acts 2?

**1 Corinthians 15:20** - But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep.

And, of course, we find our Passover lamb.

**1 Corinthians 5:7** - Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, **our Passover lamb**, has been sacrificed.

And so what can we say about Pentecost? I think we can see that it was God's plan from the very beginning that the eternal kingdom of Christ would be established on the day of Pentecost, which was always held, not on a Saturday Sabbath, but on a Sunday - on the Lord's day (Revelation 1:10).

It was on that great day that God opened the doors of his kingdom to all who would obey his gospel - both Jew and Gentile.

It was on that great day that, as we will soon see, God poured out his Spirit on **all** flesh - both Jew and Gentile.

And what better way to inaugurate that great day than with a celebration of the harvest!



**Luke 10:2** - And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Pentecost was the perfect day for the establishment of the church of Christ - the eternal kingdom in which all men, both Jew and Gentile, could enjoy the worldwide blessing in Christ that was promised to Abraham. Isaiah 2 **prophesied** it. Acts 2 **describes** it. Ephesians 2 **explains** it.

But where in Joel 2:15-16 do we see Pentecost?

I said earlier that I think there are some hints about Pentecost in these verses, but what are they?

I think the best way to answer that is to put ourselves in the place of those who first heard the prophet Joel proclaim these verses.

If those locusts had not come, then those people would have been calling a solemn assembly - not to mourn the lost harvest, but to celebrate the successful harvest with this feast of Pentecost. Listen again to the description of that great event.

**Leviticus 23:21** - And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. **You shall hold a holy convocation.** You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

And what do we see in Joel 2:15-16? "Call a solemn assembly; gather the people; consecrate the congregation."

In short, it seems that God was still calling upon them to celebrate the harvest even though there was no harvest. Rather than feasting, they were fasting. But, although the physical harvest had been destroyed, God would soon be telling them about a restored harvest (verses 25-26) that was coming!

And I think everyone listening to Joel would have recognized the similarity between what they were being commanded to do here and what they would have been doing anyway had the harvest not been destroyed.

They would have been looking forward to Pentecost to celebrate their harvest. But now their harvest had been destroyed. And yet they are still being commanded to gather together like they would have done for Pentecost. Rather than feasting though, they are fasting because their physical harvest has been destroyed. But later in this same chapter we are going to find out that there is a restored harvest on the way (verses 25-26). And then at the end of the chapter, God is telling them about the church. Don't we think we are looking at Pentecost in these verses?

I think any Jew reading these verses and certainly any Jew experiencing these verses would have been thinking about Pentecost.

We know that Joel 2 ends with a description of Pentecost. I think we are already seeing some hints of Pentecost right here in verses 15-16.

## Joel 2:17

**Joel 2:17** - Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

Once again we are reminded of something we have already seen in this book - the temple was standing when Joel was written. The priests are told to do something "between the vestibule and the altar." That means that Joel must have been written either before the temple was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar or after the temple was rebuilt under King Cyrus. But we already knew that.

The priests are told to gather "between the vestibule and the altar" - why there specifically? Was there something special about that location?

While some have suggested deep spiritual significance to this spot, I think the simpler explanation is likely the better explanation - that area between the vestibule and the altar was just a large open area where they could all gather together.

The priests are commanded to weep and speak, and I suspect many of them did not need a command to weep given what they had all just gone through.

But I think this weeping is more than just sorrow over a lost harvest; I think this weeping is sorrow over a lost people. I think that this command to weep is part of the repentance that was commanded in verse 12 - "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with **weeping**, and with mourning."

As we know, the priests stood between God and the people. They interceded with God on behalf of the people.

**Hebrews 5:1** - For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

And what were they commanded to say here in verse 17 on behalf of the people?

"Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

I think the ASV provides a much better translation of this verse:

Spare thy people, O Jehovah, and give not thy heritage to reproach, **that the nations should rule over them**: wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?

As one commentator explains, some of the modern translations use "a byword among the nations" apparently because that phrase is very close to the word translated "reproach" - but that translation cannot be correct. According to that commentary, the Hebrew phrase can only mean, "Do not let the nations rule over them" as we (almost) see in the ASV.

Why is that distinction so important? Two reasons - it is important because of the context in Joel 2 and it is important because of the context in Acts 2.

First, the context in Joel 2 is all about a nation ruling over the people. If the pre-exile view for when Joel was written is the correct view, then that nation ruling over them would soon be Babylon.

And, yes, when Babylon carried them off, God's people would suffer reproach, and the nations would ask, "where is their God?" And, in fact, we know that both of those things happened with regard to Babylon.

**Psalm 137:3** - For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

**Ezekiel 36:6** - ...You have suffered the reproach of the nations.

**Lamentations 2:15** - All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?"

**Daniel 9:16** - ...Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.

**Psalm 115:2** - Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"

And so the immediate context favors the translation "that the nations should rule over them." That was why the people would suffer this reproach.

But there is a second reason why the translation "that the nations should rule over them" is important here. It is important because of the relation between Joel 2 and Acts 2.

**There is no earthly nation that could ever rule over the kingdom of Christ.**

If any earthly nation could ever have ruled over the church it would have been ancient Rome.

The world had never seen a kingdom like mighty Rome, and the conflict between Rome and the

church occurred when Rome was at the height of its power and when the church was in its infancy.

No one looking at that conflict with an earthly perspective would ever have bet on the church to win over Rome.

But Rome did not win. The church prevailed over Rome.

Yes, the meaning of Revelation is debated, but the central message of Revelation is not. The central message of Revelation is simple - **we win!**

**Revelation 19:11-16** - Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Is there any earthly nation that can stand against that? Is there any nation that can defeat the one called Faithful and True? Is there any earthly king who can prevail over the King of kings and Lord of lords?

And, yes, I know that sometimes in this auditorium we are asked to sing a song that says Jesus is not King of kings and Lord of lords! ("We Bow Down") But don't do it! Don't sing it! Instead, read Revelation 19 and rejoice that Jesus Christ **is** King of kings and Lord of lords!

Let me say it again: **There is no earthly nation that could ever rule over the kingdom of Christ.**

And, in fact, we see that great promise all the way back in Daniel 2. That was not just something Rome learned the hard way, but it was also something that Babylon learned the hard way. And something Persia learned the hard way. And something Greece learned the hard way. It is a lesson that every nation of this world will learn the hard way!

**Daniel 2:44-45** - And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

That stone is the kingdom of Christ established in Acts 2 during the days of those Roman kings - and it is that kingdom of Christ that Daniel says "shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end."

## Joel Lesson 20

### Joel 2:17, Continued

**Joel 2:17** - Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

As was said last week, I think the ASV provides a much better translation of this verse:

Spare thy people, O Jehovah, and give not thy heritage to reproach, **that the nations should rule over them**: wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?

And, as we also said last week, **there is no earthly nation that could ever rule over the kingdom of Christ**. And, in fact, we see that great promise all the way back in Daniel 2, over 500 years before Acts 2.

**Daniel 2:44** - And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. **It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end**, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and **that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold**. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

That stone cut by no human hand is the kingdom of Christ that was established in Acts 2 during the

days of those Roman kings - and it is that kingdom of Christ that Daniel says "shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end."

Now, let me ask a question - **when** did that happen or **when** will that happen? When did or when will the nations of this world crumble to dust before the kingdom of Christ?

Didn't Daniel answer that question earlier in that same chapter? Let's back up a bit in Daniel 2.

**Daniel 2:34-35** - As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. **But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.**

Doesn't that final sentence answer our question? Doesn't that final sentence tell us **when** the nations of this world crumbled to dust before the kingdom of Christ? And doesn't that sentence tell us it has already happened?

The stone struck that giant statue while it was still just a stone. It was only later that the stone "became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35).

The church of Christ defeated and destroyed the kingdoms of this world in its infancy! That is not something the church will do someday when it becomes big enough and powerful enough. The church did that when it was still a stone - but that stone, even then on Day 1, was already big enough and powerful enough to defeat every kingdom of this world.

I think we see that same promise elsewhere in the Bible.



**Psalm 2:7-9** - I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. **You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.**"

**Haggai 2:21-23** - "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, **and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders.** And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts."

Let me say it again: **There is no earthly nation that could ever rule over the kingdom of Christ.** And that fact has been true of the church from the very beginning of the church in Acts 2.

Why am I emphasizing this fact?

First, I am emphasizing that great fact about the church because I think we are seeing a preview of it here in verse 17.

But second, I am emphasizing that great fact about the church because we are slowly marching toward the description here in Joel 2 of the events in Acts 2 - and one of those events was the precise event prophesied by Daniel in Daniel 2:44.

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven **will set up a kingdom** that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall

break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever...

And perhaps there were more things going on that day than we usually think! Perhaps nations were crumbling on that great day!

Let's keep all of that in mind as we study Joel 2 and Acts 2. And let's never doubt the power of the Lord's church. Let's never be guilty of thinking that we will do some great things if we ever get big enough! We are already big enough. We are already powerful enough. And we always have been!

**Romans 8:31** - If God is for us, who can be against us?

But, some might say, the nations of the world sure don't look like they have been defeated! And Rome sure didn't look defeated in the first century! How do we explain that?

Simple. Last week we read the great description of Christ found in Revelation 19. Let's read verse 15 from that description again.

**Revelation 19:15** - **From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations,** and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

Let's never doubt the power of God's word. God created the universe with words! The gospel is the power of God (Romans 1:16), and the gospel is something we hear - the gospel is the word of truth.

**Ephesians 1:13** - In him you also, when you **heard** the word of truth, the **gospel** of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

Let's never doubt the power of God's word.

**Ephesians 6:17** - And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

**Hebrews 4:12** - For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

So, someone asks, how were all of those nations defeated? They were all defeated the same way they were all created in the first place - by the word of God! **"From his mouth** comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations!"

But they don't look defeated! That may be true for some, but that does not mean that they are not defeated. All that means is that we should add that to our list of things that are seen by fallen man as the opposite of how they really are - and that is a very long list!

**1 Corinthians 2:13-14** - And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

If we want to see things as they really are, then we must view them through the word of God. And the Bible tells us that the nations of this world have been defeated by the word of Christ! The Bible tells us that they have all crumbled to dust before the church of Christ! The Bible tells us that there is but one eternal kingdom!

## Joel 2:18

**Joel 2:18** - Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.

The opening phrase in verse 18 can be translated either "became jealous" (as we just read in the ESV translation) or "will become jealous" (which is close to the KJV translation - "Then will the LORD be jealous for his land.")

In the ESV, the verb would be describing a past event, but in the KJV the verb would be describing a future event that is tied to a present event.

Based on the context, I think the KJV is the better translation here. This verse is following a call to repent, and I think this verse begins a section that shows us what would happen if the people did, in fact, repent.

As one commentary concludes, I think we should take "this response from God as a contingent promise rather than as a report of action already taken."

I think verse 18 makes better sense as a promise than as a report, and I think the verses that follow verse 18 will confirm that view for us. God is telling the people here what will happen if they repent and return to him.

And what does verse 18 tell us would happen? Two things: God would be jealous for his land, and God would have pity on his people.

We often see God's jealousy for his people in the Bible, and that jealousy (like the jealousy of a husband for his wife) is based on the covenant relationship between God and his people. God expects his people to be faithful to him just as a husband expects his wife to be faithful to him.

**Deuteronomy 4:23-34** - Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, **a jealous God**.

And, again, as we see between a husband and a wife, the worry is not that God is jealous for his people, but rather the worry should come when God is not jealous. And I think we saw that sad situation with regard to Israel in our study of Hosea.

**Hosea 1:9** - And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

But here in Joel 2 that has not yet happened with Judah. And the promise here is that it will not happen if the people will repent and return to God, their husband.

As for the reference to “the land” in verse 18, I think that word “land” is pointing to the danger of the invading army that God has said is coming and is near. We see that same connection between God’s jealousy and God’s land in Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 36:4-6 - Therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD:** Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains and the hills, the ravines and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted cities, which have become a prey and derision to the rest of the nations all around, therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Surely I have spoken in my hot **jealousy** against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave **my land** to themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, that they might make its pasturelands a prey. Therefore prophesy concerning **the land of Israel**, and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I have spoken in my **jealous** wrath, because you have suffered the reproach of the nations.

And we see God’s jealousy in Zechariah in the context of the surrounding nations that had abused God’s people.

**Zechariah 1:14-15** - So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly **jealous** for Jerusalem and for Zion. And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster.

And, again, as we will soon see, that context of disaster from a surrounding nation is the same as our context here. Joel 3 will later begin with God’s judgment against the nations that “have scattered” God’s people and that “have divided up” God’s land.

And so we see God’s jealousy for his people here in verse 18 - but we also see something else. We also see God’s pity for his people in verse 18.

And those two things - God’s jealousy and God’s pity - are the basis for what God is promising to do here.

The first - God’s jealousy - points to God’s covenant relationship with his people, while the second - God’s pity - points to God’s great love for his people.

In short, God was not just their husband - God was their **loving** husband. God did not just want them back because they were his - God wanted them back because he loved them.

God did not just want his wife back. God wanted his happy home back! God wanted a complete restoration of the loving relationship that he had earlier enjoyed with his wife. I think we also saw that in our earlier study of Hosea.

And let’s keep all of that in mind as we get closer to the end of Joel 2. Why? Because we know from Acts 2 that the end of Joel 2 is telling us about God’s household - the church!

**1 Timothy 3:15** - ...you may know how one ought to behave in **the household of God**, which is the **church** of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

All throughout the Old Testament we see God’s desire to dwell with his people as a loving husband dwells with his wife - and that is precisely what we see in the church.

The church is the household of God. The church is a dwelling place for God. The church is the bride of Christ. There is peace in the church - even between Jew and Gentile!

We are God’s happy home! Let’s all do our best to keep it that way!

## Joel 2:19

**Joel 2:19** - The LORD answered and said to his people, "Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.

Verse 19 is a transition point in the book of Joel, and I think we can see why when we look at the Handout for Lesson 20.

That handout shows all of the references to God in the book of Joel.

- Some of the references to God use the words "Lord," "God," or "Almighty." Those references are underlined in red with a bold font on the handout.
- Other references to God in Joel are with pronouns, and some of those pronouns are first person pronouns spoken by God, such as "I am sending" or "return to me." Those first person references are highlighted in yellow.
- Other pronoun references to God in Joel use second person pronouns spoken to God, such as "to you, I call" or "spare your people." Those second person references are highlighted in blue.
- And, finally, other pronoun references to God in Joel use third person pronouns spoken about God either by God himself or by someone else, such as "his people" or "he has poured." Those third person references are highlighted in green.

Now, let's focus on the yellow highlights, which are the first person pronouns spoken by God about himself.

The front side of the handout covers most of the text that we have studied so far in our study of the book of Joel. How many first person pronouns (highlighted in yellow) do we see on the front side of the handout?

- We see some examples in Joel 1:6-7. (Some commentaries believe that is Joel speaking

about himself there, but we decided that it was more likely God speaking about himself in those two verses.)

- And then we see two more examples: "my holy mountain" in 2:1 and "return to me" in 2:12.

But that is it for the text prior to Joel 2:19, which is the verse we are looking at now.

So, let's now ask that same question about the remaining text of Joel - how many first person references to God do we find in the remainder of Joel?

When we flip the handout over to look at the back, the first thing we notice is that there is a lot more yellow on the back than we saw on the front!

In fact, here in verse 19, we see something we have not seen at all before in the book of Joel - we see God referring to himself as "I." Here in verse 19, God says, "I am sending" and "I will no more make you."

And if we count all of those first person pronoun references to God, what do we find?

- We find 5 first person references by God prior to verse 19.
- We find 37 first person references by God from verse 19 to the final verse of the book.

As I said, a transition occurs in verse 19. As one commentary says:

"A brief perusal of the last half of the book reveals how completely first-person verbs (with God as subject) dominate the text."

For the most part, the first half of Joel is Joel talking about God, while the second half of Joel is God talking about himself. Yes, there are exceptions, but that is what we find for the most part.

And, yes, the entirety of the text is inspired, and so, in that sense, the entirety of the book is God talking about himself - but, starting with verse 19, the inspired text does that differently.

And our question is **why**. Why do we see this big shift in verse 19?



Could it be because the importance of the message has changed? Yes, everything in Joel is important, but not everything in Joel is of equal importance.

What do I mean by that? What I mean is that some of the text in Joel is directed to local concerns - local in geography and local in time. The locust invasion, for example, was certainly important to those who experienced it, but less so for those of us who did not.

But when we get to Joel 2 we find a description - not of a local locust invasion - but of the great day when the glorious kingdom of Christ was established. That event was not just a local event in any sense! That great day was planned before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4)!

I think this change to first person pronouns in verse 19 occurs because of a change in content and scope of what is being described. Let me give a modern analogy to what I think is happening here.

When a lawyer is working on a complex litigation matter, that case usually extends over several years. And during that time, the attorney interacts with the judicial system through various intermediaries.

Many of those communications come through court clerks or magistrate judges acting under the presiding Judge's authority, and those court officials convey the judge's thoughts and preliminary rulings.

But then one day you find yourself standing before the presiding Judge in open court, and you hear the Judge say, "I hold" or "I have decided."

While all of the prior communications carried judicial authority, there is an unmistakable difference in weight when the Judge speaks directly to you using those first person pronouns. Every word takes on heightened significance as you experience the court's authority in its most direct form.

I think we are seeing something similar here as the text shifts from Joel talking about God to God talking about himself.

But, for whatever reason it happens, we can certainly say that God begins speaking directly to the people here in verse 19, and that continues for most of the remainder of the book.

Here in verse 19 we are told that God is answering someone. Who is God answering, and what question is God answering? I think verse 17 answers both of those questions.

**Joel 2:17 [ASV]** - Let the priests, the ministers of Jehovah, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Jehovah, and give not thy heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?

Here, in verse 19, God is responding to the priests, and the question God is answering is the priests' combined petition and question that we just read in verse 17.

And what is God's answer? It begins right here in verse 19.

And, again, as we said for verse 18, I think this section is showing up what would happen if the people repented.

How do we know that? Well, if the invading nation here in Joel 2 is Babylon (as is looking increasingly likely), then we know that the people were not spared that punishment, and we know that the people did in fact become a reproach among the nations.

**Jeremiah 51:51** - 'We are put to shame, for we have heard reproach; dishonor has covered our face, for foreigners have come into the holy places of the LORD's house.'

And so, if this is about Babylon, then I think we know that this promise that begins in verse 19 is a conditional promise. It is showing us what God would do if the people repented, as God commanded them to do back in verse 12.

But, in the case of Babylon, we know that the people did not repent. We know that they persisted in their sin and rebellion, which caused God to punish them with a 70 year exile.

**Jeremiah 25:8-11** - Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: **Because you have not obeyed my words**, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, **and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.**

So, with that background, what then is God telling the people here in verse 19 that he would do if they repented?

“Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.”

If we were to summarize that statement with a single word, I think that single word would likely be “restoration.” And, in fact, that word “restoration” is a key theme that we will see all throughout the remainder of the book of Joel.

Here, we are told that God would restore their lost grain, that God would restore their lost wine, that God would restore their lost oil, and that God would restore their lost reputation.

And, God tells them, “you will be satisfied.”

I think there are two aspects to that satisfaction. First, there is the obvious one - the people would no longer be hungry and thirsty.

But, second, the people would once again be able to worship God as God wanted them to worship him.

They would once again be able to make the required drink and grain offerings to God. Back in Joel 1:13 we saw that those offerings had been withheld after the locust attack, but now they would be restored.

But how do we know the people would be concerned with those offerings? We know that the people would be concerned with the lack of food in their own homes - but what makes us think that they would be concerned with the lack of food in God’s house?

I think we know that because of the conditional nature of this promise. These blessings would come only after the people repented, and if the people repented, then we know that they would have the proper concern for the house of God and the worship of God.

And, so, not only would the grain, the wine, the oil, and their reputation be restored - but their proper worship of God would also be restored.

And while this restoration did not happen prior to the Babylonian exile - it did happen.

It happened after the people returned from that exile 70 years later as we saw when we studied the book of Ezra. And we know that their proper worship of God was restored when the temple was rebuilt.

## Joel 2:20

**Joel 2:20** - “I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.

**“I will remove the northerner far from you.”**

Who or what is this “northerner” in verse 20?

Are they northern locusts? That 1915 article from *National Geographic* that we looked at earlier certainly seemed to think so.

These clouds of flying locusts, in Jerusalem at least, invariably

came from the northeast going toward the southwest, and it was observed that when strong winds arose, too stiff for them to resist, rather than be carried they seemed to settle till the storm passed over. Students of Joel, who assert that the first two chapters up to the 28th verse picture an actual invasion of locusts and not Judah's human enemies, such as the Assyrians and Chaldeans, find a difficulty in the verse, "And the northerner will I remove far from you," since locusts were reported to invade Palestine from the south; the present experience not only removes this difficulty but establishes the accuracy of Joel's account.

The argument in that article seems to be that, while locusts usually arrived from the south, the fact that they arrived from the north at least once proves that the "northerner" in verse 20 must be talking about locusts.

But does that argument make any sense?

Let's keep in mind the change in the verb tenses that we saw between chapter 1 and chapter 2. Whatever invasion force we are looking at here in Joel 2 has not arrived yet. And so, if this word "northerner" is describing a locust invasion, then it is describing a locust invasion that had not yet come.

And so here is the question: if the people were looking for a second terrible invasion of locusts, in which direction would they be looking?

Would they be looking north, or would they be looking south? And even if the locusts did on some rare occasion arrive from the north, would that mean the people would be looking north when they looked for the next locust invasion?

Let's consider a modern example. If I told you a huge tropical storm was coming and was near, which way would you look? North or south?

But what if I reminded you that tropical storm Allison, which dumped 40 inches of water on Houston, actually approached from the north after

it had stalled and changed direction? Would that fact make you now look north instead of south for this next storm?

I think the answer is no. Just because we can think of one tropical storm that came from the north does not change the fact that we expect those storms to approach from the south.

Likewise with these locusts, the fact that they once may have approached from the north does not mean that we should suddenly start referring to them as northerners anymore than we should suddenly start calling tropical storms a "northern threat" after Allison.

Far from showing that the locusts are northerners, that 1915 article actually shows the opposite. As the article itself states, "locusts were reported to invade Palestine from the south." That it makes news when they come from the north is just an example of the exception proving the rule - they usually come from the south.

So far in Joel 2, we have looked at various reasons why the coming invading force in this chapter is **not** a locust invasion, but rather is the invasion of "a great and powerful people" as verse 2 tells us.

And perhaps verse 20 is the best evidence of all. It would make no sense to refer to locusts as northerners, but it would make all the sense in the world to refer to an invading **human** army as northerners. As one commentary states:

The word "northerner" is a major conundrum for those who assert that Joel had only locusts in mind here and not a human army. It is indeed difficult to imagine how Joel could have used this term for a locust plague. ... The simple fact is that locust plagues attack the environs of Jerusalem from the south or southeast, not from the north. The rare exception of a locust plague arriving from the north or northeast does not solve the problem. For locust plagues to acquire the nickname "northerner" in the Jerusalem dialect, they would actually have

to come from the north with sufficient frequency for the term to make some kind of sense to speakers.

But what about a human army? Does the Bible ever refer to a human army as a **northern** invasion? Yes, over and over again it does.

**Isaiah 14:31** - Wail, O gate; cry out, O city; melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you! For smoke comes out of the **north**, and there is no straggler in his ranks.

**Isaiah 41:25** - I stirred up one from the **north**, and he has come, from the rising of the sun, and he shall call upon my name; he shall trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay.

**Zephaniah 2:13** - And he will stretch out his hand against the **north** and destroy Assyria, and he will make Nineveh a desolation, a dry waste like the desert.

**Zechariah 2:6-7** - Up! Up! Flee from the land of the **north**, declares the LORD. For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, declares the LORD. Up! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.

**Jeremiah 1:14** - Then the LORD said to me, "Out of the **north** disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land.

**Jeremiah 4:6** - Raise a standard toward Zion, flee for safety, stay not, for I bring disaster from the **north**, and great destruction.

**Jeremiah 6:1** - Flee for safety, O people of Benjamin, from the

midst of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and raise a signal on Beth-haccherem, for disaster looms out of the **north**, and great destruction.

**Jeremiah 10:22** - A voice, a rumor! Behold, it comes! — a great commotion out of the **north** country to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a lair of jackals.

Most of those references to a northern army are describing Babylon, and, if the pre-exile view is correct about when Joel was written, then the invading army here in Joel 2 is also Babylon.

And although Babylon was located geographically east of Jerusalem, it was typically described as coming from the north. Why? Because invading armies from Babylon would approach Jerusalem from the north because anyone coming from Babylon in the east would travel around the Arabian desert rather than directly through it. That is why Jeremiah repeatedly referred to the Babylonian threat as a northern threat.

Is Babylon the threat here in Joel 2? We have not yet made a final decision on the date of the book, but, based on what we have seen so far, I think we are leaning strongly in favor of the pre-exile view, which would mean that, yes, the invading army here is Babylon.

But whether it is Babylon or Assyria, we have a question to consider here in verse 20 - **why wasn't Joel more specific?**



## Joel Lesson 21

### Joel 2:20, Continued

**Joel 2:20** - “I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.

Last week we looked at the word “northerner” in verse 20, and we saw how that word makes no sense as a description of a locust invasion, but how it makes perfect sense as a description of a human invasion.

But we ended with a question: **why wasn't Joel more specific?**

Other prophets had no problem calling out Babylon by name - why didn't God do that through Joel if, in fact, this northern invasion is from Babylon? Why not say Babylon? Or if the invasion was from Assyria, why not say Assyria?

And, if the text had been specific, would there have been a better place to do that than right here in verse 20? Couldn't God have said, “I will remove the Babylonians far from you!” Why instead say, “I will remove the northerner far from you”? Why the continued vagueness?

I think that perhaps we can answer that question with two words: Gog and Magog.

#### **Who or what are Gog and Magog?**

We first meet Gog of the land of Magog in the book of Ezekiel.

The Handout for Lesson 21 shows the text of Ezekiel 38-39, with some verses highlighted. All of the text is interesting, of course, but for our purposes here, the yellow highlighted text is really interesting - and the green highlighted text is really, really interesting!

**Ezekiel 38:2-3** — Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the

land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.

But, after reading about Gog of Magog in Ezekiel 38-39, we are very likely surprised by something - we are surprised that we don't read about Gog of Magog earlier in the Bible. Why is that surprising? Because, in verse 17 of Ezekiel 38, God says this about Gog of Magog:

**Ezekiel 38:17** - Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the **prophets** of Israel, who in those days **prophesied for years that I would bring you against them?**

Where are any such earlier prophecies found anywhere in the Bible?

A quick word search turns up a son of Japheth named Magog (a person - not a place!) in Genesis 10:2, and a son of Shemaiah named Gog in 1 Chronicles 5:4 — but there is no prophecy about either one of them prior to what we find in Ezekiel. Their only relation with Gog of Magog appears to be names they share.

If Gog of Magog is never mentioned in the Bible prior to Ezekiel 38, then how can it be true that Gog of Magog was spoken about in old time by the prophets (plural!) of Israel, as Ezekiel 38:17 very plainly tells us? **“The prophets of Israel ... prophesied for years that I would bring you against them.”** How can that be true when we are unable to find a single example of such a prophecy?

The only solution to that puzzle is to recognize that there is no literal Gog of Magog. There is no literal king named Gog, and there is no literal kingdom of Magog. The solution is to understand that Gog is a symbolic and figurative king of a symbolic and figurative kingdom of Magog - and that God is walking Gog of Magog out onto the stage in Ezekiel 38-39 to teach the people a lesson.

But how does that solve our problem about the lack of any Gog or Magog prophecies? Simple. While there is no earlier prophecy that mentions

Gog by name, there are many earlier prophecies from many earlier prophets that foretell of various earthly enemies of God's people being defeated by God. And each of those earlier prophecies - whether against Egypt or against Edom or against Assyria or against Babylon or against someplace else - is an example of a prophecy about this figurative Gog of Magog.

In short, I think what we must conclude here is that **Gog of Magog figuratively depicts whoever happens to be the current enemy of God's people.** Gog of Magog is God's name for the enemy *du jour*!

I think that is exactly how Gog of Magog is used in Ezekiel 38-39, and I think that is how Gog of Magog is used later in Revelation 20, where we meet him once again - not in the context of Babylon, but in the context of Rome (which is disparagingly referred to as Babylon a number of times in the New Testament).

**Revelation 20:7-8** - And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.

**But how do we know all of that for sure?** How do we know for sure that Gog of Magog is not a real king from a real land?

One way we know that for sure is by looking for someone named Gog from some kingdom named Magog during the days of Ezekiel or afterward. We will not find either one! If there was someone named Gog from some land of Magog who was able to do all that is described in Ezekiel, then there would be some record of him - but there isn't.

That is one reason, but I think we can also know that Gog was not a real person by looking at the context of Ezekiel 38 where Gog of Magog is first introduced to us.

What had God just told the people? Let's back up a few verses.

**Ezekiel 37:24-27** - **My servant David shall be king over them,** and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and **David my servant shall be their prince forever.** I will make a covenant of peace with them. **It shall be an everlasting covenant with them.** And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

In short, God had just promised them an eternal kingdom that would be based on an everlasting covenant.

And how did the people respond to that great promise?

I suspect they responded by saying:

"So what? First there had been Egyptian slavery, and then the Philistines had attacked us, and then the Assyrians, and now the Babylonians. Who is next? What guarantee do we have that the same thing that happened before won't happen to this so-called eternal kingdom? How can we have any hope in what you are promising us given all that has happened to us?"

Isn't that the same attitude that we see earlier in Ezekiel 37 with the valley of the dry bones?

**Ezekiel 37:11-14** - Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. **Behold, they say, 'Our bones are**

**dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.**' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. **And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live,** and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.'

I think the people were saying to God, "Eternal kingdom? Everlasting covenant? Ha! Nothing we do will ever work - and nothing you do for us will ever last."

And so what did God need to tell them in response through the prophet Ezekiel? God needed to convince the Jews that under the Messiah their glory would be secure. They needed to understand that their kingdom would be restored and would be eternal.

And how does God do that through Ezekiel? God does that with this great symbolic battle with the figurative Gog from the figurative land of Magog. In short, God shows the people that their security was assured because they would be able to defeat **any** enemy with the Messiah fighting for them.

Instead of saying to the people, "I defeated the Egyptians for you, I defeated the Philistines for you, I defeated the Assyrians for you, I defeated the Babylonians for you," and on and on and on, God instead just wraps all of those great earthly enemies up into a single package along with any future such earthlu enemies and calls that entire package "Gog of Magog."

And can't we see that - or rather hear that - in the name itself? Gog of Magog? Doesn't that sound a bit like "Stan from Iran" or "Jack from Iraq"? Can't we hear some wordplay there?

I think the message here is that the **name** of the enemy is irrelevant. The **location** of the enemy is irrelevant. The **size** of the enemy is irrelevant. The **power** of the enemy is irrelevant. The **track record** of the enemy is irrelevant. None of that matters at all. **No one can stand against God! No one can defeat Christ! No one can overcome the kingdom of Christ!**

I think Paul sums up the message of Gog of Magog very nicely for us.

**Romans 8:31** - If God is for us,  
who can be against us?

Let's all think of the worst enemy that we can imagine - the most powerful, the most relentless, the most ruthless, the most terrifying, and the most horrific. And then let's call that terrible enemy Gog from the land of Magog. No matter what we imagined, God will defeat that enemy. No matter what we imagined, the church will win. Far from such an enemy actually existing, we cannot even imagine an earthly enemy that could ever defeat the kingdom of Christ!

Yes, Egypt was powerful, but Egypt was not the eternal kingdom of Christ! Yes, Assyria was powerful, but Assyria was not the eternal kingdom of Christ! Yes, Babylon was powerful, but Babylon was not the eternal kingdom of Christ! Yes, Rome was powerful, but Rome was not the eternal kingdom of Christ! And we could add many others such as the Soviet Union and China or even the United States. There has never been and there will never be any earthly kingdom that can defeat the eternal kingdom of Christ!

And if Egypt failed, and if Assyria failed, and if Babylon failed, and if Rome failed - then doesn't that show us that all such attempts will fail? I think that is God's point with Gog of Magog in both Ezekiel and in Revelation. No matter the earthly enemy, God will defeat that enemy. No matter the earthly enemy, the church will prevail over that enemy and will outlast that enemy.

There is but one eternal kingdom! And that one eternal kingdom is not man-made! Daniel 2:34 tells us that.



And who is Gog today? Where is Magog today? What is our great enemy today? What are the earthly forces today that are arrayed against us on our northern border?

Whatever it is, God will deliver us from that great enemy if we remain faithful to God and refuse to compromise with this world.

And, yes, Gog's army is huge. In Ezekiel 39:12, we see that Gog's army was so large that it took seven months to bury them all! In Revelation 20:8, we are told that his number is "as the sand of the sea."

The whole earth could be arrayed against us - and often it seems that such is the case! But the message here is that no matter how big or how powerful the enemy, that enemy will not win. God will defeat them. We win! The faithful people of God always win!

And is that because we are so powerful? Not at all. We win because God is so powerful. And we share in that victory because of our faith in God and our faithfulness to God.

**1 John 5:4** - For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. **And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.**

Let's now get back to our question about Joel 2:20. How do Gog and Magog (who, by the way, are not mentioned anywhere by name in Joel!) answer our question about why God was not more specific here in verse 20?

I think the answer is this: **no matter who is invading from the north, God will remove that enemy far away from his faithful people.**

That is God's great promise, and it is a great promise that extends far beyond the immediate concerns of Joel's listeners. It is a great promise that extends all the way to the church, the eternal kingdom of Christ, which we know Joel is about to discuss in this same second chapter.

In my opinion, that is why the text is not more specific. I think that is why we don't see Babylon or Assyria mentioned by name anywhere in Joel.

I think that is what we have had so much trouble dating the book of Joel.

We asked all of those questions back in our introduction to Joel, and now, 21 lessons later, I think we have found the answers!

I think that is why the word "northerner" is used in verse 20. After all, from what direction did Gog of Magog approach? Look at those green highlights on your handout!

- (38:6) from the uttermost parts of the north.
- (38:15) out of the uttermost parts of the north.
- (39:2) from the uttermost parts of the north.

Gog of Magog came from the north! And as the faithful people of God on this earth, we can be certain that there will always be a terrible enemy coming against us from the north!

But no matter how terrible the enemy, we can also be certain that God both can and will defeat that enemy for us. All of the kingdoms of this world will crumble to dust before the kingdom of Christ. That was true in the days of Daniel, and that is true in our own day as well.

Gog of Magog will do no better today than he did in the days of Ezekiel when Babylon was playing the part of Gog or in the days of Revelation when Rome was playing the part of Gog. The actors may change, but the script does not. God always wins! The faithful people of God always win! Faith is always the victory!

And if there is any doubt about the relation between Joel and Ezekiel 38-39, just look again at the green highlights on the Handout for Lesson 21.

- In 38:4, we see a great army.
- In 38:6, we see that the great army is from the north.
- In 38:18-19 and 39:8,13, we see a day of the Lord.
- In 39:11, we see a valley. (We will see three valleys in Joel 3.)
- In 39:28, we see God's salvation of his people.
- In 39:29, we see God pouring out his Spirit.



And keep in mind that if the pre-exile view about when Joel was written is the correct view, then Joel and Ezekiel are both focused on the Babylonian invasion - with Joel looking at that invasion before it happened and Ezekiel looking at that invasion after it happened.

And those who reject the early view and the pre-exile view often point as evidence to the fact that Joel mentions neither Assyria nor Babylon by name - but perhaps we have now figured out why neither of those great powers is named in this book.

I think God wants the people to focus on him rather than on whatever great enemy happens to be the current threat. **The enemies change; God does not.** And I think that is also a good lesson for us today as well.

Now let's look at the remainder of Joel 2:20.

I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.

As we just saw, I think this "northerner" has both a specific meaning and a general meaning.

Specifically, I think this northern invasion force was the army that was coming and that was near, which under the pre-exile view would have been Babylon.

But, generally, I think this northern invasion force is any invading army that might ever come for the people of God. None of them will ever be successful in defeating the faithful people of God.

And keep in mind that these verses are assuming that the people have repented - that these people were in fact the faithful people of God. These verses are telling us what God would do if the people turned back to him.

Verse 20 continues with that description: God would also "drive him [the northerner] into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea."

The Hebrew word translated "drive him" is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe driving a people out of their land into exile.

**Deuteronomy 30:1** - And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has **driven** you.

But usually it is Israel that is being driven away. In fact, in Jeremiah 16, we see that Israel was driven away to the north country.

**Jeremiah 16:15** - ...As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the **north** country and out of all the countries where he had **driven** them...

But here in verse 20, it is the northerners who are being driven out. What we are seeing here is a great reversal. The enemies of God's people would experience the same sort of exile that they had inflicted or had threatened to inflict on God's people.

And to where would those enemies be driven? They would be driven to "a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea."

I think we are seeing the four cardinal directions in this verse. We certainly see the north, the east, and the west. But I think we are also seeing the south with that reference to "a parched and desolate land" where those in the north would be driven. That parched and desolate land is likely the Negeb desert in the south.

What does it tell us if verse 20 mentions (either directly or indirectly) all four cardinal directions?

On one level, the message is simple - this northern force would be scattered the same way a bug is scattered when I step on it! They would be scattered in all directions under God's foot!

But I think there may be a deeper meaning as well. And this deeper level would offer some confirmation for what we said earlier about Gog of Magog.

Say what you will about Gog of Magog, one thing is certain: his army is a human army. Gog is a human who is shaking his fist at God and trying to overcome the people of God with his earthly army and his earthly kingdom. But, as we know, no earthly force can ever overcome the faithful people of God.

I think we may be seeing that fact *figuratively* in verse 20 with these four cardinal direction.

The number four is often used figuratively in the Bible to represent things of worldly or earthly origin, especially when contrasted with things of heavenly origin.

This symbolism of the number four comes from the natural occurrences of four in the created world, such as the four cardinal directions (north, south, east, west), the four seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter), and the four basic elements (earth, air, fire, water). Today we might also add our own DNA, which consists of four chemical bases.

We often see the number four used that way in the Bible:

- In Daniel 7:3, the four great beasts represent four earthly kingdoms (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome).
- In Zechariah 1:18, four horns represent the earthly powers arrayed against God's people.
- In Zechariah 6:1, four chariots are sent out by God to show His dominion and power over the earth.
- In Revelation 9:13, four horns are shown as a reminder that the kingdoms of this earth are all under God's sovereign rule.
- In Revelation 5:12-13, when **heaven** praises Christ, it does so with a seven-fold blessing, but when the **earth** praises Christ, it does so with a four-fold blessing.

And here in Joel 2:20? Here we see a great northern army arrayed against the people of God, but who are

driven out by God in all four directions! No earthly force can stand against the kingdom of Christ!

And, next, verse 20 says: "**the stench and foul smell of him [this northerner] will rise.**"

Apparently, dead locusts smell really really bad, and so this part of verse 20 is very often cited as evidence of a locust invasion in Joel 2.

But for that argument to make any sense we would first have to show that dead locusts are the **only** thing that smells really really bad - and, of course, they are not. Dead humans also smell really bad, as the Bible reminds us elsewhere.

**Isaiah 34:3** - Their slain shall be cast out, **and the stench of their corpses shall rise**; the mountains shall flow with their blood.

Again, I don't think we are seeing locusts here - or smelling locusts here to be more precise. Instead, I think we are both seeing and smelling the dead bodies of the human northern invaders who have been removed by God so that they could not harm God's faithful people.

Finally, in verse 20 we read: "**for he has done great things.**"

Who is "he"? And what are these "great things" that "he" has done?

The Hebrew phrase "he has done great things" is ambiguous. It can be understood in either a good sense or a bad sense.

For the bad sense, the phrase could be translated to say that "he has acted with arrogance." For the good sense, the phrase could be translated just as it is in the ESV: "he has done great things."

So which is it? Good or bad? I think the answer is yes! I think the bad sense is used here in verse 20, but I think we will see the good sense used in the next verse.

And I think that ambiguity is intentional. I think the lesson is clear - this northern force was acting like they were in charge! They were acting like they were God.

Yes, we are to follow God's example if we want to live godly lives, but that does not mean that we are

to put ourselves in the place of God. Following the example of Christ is very different from acting like we are Christ. For example, Matthew 7:29 tells us that Jesus taught as one who had authority, but that must not be how we teach. We must teach using the Bible as our authority rather than using ourselves as our own authority. There is a difference between following Jesus' footsteps and stepping into his shoes.

As so, the phrase "he has done great things" could be used both to praise God and to condemn men who act like they are God - and I think that is how the phrase is being used here in verse 20 and in the next verse. Here in verse 20 the phrase condemns those who act as if they are God, but in verse 21 the same phrase will be used to praise God.

But how did this northerner act like God? How did this northerner act with arrogance?

If this Northern force is Babylon (as is seeming more and more likely), then the Bible answers that question.

**Isaiah 13:11** - I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.

**Isaiah 13:19** - And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.

And the Bible also tells us that Babylon went too far in punishing Judah, which is why Babylon was punished so severely.

**Zechariah 1:15** - And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster.

**Isaiah 47:6** - I was angry with my people; I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand;

you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.

Babylon had not done these things yet - but these things were coming and were near. And God is telling the people that these things could still be prevented if they would repent and return to him.

## Joel 2:21

**Joel 2:21** - "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!"

As we saw in verse 20, the Northern invader acted like it was in the place of God, and that is why the phrase "he has done great things" was used in a negative sense in that verse.

But here in verse 21, the people are told to be glad and to rejoice. Why? Because God has done great things! It's the same phrase we saw in verse 20, but here that phrase is describing God - and that phrase is also providing the reason why the people should rejoice.

We are not God. We are not in charge. And if we ever act like we are, then we should face the condemnation of verse 20.

But God is God! God is in charge! God is the King! God is the creator of the universe! And for that reason, we should all be glad and rejoice. The Lord has done great things!

And there is something else the people should do - or rather not do. Verse 21 says, "**Fear not, O land!**"

That the text is urging the land to rejoice and to not be afraid tells us that the land here is being personified. The word "land" is being used here to mean the people who lived on the land.

And why do we see that personification? Most likely it is because the focus here is on an invasion of that land and on a battle that occurs on that land.

In the Old Testament, we often find a command to fear not in the context of a battle.

**Numbers 14:9** - Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear

the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; **do not fear them**.

But we also see that same command in the context of God coming to redeem and save his people.

**Isaiah 40:9-10** - Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, **fear not**; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

**Isaiah 43:1** - But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "**Fear not**, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."

**Isaiah 44:1-4** - "But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: **Fear not**, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams.

**Isaiah 54:4** - **Fear not**, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.

There is something very important about these verses from Isaiah when it comes to our study of Joel, and it is this: they are addressing the same themes that we have been seeing in Joel and that we will see later in Joel. Here is how one commentary describes the similarity.

In short, the Book of Isaiah addresses many of the themes that appear in Joel, including the healing of the land, the triumph over their enemies, the end of Israel's shame among the nations, the return from exile, and the gift of the Spirit. "Do not fear" is the refrain of reassurance that runs through them all.

How many times in the Bible do we see God or an angel of God showing up to help the people of God - but first having to say, "fear not" to those people he has come to help?

**Genesis 15:1** - After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "**Fear not**, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

**Isaiah 41:13** - For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "**Fear not**, I am the one who helps you."

**Daniel 10:12** - Then he said to me, "**Fear not**, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.

**Luke 2:10** - And the angel said to them, "**Fear not**, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

And that is what we also see here in verse 21: "**Fear not**, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!"



When God shows up, even when he shows up to save, most often the first thing God says is “fear not.” And I think that God likely has to start with that reassurance to keep the people he is addressing from fainting dead away before they can hear anything else he has to say!

But do you know what? That all changed with Jesus, didn't it?

When Jesus came to this world, he came as a baby who grew up to be a boy and then a man. Yes, the Messiah is 100% God - but the Messiah is also 100% man.

And while I don't think we can ever fully understand that wonderful truth about Jesus in this life, there is one thing we can understand for sure. There is one thing that we can see all throughout the gospel accounts - one thing that is very different from how God interacted with people in the Old Testament and that is truly wonderful about how Jesus interacted with people in the New Testament.

And what is that wonderful truth? It is this: **Jesus could talk to anyone without first having to announce, “Fear not!”** Whether Jesus was talking to a tax collector, or to a blind man, or to a widow, or to a leper — Jesus could do just that: talk!

Yes, Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” and “by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:15-16).

But that same Jesus could walk up to someone on the street and talk to that person without having to first proclaim, “fear not!”

Look for a moment at the very last phrase in the book of Joel at the end of Joel 3:21 - “for the LORD dwells in Zion.”

A theme that runs all throughout the Bible is God's desire to dwell with his people. We see that desire in Eden, and we see that desire in Exodus.

**Exodus 25:8** - And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may **dwell** in their midst.

**Exodus 29:45-46** - **I will dwell among the people of Israel** and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt **that I might dwell among them.** I am the LORD their God.

And we see that desire in the prophets.

**Ezekiel 37:27** - **My dwelling place** shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Is that something yet to happen, or has it already happened? It has already come to pass. It happened when Jesus was here.

**John 1:14** - And the Word became flesh and **dwelt among us**, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And it is still true today. God dwells with us today in the Lord's church.

**Ephesians 2:19-22** - So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of **the household of God**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into **a dwelling place for God** by the Spirit.

**Revelation 21:3** - And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, **the dwelling place of God is with man.** He will dwell with them, and they will be his

people, and God himself will be  
with them as their God.

Jesus - who became flesh and dwelt among us -  
made all of that possible. "Behold, the dwelling  
place of God is with man!"

"Fear not, O land; be glad and  
rejoice, for the LORD has done  
great things!"

That is as much a message for us today as it was  
for the people of Joel's day! In fact, that is always  
a message that the faithful people of God need to  
hear. **Fear not! Be Glad! Rejoice! God has done  
great things!**

## Joel Lesson 22

### Joel 2:22

**Joel 2:22** - Fear not, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

As we saw earlier, restoration is a key theme in the second half of Joel, and we see that theme again here in verse 22.

Let's think back about what we saw earlier. Back in Joel 1:18, animals were crying out in agony, and, in Joel 1:7, the trees had been stripped bare.

But what do we see happening now? We see a complete reversal. We see a restoration. Those suffering beasts now receive a promise of relief, and those bare trees are promised fruitfulness. And, once again, we see the command to fear not, which we also saw in verse 21.

And why is the text here so concerned about animals and trees?

I think one reason is the same reason we discussed earlier - that at the end of Joel 1 God was showing us a breakdown of the created order: the animals were dying, the plants were dying, and the good order of seed time and harvest had been disrupted. It was as if creation itself was being reversed as chaos was making a come-back.

And, as we also said earlier, that theme of reversing creation often accompanies descriptions of the day of the Lord. In fact, we saw it earlier in this second chapter of Joel.

**Joel 2:10** - The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

But now, in verse 22, we are seeing what would happen if the people repented. And one thing that would happen is that God would restore the proper created order. Things would once again be the way

God wanted them to be - with well-fed beasts and people enjoying the abundance of the land.

That is God's will for his creation, but Satan has other ideas. Our sin and rebellion cause not only us to suffer, but all creation to suffer as well. That *may be* Paul's point in Romans 8.

**Romans 8:19** - For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

I say that it "may be" Paul's point because it is possible that the "creation" in Romans 8 is the "new creation" of the church (2 Corinthians 5:17) - but, either way, I think the main point remains the same: Sin and rebellion leads to the suffering of all creation.

We certainly see that suffering of all creation with the entry of sin into the world.

**Genesis 3:17-18** - And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' **cursed is the ground because of you;** in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; **thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;** and you shall eat the plants of the field.

And I think we see that same suffering in Joel was well - but here the promise is that *all creation* would be blessed and restored if the people repented.

And, of course, we know that those blessings are enjoyed today in the church. It is in the church that we can once again enjoy the perfect peace with God and with each other that was enjoyed in the Garden.

**Isaiah 65:24-25** - “Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.

## Joel 2:23-24

**Joel 2:23-24** - “Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. 24 “The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

Verse 23 is one of the most important verses in Joel 2 - and I realize that is saying a lot given the importance of the verses that we will see at the end of Joel 2!

And, again, what do I mean by “important”? What I mean is that verse 23 has a strong link to what we see in the New Testament - verse 23 is important to our understanding of the New Testament.

But, on the surface, verse 23 may not look all that important. And we could certainly interpret verse 23 in a way that is entirely local in time and place - in a way that is unrelated to what was coming. Be glad and rejoice! Why? Because you have been in a drought, but I am about to make it rain.

But is that all that is going on here? Is verse 23 just a weather report? I don’t think so. I think there is much, much more going on here in verse 23.

And I think we can see that in two different ways - one of which is *obscured* by our English translation, but the other of which is *highlighted* by our English translation. Let’s start with the latter of those two points.

I think that our English translations of verse 23 highlight a connection for us that might have been harder to spot in the original Hebrew. How? By the

use of the word “poured” - “he has **poured** down for you abundant rain.”

While we do not see the same *Hebrew* word later in Joel 2, we do the same *English* word later in our translations of Joel 2 - “I will **pour** out my Spirit” in verse 28 and in verse 29.

And, based on the lexicons, I think it is correct that the two Hebrew words both mean “pour.”

- The Hebrew word “yarad” (Strong’s #3381) in verse 23 means to go downward or to descend, and so when paired with “abundant rain” it refers to rain pouring down.
- The Hebrew word “sapak” (Strong’s #8210) that we will see later in verses 28 and 29 means to spill forth or to gush out as with water (Exodus 4:9) or with blood (Genesis 9:6).

Here, in Joel 2, God is the source of both - God pours down the rain in verse 23, and God pours out his Spirit in verses 28-29.

So why the two different Hebrew words? I think both words are pointing to God in different ways - one by pointing to the *direction* of the pouring, which gives us the source *indirectly* (down from God or down from heaven in verse 23), and the other by pointing *directly* to the *source* of what is poured (out of God or out of heaven).

And I am saying that this pouring down of rain in verse 23 is the same as the pouring out of the Spirit in verses 28-29? No, I am not saying that.

All I am saying is that this pouring down of rain in verse 23 should make us start thinking about the pouring out of the Spirit that we will see twice later in this same chapter.

All I am saying is that these verses have a related theme. Just as earlier verses caused us to start thinking about the church, I think this verse should cause us to start thinking about the Spirit.

And I think that view is confirmed by Isaiah.

**Isaiah 44:3** - For I will **pour water** on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will **pour my**



**Spirit** upon your offspring, and  
my blessing on your descendants.

And, by the way, Isaiah uses yet a third Hebrew word meaning “pour” - the word “yasaq” (Strong’s #3332).

So that is one reason why verse 23 is so important - because verse 23, like Isaiah 44:3, compares the pouring out of rain with the pouring out of the Spirit.

And there is also a second reason why I think verse 23 is so important. But while that first reason was *highlighted* by our English translations, this second reason is *obscured* by those same translations.

Here, again, is the ESV translation of verse 23.

Be glad, O children of Zion, and  
rejoice in the LORD your God, for  
**he has given the early rain for  
your vindication**; he has poured  
down for you abundant rain, the  
early and the latter rain, as before.

Let’s focus on that phrase in the middle: “he has given the early rain for your vindication.” Here are some other translations of that phrase:

- (KJV) “for he hath given you the former rain moderately”
- (LSB) “for He has given you the early rain in **righteousness**”
- (YLT) “for He hath given to you **the Teacher** for righteousness”

Now, that’s interesting. The Young’s Literal Translation of verse 23 has the word “teacher” in place of the phrase “early rain.” Where did that come from?

The answer is that it came straight from the Hebrew. The Hebrew word “moreh” (Strong’s #4175) in verse 23 can mean either “teacher” or “early rain.” You can see the definition on the Handout for Lesson 22.

How is that Hebrew word used elsewhere in the Bible? Well, it is found in two other places - and one of those places uses it to mean **rain**, while the other uses it to mean **teacher**.

**Psalm 84:6** - As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the **early rain** also covers it with pools.

**Proverbs 5:13** - I did not listen to the voice of my **teachers** or incline my ear to my instructors.

Those two verses confirm that the same Hebrew word can mean either “early rain” or “teacher.” But what is the meaning of the word here in verse 23?

On one hand, we might very easily conclude that it means “early rain” given the context of verse 23. That verse is all about rain, and there is nothing in the immediate context about teachers. Most English translations see the situation that way, and so they translate the word as “early rain.”

But, on the other hand, perhaps we should look at another Hebrew word in verse 23 - the word translated “vindication” in the ESV. Let’s take a closer look at that word.

The Hebrew word is “daqa” (Strong’s #6666), and I think it is better translated as “righteousness” than as “vindication.” In fact, that word is found 157 times in the Bible, and the KJV translates it as “righteousness” in 128 of those instances. The basic meaning of the word is “rightness.”

And so here is our question: what is the relationship between “early rain” and “righteousness”? The ESV apparently had some trouble with that same question, which I suspect is why they chose the word “vindication” in place of the word “righteousness.”

But, rather than doing that, let’s consider another possibility - maybe the text is, in fact, talking about a **teacher of righteousness**.

Does that mean we have to reject the “early rain” translation? Not at all - it just means that we may be looking at an intended double meaning here.

The Hebrew word is ambiguous absent context - it can mean either rain or teacher. But maybe that ambiguity was intentional here - maybe we are supposed to see rain on the surface, but we are also supposed to see a teacher when we look below the surface.

And don't we see examples of that elsewhere in the Bible? Statements that have both an immediate physical meaning as well as a deeper spiritual meaning?

- "Give us this day our daily bread."
- "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."
- "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."

And we could find many more examples. In fact, we may even find an example in the immediate context of verse 23 as we continue studying Joel 2. (Hint: Look at verse 26 below!)

Here is how one commentary describes the possible situation here in verse 23:

The surface or immediate meaning is that God will vindicate the Jews in the presence of the nations by sending rains to heal their land. At the same time, it seems, Joel used a wordplay to hint that the salvation of the nation would come from a teacher of righteousness.

I think that view is the correct view. I think we are intended to see, not just early rain, but also a teacher of righteousness here in verse 23.

Why is that my view? I can answer question with a single word: **Deuteronomy**.

All throughout Hosea and now all throughout Joel, both prophets have been using Deuteronomy as a framework for what they are proclaiming. The people were living through the promised curses in Deuteronomy and were failing to enjoy the promised blessings in Deuteronomy because they were engaging in the sin and rebellion condemned in Deuteronomy.

But what else does Deuteronomy tell us?

**Deuteronomy 18:15** - The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers — **it is to him you shall listen.**

And, of course, we know the identity of that promised prophet.

**Matthew 17:2-5** - And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; **listen to him.**"

It is to him you shall listen! Listen to him!

**Acts 3:18-24** - But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. **Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'** And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.

The promised prophet of Deuteronomy 18 was Christ, the Messiah. And if Joel 2:23 is telling the

people about a promised teacher of righteousness, then that teacher is also Christ, the Messiah. And, again, that would mean that we are seeing yet another link between Joel and Deuteronomy, which should not surprise anybody.

But is there any more evidence that verse 23 is intended to make us think both about rain and about a teacher? Yes, there is - and that additional evidence comes from Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple.

**1 Kings 8:35-36** - When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, **when you teach them the good way in which they should walk, and grant rain upon your land,** which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

The Hebrew word "yara" (Strong's #3384) translated "teach" in 1 Kings 8:36 means "to flow like water." Solomon linked rain with teaching when the temple was dedicated - and I think we are seeing that same linkage here in verse 23.

But Solomon is not alone. The prophets also link rain with right teaching.

**Isaiah 30:20-23** - And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your **Teacher** will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your **Teacher**. ... And he will give **rain** for the seed with which you sow the ground, and bread, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous.

**Amos 8:11** - "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD,

"when I will send a famine on the land — not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for **water**, but of **hearing the words** of the LORD."

**Hosea 10:12** - Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and **rain righteousness** upon you.

Should we be surprised to find Joel telling us about the Messiah in verse 23? Of course not. Why? Because we know with certainty that Joel will soon be telling us about the establishment of the Messiah's eternal kingdom just a few verses later!

So, with all of that background, what are verses 23-24 saying?

Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

God is telling the people to rejoice and be glad because of what is coming - and I think also because of **who** is coming. "He has given the early rain for your vindication." "For He hath given to you the Teacher for righteousness."

And, yes, that rain in verse 23 was a gift from God, and that grain, wine, and oil in verse 24 were gifts from God, but God's greatest gifts were yet to come - and I think these verses are also looking forward to those greatest gifts.

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

**Acts 2:38** - And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one

of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the **gift** of the Holy Spirit.”

**2 Corinthians 9:15** - Thanks be to God for his inexpressible **gift**!

When we read verse 23, what do we see? We see God **giving**, and we see God **pouring**.

And what do we see when we open the pages of the New Testament? We see the same thing - we see God **giving**, and we see God **pouring**.

As I said, verse 23 is one of the most important verses in Joel! The great blessings that we see in verses 23-24 are pointing us to the great spiritual blessings that we enjoy today in Christ.

**Ephesians 1:3** - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ **with every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places.

## Joel 2:25

**Joel 2:25** - I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you.

Back in Lesson 3, we looked at some important lessons that we could learn from the book of Joel, and one of those lessons was the importance and the possibility of restoration.

And the verse we looked at for that important lesson was verse 25, which we just read. This verse contains one of the most beautiful promises found anywhere in the Bible.

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

Yes, God can restore time! We can't restore time, but God can! Yes, the troubles will come, but we can be made new! God can restore what we have lost -

even if what we have lost is time! “I will restore to you the **years** that the swarming locust has eaten.”

But **how** does God restore time? How can God restore the wasted years?

I don't think we need to look to physics or to time travel to answer that question. And, likewise, I don't think we need to look to the 15 years that God miraculously added to the life of King Hezekiah.

Instead, I think God can restore our lost time by restoring us! Like Shakespeare, we may be saying, “I wasted time, and now doth time waste me!” But God can change all of that.

God can restore me so that I will have a different relationship with time. God can make time my friend rather than my enemy!

God can give me eternal life so that hand of the clock is no longer the hand of a cruel taskmaster. God can lift up my eyes so that I can see the big picture - a picture that stands apart from time and that includes me living eternally with God!

God can remove the tyranny of time. When I am in Christ, the clock is no longer counting the days until my death - but rather that clock is counting the days until my life! That clock is ticking down the time until the hour and the minute and finally the second when I close my eyes in this world and open them in the next to live eternally with God.

And if that isn't a restoration of the wasted years, then I don't know how else to describe it!

When it comes to time, our prayer should be the same as that of the Psalmist.

**Psalm 90:12** - So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

I think that great lesson of restoration is an important spiritual lesson that we can learn from verse 25. But let's also look at the more immediate and more localized meaning of verse 25.

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the



cutter, my great army, which I sent among you.

And the first thing we notice is that the text is most definitely talking about locusts here in verse 25.

Does that mean Joel 2 has been talking about locusts all along? No. It does not.

First, perhaps we should note that in a book that is sometimes said to be about nothing but locusts, the word “locust” occurs in only two verses - here in Joel 2:25 and in Joel 1:4.

And second, we should note again what we just observed - that there is no mistaking the fact that locusts are being discussed here in verse 25. Joel uses the word “locust.”

Was that also the case earlier in Joel 2? No, it was not. This is the first time we have seen the word “locust” in Joel 2.

Perhaps that fact should tell us what we likely already know - when God is talking about locusts, God can do that very plainly - as he does here in Joel 2:25 and as he did back in Joel 1:4.

But God does not do that earlier in Joel 2. God never says, as he did in Joel 1, that this coming invasion would be a locust invasion. Instead, if we are looking for the plain description of what was coming, what we find is “a great and powerful **people**” in Joel 2:2.

And, again, I think we are intended to read Joel 2 and to think about the locusts that we just saw in Joel 1. I think the error comes when we read Joel 2 and think **only** about locusts. If we do that, then I think we have missed the boat about Joel 2, and we have also left ourselves without any explanation for the judgment that we will see in Joel 3. Why would the nations be judged for a *locust* invasion?

But, some might say, verse 25 refers to those locusts as “my great army!” Doesn’t that prove that the army in Joel 2 is an army of locusts? No, it does not.

Yes, the locusts were an army sent by God, but nowhere does God say that these locusts were his **only** army. I think we have already seen another army in this chapter - the “great and powerful people” in Joel 2:2 that are called God’s army in Joel 2:11.

And remember what we saw in verse 20 - we saw the villain of Joel 2 described as a “northerner” who was acting like he was God - he was arrogant. Could that be true of a locust? Have you ever met an arrogant locust?

God can have two armies, and I think he does here in Joel. We have the army of locusts in Joel 1:6, and we have the army of people in Joel 2:2 (that in some ways should remind us of the army of locusts from Joel 1).

And if we had any doubt at all about whether God was behind that locust invasion in Joel 1 - we no longer have that doubt. Verse 25 is very clear on that point: God calls those locusts “**my** great army, **which I sent among you.**”

As we said earlier, God sent those locusts to teach the people a lesson and to warn them about something else that was coming.

But why does God tell them that he would restore what the **locusts** did but not tell them that he would restore what the **invading human army** did?

Simple - **the invading human army hadn’t done anything yet!** In fact, what God is telling the people here is what he would do if they repented - and one thing he would do if they repented was that he would remove the northerner far from them.

That is, if they repented then there would be nothing to restore after the northern invasion because that northern invasion would never have occurred.

But the locust invasion had already occurred. God could not prevent the locusts from coming because the locusts had already come. But God could restore what the people had lost because of those locusts.

One last point about verse 25 - the word order for the four locust types is different here in verse 25 from what we saw in Joel 1:4.

- **Joel 1:4** - cutting locust, swarming locust, hopping locust, and destroying locust.
- **Joel 2:25** - swarming locust, hopping locust, destroying locust, and cutting locust.

Can we conclude anything from that difference? Likely not, although it may be noteworthy that the lists are arranged so that the **cutting** locust is both the first and the last locust that we meet in Joel.

That Hebrew word “gazam” (Strongs #1501) translated “cutter” in Joel 2:25 and translated “cutting locust” in Joel 1:4 is found in only one other verse in the Bible.

**Amos 4:9** - “I struck you with blight and mildew; your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees **the locust devoured; yet you did not return to me,**” declares the LORD.

And likewise here, I think the question is the same: the locust devoured - but would the people return to God? In Amos, they did not. Would they in Joel? That may be why God closes verse 25 with that particular locust.

But, with that said, I think the **number** is likely more important here than the **order**. We see **four** words for locust here, and, as we have said, the number four is often used in the Bible as a symbol for the earth. These locusts are an **earthly** army sent by God, just as surely as the Babylonians and the Assyrians were **earthly** armies sent by God.

## Joel 2:26

**Joel 2:26** - “You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Verse 26 describes the great blessings that would follow the restoration in verse 25.

**“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied.”**

As we said when we looked at verse 23, verse 26 is an example of a statement in the Bible that has a surface physical meaning along with a deeper spiritual meaning. And perhaps this statement in verse 26 is additional evidence that we were intended to see both the rain (the physical blessing) and the Messiah (the spiritual blessing) in verse 23.

Here the people are promised all they can eat after the restoration from God occurs. And, as we said, that statement is true on two different levels.

On one level, they will have all the *physical* food that they can eat. God will restore their crops and restore their rainfall, and so they will have physical food in abundance.

But, on another level, and especially if they were just told about the Messiah in verse 23, the people would have all the *spiritual* food that they can eat.

**Ephesians 1:3** - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places.

**Romans 8:32** - He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

But some commentaries disagree. They tell us that the book of Joel is just a book about locusts. They tell us that the book of Joel is just a book about lost crops and a terrible drought. And so they tell us that Joel here is just promising physical rain and physical crops to satisfy a physical hunger.

And what do I say in response to those commentators? I say that they are dead wrong!

God is always asking us to lift up our eyes from this physical world to see the unseen spiritual world - and this book of Joel is no different.

## Joel Lesson 23

### Joel 2:26, Continued

**Joel 2:26** - “You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

As we saw last week, verse 26 describes the great blessings that would follow the restoration in verse 25. And the first great blessing is that “you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied.”

And, as we also saw last week, I think we should view that blessing on two levels - the surface level of physical food and the deeper level of spiritual food. I think we saw Jesus in verse 23, and so we should not be surprised this week to see spiritual blessings in verse 26.

But some commentaries disagree. They tell us that the book of Joel is just a book about locusts. They tell us that the book of Joel is just a book about lost crops and a terrible drought. And so they tell us that Joel is just promising physical rain and physical crops to satisfy a physical hunger.

But I think those commentaries are completely wrong. Why? Because of what Peter tells us in Acts 2.

Right now we are looking at Joel 2:26, but we know with certainty that Joel 2:28 will be telling us about the eternal kingdom of Christ because that is what Peter tells us in Acts 2:16. And that fact alone tells us that Joel is **not** just focused on the physical, despite what many commentaries would have us believe. Joel is **not** just a textbook about locusts!

Let's look again at the blessings promised in verse 26. **“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied.”** Does that statement remind us of anything?

**John 7:37-39** - On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.** Whoever believes in me,

as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” **Now this he said about the Spirit**, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Here in Joel 2, we see the rain pouring down, and we see great blessings from God. And what will see at the end of Joel 2? We will see the Spirit of God being poured out, and we will see great blessings from God.

And how should the people respond to those great blessings from God? The answer is the same no matter which great blessings from God are being received, and verse 26 gives us that answer.

**“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you.”**

The proper response from people who have been **blessed** by God is to **praise** God.

The Hebrew word “halal” translated “praise” in verse 26 means to speak with approval and admiration about God and to affirm his greatness and goodness with an attitude of delight and rejoicing.

One commentary makes the interesting point that when the Hebrew verb “halal” is used in the Old Testament, it is almost always used in the plural, as it is in “hallelujah,” which is the **plural** imperative of the verb halal - praise **you all** the Lord!

The frequent use of the plural form suggests that this praise is most often a congregational activity. Yes, we can and should praise God when we are alone, but the praise that we find most often in the Bible is the collective praise of God's people when they are together praising and worshiping God.

There is an interesting link between the word “wondrously” in verse 26 and something we saw when we studied the book of Zechariah. The same Hebrew word translated “wondrously” in verse 26 is found twice in Zechariah 8:6.

**Zechariah 8:6** - Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is **marvelous** in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be **marvelous** in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts?

Zechariah and Joel have something in common - some commentaries find nothing about Christ or his church in either book.

But, of course, we know that those commentaries are wrong. How do we know that? We know that because the New Testament quotes both Joel and Zechariah and confirms that they both contain prophecies about Jesus.

But can we prove that fact from the Old Testament alone? Did the people who first heard these prophecies know that the prophecies were about more than just their own current situation? Yes, I think they did. And I think Zechariah 8:6 proves that they did by using the same word that we find here in Joel 2:26.

If those prophecies in Zechariah were about only finishing the temple and repopulating the city of Jerusalem, then no one listening to those prophecies would have thought them farfetched. The temple was already under construction, and people were already moving back into the city.

But Zechariah 8:6 tells us that the people had a different reaction to those prophecies. They seem to have thought that the prophecies were so farfetched that not even God would be able to make them happen! And because of that attitude, the people receive a sharp rebuke in Zechariah 8:6.

God asks them if what seemed “marvelous” in human eyes would actually prove “marvelous” in his own sight? In other words, should an action be considered too difficult for God to accomplish simply because the action is too difficult for man to accomplish or even to imagine?

And here in verse 26 we find that same word: God has dealt **wondrously** with his people. Is that verse just talking about locusts? No, it is not - no more than Zechariah was just talking about a local construction project.

Both Joel and Zechariah were looking down the years to the day when Christ would come to save his people and establish his kingdom. That is what the word “wondrous” tells us.

**Psalm 40:5** - You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your **wondrous** deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.

Joel is telling us about Christ. Joel is telling us about the church of Christ. “Praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you!”

Verse 26 continues: “**And my people shall never again be put to shame.**”

Again, I think we are seeing a promise here that should be viewed on two levels.

First, the people hearing Joel would not be ashamed. Why not? Because it would be clear to all that God had not abandoned them.

In ancient times, when one nation was conquered by another nation, the assumption was that the god or gods of the first nation were just not as powerful as the god or gods of the conquering nation. And so, when the people of Israel were carried off into exile, the surrounding nations thought either that God had abandoned them or that God had been defeated. And that attitude from their enemies caused the people to be put to shame.

**Psalm 25:2** - O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to **shame**; let not my enemies exult over me.

**Jeremiah 9:19** - For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion: ‘How we are ruined! We are utterly **shamed**, because we have left the land, because they have cast down our dwellings.’

But the promise here is that such shame would not happen. If the people repented, then the invasion would be stopped, and the shame would not occur.



But this promise is more than that. The promise here goes beyond telling them that this shame would not happen. The promise in verse 26 is that this shame would **never** happen again. "And my people shall **never again** be put to shame."

That part of the promise tells us that we are not just looking at Babylon or whatever current enemy was threatening the people. Instead, we are looking at **all** such enemies that would **ever** threaten the people of God. And, of course, that promise extends all the way to the church - the eternal kingdom of Christ that was coming and that would outlast and destroy all earthly kingdoms.

And how do we know that for sure? We know that for sure when we read the New Testament.

**1 Peter 2:6** - For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him **will not be put to shame.**"

**Romans 10:11** - For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him **will not be put to shame.**"

This promise in Joel 2:26 goes far beyond the days of Joel. This great promise is a promise for the faithful people of God under the rule of Christ.

And the promise is not just that we will win the **next** battle - the promise is that we will win **every** battle. "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

And how will that happen? That's the wrong question. Instead, we should be asking how could that not happen! Remember who is fighting for us!

**Revelation 19:11-16** - Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but

himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

That is why we know that "everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." How could it be otherwise?

And just how important is that great promise? It is so important that God repeats it in the very next verse!

## Joel 2:27

**Joel 2:27** - You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Who are God's people? How do we know?

The answer to that question here is that the people would know because of what God had done for them.

God would save them, God would restore them, and God would do wondrous things for them. And, as a result, the people would know that God was in their midst. They would know that they are God's people because of what God had done for them.

And today? How can we know that we are God's people?

The answer is the same. God has saved us, God has restored us, and God has done wondrous things for us. And, as a result, we know that God is in our midst. We know that we are God's people because of what God has done for us.

Isn't that what John tells us? Doesn't John tell us that we know we are God's people because God has saved us and restored us and done wondrous things for us?

**1 John 3:9-10** - No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, **because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God**, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

**1 John 3:23-24** - And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. **And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.**

**1 John 4:13-14** - **By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

And don't we know that God is in our midst? Haven't we been "built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22)? Isn't the church "the household of God" (1 Timothy 3:15)? And don't we know that we have been added to that church (Acts 2:47) after we have obeyed the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:38)?

Joel 2:27 is as much a promise for us (as *spiritual* Israel) as it was for the people of Joel's day (as *physical* Israel). "You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame."

And that knowledge runs both ways. We know that we are God's people, and God knows that we are his people.

**2 Timothy 2:19** - But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "**The Lord knows those who are his**," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

"The Lord knows those who are his." Where does that quote come from? The most likely source is the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16.

**Numbers 16:3-5** - They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! **For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them.** Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, and he said to Korah and all his company, "In the morning **the LORD will show who is his**, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him."

The spirit of Korah is still alive and well in the world today - "all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them." Korah may have believed that was true, but that was not true. Instead, what was true then and what is true today is that "the Lord knows those who are his."

**Matthew 7:21** - **Not everyone** who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but** the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

**2 Timothy 2:19** - But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "**The Lord knows those who are his**," and, "Let everyone who

names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”

Let's pause and look at a particular word in that verse we just read from 2 Timothy - the word “seal.” “But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this **seal**: The Lord knows those who are his.”

We have look at some parallels between Joel and Zechariah - let's look at another one. Zechariah, like Joel, also tells us about the church.

**Zechariah 3:9** - For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, **I will engrave its inscription**, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

As we said when we studied that verse in our previous classes on Zechariah, that stone is the church. It is the same stone that Daniel told us about in Daniel 2.

And what does Zechariah tell us that God has done with that stone? God has engraved something on it. “I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts.”

What has God engraved on the church?

Let me first ask a related question: What do we do when we have something important that we don't want to lose? Don't we write our name on it?

I think that is what we are seeing here with this engraved stone. I think God is writing his name on something that belongs to him and that is precious to him.

The New Testament tells us repeatedly that God has written his name on us.

**2 Corinthians 1:21-22** - And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his **seal** on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

**Ephesians 1:13-14** - In him you also, when you heard the word of

truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed** with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Ephesians 4:30** - And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were **sealed** for the day of redemption.

**Revelation 9:4** - They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the **seal** of God on their foreheads.

God has written his name on us. God has put his seal on us - we are his people. That seal is an indication of ownership. God sets his seal upon us to show that we belong to him. We are precious to him.

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** - Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? **You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.** So glorify God in your body.

God bought us, and God wrote his name on us.

So, who are God's people?

That is a question that runs all throughout the Bible. What is the identity of God's people? I think we are seeing that issue here in Joel 2:27, and I think we also see that issue in a parallel passage from Isaiah.

**Isaiah 44:3-5** - For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; **I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring**, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. **This one will say, 'I am the LORD's,' another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write**

**on his hand, 'The LORD's,' and name himself by the name of Israel."**

I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring ... and another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's.'

How can I know that I belong to God? How does God know that I belong to him? The answer to each is the same - the Holy Spirit.

**1 John 4:13** - **By this we know** that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

**Romans 8:16** - **The Spirit himself bears witness** with our spirit that we are children of God.

And how does the Holy Spirit do that for us today? Is it through some sort of special miraculous modern-day revelation? No, it is not.

Let's think about Acts 2 again. At the beginning of that chapter, Peter began speaking to people who had crucified Christ. But at the end of that chapter, some of those people had been added to the church of Christ. They had been saved - and they knew they had been saved.

How did they know? They knew they were saved because they knew that they had done what Peter had told them to do. And who told Peter? Who told Peter what those people needed to do? The Holy Spirit.

**Luke 12:11-12** - And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, **for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.**

The Holy Spirit taught Peter, and then Peter taught his listeners.

And today? Is the Holy Spirit still teaching us what to say today? Yes, he is - but he is doing that today

**only** through the unchanging written word of God - the Bible.

**2 Timothy 3:16** - All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for **teaching**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, and for **training** in righteousness, that the man of God may be **complete**, equipped for **every** good work.

So how did the people in Acts 2 know they were saved? How do we know today that we are saved? The answer to each question is the same - the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit through Peter told the people in Acts 2 what they had to do, and the Holy Spirit through the Bible tells us what we must do.

We can know with certainty we are saved because we can know with certainty that we have obeyed the gospel. The people in Acts 2 did not need a miracle to know that - and neither do we.

But what if I have not obeyed the gospel, but I think I am saved anyway? John answers that question.

**1 John 2:3-5** - And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar**, and the truth is not in him...

The reason why I can know that I am a child of God is because I can know whether or not I have done what the Bible tells me that I must do to become a child of God.

And what must I do? Let's listen as the Holy Spirit answers that question.

**Acts 2:38** - And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."



Have I done that, or have I not? Have I obeyed the gospel, or have I not? Am I a child of God, or am I not? I can **know** the answers to those questions.

And so where are we with verse 27?

The people are being told what would happen if they repented and obeyed God, and verse 27 is the culmination of that description:

“You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.”

And the same is true today - that is also what happens when we repent and obey the gospel. God dwells in our midst, we know that we are his people, and God knows that we are his people. And we will never be put to shame because we are victorious in Christ!

Well, that would certainly have been a happy ending for the people of God in Joel's day if they had repented and returned to God.

But what if they did not repent? What if they persisted in their rebellion? Then they would not receive these great blessings.

But would anybody receive them? Yes, they would.

God had long before promised Abraham that he would bless the entire world through Abraham's seed. And that great blessing was going to happen whether or not Joel's listeners repented and turned back to God. One way or another, God was going to send the Messiah to bless the entire world.

And that great blessing is what we see in the closing verses of Joel 2. Whatever happened with the people of Joel's day - whether they repented or did not repent - God turns next to what he was going to do afterward.

## Joel 2:28

**Joel 2:28** - “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall

dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

How many chapters are there in the book of Joel? And what chapter are we in now?

If you look at the Bible that you brought today, I suspect the answers are 3 and 2 - there are 3 chapters in Joel, and we are in chapter 2.

But if you look at the Bible that I brought today (and which is also shown on the Handout for Lesson 23), then the answers are 4 and 3 - there are 4 chapters in Joel, and we just started chapter 3. Why the difference?

Several of our handouts, including the one from last week, has shown excerpts of the Hebrew text of Joel in Leningrad Codex of AD 1008. As you will notice on those handouts, there is a lack of chapter and verse divisions in that Hebrew text - and that is the way things were from the day they were first written down up until around 1227, when the chapter divisions that we use today were added. The verse numbers that we use were added around 1555.

Over the years, two standardized chapter and verse divisions were created - one set for the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Septuagint (both of which are only the Old Testament, of course), and another set for the Latin Vulgate (which contains both the Old and New Testaments).

And why is that difference important?

When you open a commentary on Joel or one of the other prophets listed on the Handout, that commentary may refer to both numbering systems. For example, a commentary on Joel 2:28 may refer to Joel 3:1 in parentheses. And some of the sources may use only the Hebrew system - for example, the program I use to locate verses in the Leningrad Codex uses only the Hebrew system. We will continue to use the numbering system in the ESV, but it can be very helpful at times to be aware of the other system.

And let me say one more thing about the *Jerusalem Bible* before we move on. That version of the Bible is of interest, not only to Bible readers, but also to readers of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*! Why? Because the person who translated the book

of Jonah in the Jerusalem Bible was none other than J. R. R. Tolkien (my favorite author)!

Now that we have reached verse 28, we have reached a section of Joel that is by any measure one of the great texts of the Bible. And, yes, they are all great - but there is only one Old Testament passage so great that Peter quoted it at the very beginning of the first gospel sermon, which was preached on the day that the eternal kingdom of Christ was established in Jerusalem!

But, as is so often the case, greatness is accompanied by controversy. These final five verses of Joel 2 are very controversial, both in and out of the church - and we will be faced with many hard questions, some of which we may be able to answer definitively, but others of which we will likely have to be content with a range of possible answers.

And how can I be so sure that is where we will end up? Because that is where many, many others before us have ended up!

One of the things I have done to prepare for these lessons is to read every article I could find in the *Firm Foundation* about the Holy Spirit. The earliest article I found was written in 1890!

And what did I discover after reading all of those articles? I discovered that there is very broad range of opinions in the church about the Holy Spirit - and it seems that has always been true, at least if we start in 1890.

And while some might find that difference of opinion discouraging, I do not. Instead, I am encouraged by how charitable and respectful most of those articles were to those with different opinions about this very difficult subject.

I am also encouraged because our differences of opinion about the Holy Spirit prove that something we claim is true about us is in fact true - we do not have a human creed! There is no human authority telling us what to believe. Instead, we are relying only on God's word - and so we can and do have different opinions on questions not directly answered in God's word.

But I also discovered that there are some things about the Holy Spirit about which we in the church almost all agree. We may not all agree about what

the Holy Spirit does **after** we are saved (the role of the Spirit in **sanctification**), but I think most of us agree about what the Holy Spirit does **before** we are saved (the role of the Spirit in **justification**). And that is also encouraging.

If we examine carefully what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit, I think we will find some things about which we can and must all agree. But I also think we will find some things about which we can have different opinions.

Let's start with a statement for which I suspect we all agree: There are some very hard questions about the Holy Spirit!

And if we were to study all of those questions, we would have quite a long road ahead of us! But that is not our task here. Instead, our task here is to study only those issues about the Holy Spirit that we need to consider in our quest to understand the closing verses of Joel 2.

But what approach should we take in our study of these difficult verses? We know that Acts 2 has some vital information for us about these verses - how should we use that vital information? Should we start with Acts 2?

I have thought a great deal about that question, and I have decided that the best approach is not to **start** with Acts 2 - but rather to **end** with Acts 2. We today cannot read Joel 2 without thinking about Acts 2, but that was not true for Joel's original listeners. They didn't have Acts 2! How did they understand Joel 2? Or, more to the point, how were they intended to understand Joel 2?

I think we should start with that question in our study of these closing verses of Joel 2, and then afterward we can circle back and determine what Acts 2 teaches us about those same verses.

So, here is my proposed plan. Let's first study of Joel 2:28-32 from the perspective of **Joel's** listeners in Joel 2. And then, after we have done that, let's flip over to Acts 2, and study those same verses from Joel 2 from the perspective of **Peter's** listeners in Acts 2.

## Joel Lesson 24

Here again is my proposed plan for our study of the final five verses of Joel 2: Let's first study of Joel 2:28-32 from the perspective of **Joel's** listeners in Joel 2. And then, after we have done that, let's flip over to Acts 2, and study those same verses from Joel 2 from the perspective of **Peter's** listeners in Acts 2. In short, we want to know what Joel 2 tells us about Acts 2, and we want to know what Acts 2 tells us about Joel 2.

### Joel 2:28-29, Continued

**Joel 2:28-29** - "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

Whether or not we are seeing a chapter break here, we are definitely seeing a section break.

So far in Joel 2, the text has been describing this terrible second invasion that is coming and that is near, the text has called upon the people to repent, and the text has been describing what would happen if they did repent.

But, now, in verse 28, the text is beginning to describe something else - something that would come to pass **afterward**.

We are seeing something here that God was going to do later whether or not these people repented. And perhaps this glimpse of the wonderful things that God was planning would provide an additional incentive for Joel's listeners to repent and return to God.

### After what?

Our first question is this: "And it shall come to pass **afterward**" - **after what?**

Peter will help us answer that question later, but for now I think Joel 1:15 also helps us answer that question.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For **the day of the LORD** is **near**, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

And Joel 2 has been telling us about that coming day of the Lord that was near.

But I think that, starting here in verse 28, we are going to hear about something else that is coming, but that is **not** near - or, at least, not necessarily near. I think the word "afterward" in verse 28 just means "later." (Peter may tell us a bit more about this in Acts 2.)

In short, here is what I think God is telling them:

Yes, the enemy from the north will come soon if you do not repent. And, yes, I will remove that northern enemy far from you if you do repent. But whether you repent or do not repent, let me tell you now about something that I am going to do after all of this.

Some of the promises in Joel 2 have been conditional. For example, God would remove the northerner from them **if** they repented. And we know that promise was conditional because we looked back to Deuteronomy 28 to find its source, and we looked forward to the exile to find its likely termination.

But here I don't think we have a condition - either stated or unstated. "And it shall come to pass afterward."

I think God is telling the people here what he is going to do later without regard to what the people are doing now. God might use these people to accomplish his will, but God would just use someone else if these people remained disobedient and rebellious.

God had earlier made an unconditional promise to Abraham to bless the world through his seed, and God had earlier made an unconditional promise to King David that one of his descendants would reign forever. And I think we are seeing a promise here that is related to those two promises and that is likewise unconditional.

And maybe we today can know all of this by reading ahead in the Bible, but how could the people of Joel's day have known this?

I think they could have known it by reading the prophecy itself, which starts in verse 28 and continues at least into verse 32. In a word, these verses are **Messianic** - something the Jews were already accustomed to hearing from the prophets - and I think Joel's listeners would have seen these promises as Messianic promises even before Peter confirmed that for us all in Acts 2.

## I will pour out my Spirit

So what is it that was going to happen later?

These verses give us a list of things, and the very first thing on that list is a wonderful promise from God: "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

What does that promise mean? We will eventually get to that question, but for now let's start with a slightly narrower question: what would that promise have likely meant to the people who first heard it but who did not have Acts 2?

**"I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."**

I think the first thing the people might have thought when they heard that great promise was that they had already heard it before.

Joel is not the only book in the Bible that contains that great promise. There are plenty of parallel "pour" prophecies & promises in the Bible (as shown on the Handout for Lesson 24)!

**Isaiah 32:14-18** - For the palace is forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks; **until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high**, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness,

quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

**Isaiah 44:3-5** - For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; **I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.** They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. This one will say, 'I am the LORD's,' another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,' and name himself by the name of Israel."

**Ezekiel 39:28-29** - Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore. **And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel,** declares the Lord GOD."

**Zechariah 12:8-10** - On that day the LORD will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, going before them. And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. **And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace** and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only



child, and weep bitterly over him,  
as one weeps over a firstborn.

Would Joel's listeners have been familiar with these other prophecies? Yes and no. If we date Joel during the pre-exile period (as now seems likely), then they would have been familiar with Isaiah, but not with Ezekiel or Zechariah because those books had not been written yet.

But slicing and dicing the Old Testament that way is not helpful or necessary for our purposes. And given our uncertainty about the date of Joel, we can't even be sure about where we should slice and dice.

So, instead of focusing on people who lived during the days of Joel, let's focus instead going forward on people who lived between the Testaments - on people who had **all** of the Old Testament but **none** of the New Testament. What would this promise in Joel 2 have meant to them? (Later we will expand that question to include **both** Testaments when we look at Acts 2.)

Let's assume this person living between the Testaments knows all about the Old Testament - perhaps he is a scribe. And let's look at these verses from the perspective of that hypothetical Old Testament scholar.

And the first thing I think we can say about that person living between the Testaments and reading Joel 2 is that he would have also thought about Isaiah 32, Isaiah 44, Ezekiel 39, and Zechariah 10 because they contain the same promise.

And what would he have seen in all of those parallel prophecies? Look at the blue highlights on the Handout for Lesson 24.

- In Isaiah 32, he would have seen promises of fruitfulness, growth, justice, righteousness, peace, quiet, trust, and security.
- In Isaiah 44, he would have seen a people chosen by God, blessing, growth, and a people belonging to God.
- In Ezekiel 39, he would have seen restoration, mercy, God's jealousy, security, a people brought back by God, a people gathered by God, a people showing God's holiness, a people who know God, God leaving no one

behind, and God not hiding his face from the people.

- In Zechariah 12, he would have seen salvation, protection, strength, godliness, judgment, grace, mercy, and sorrow over a firstborn.

Now, as we today look back at those lists from the perspective of the New Testament, I suspect we can all think of something established by God that satisfies every single one of those descriptions!

But what about our Old Testament scholar who does not yet have the New Testament. What would he have been thinking about?

Let's look at the list again - peace, security, justice, mercy, salvation, strength, and on and on? I think that, without a doubt, he would have been thinking about the promised Messiah.

He would have seen these great promises as what they are: Messianic promises. He would have recognized that these promises of peace, security, justice, mercy, salvation, and strength are, all throughout the Old Testament, applied to the coming Messianic age. He would have understood that the focus here is on the Messiah who was coming and on the Messiah's kingdom that was coming.

And our verses here in Joel 2 would have confirmed his view: all flesh, prophecy, dreams, visions, wonders, a great and awesome day, salvation, escape, survivors, and the call of God.

I think any Jew reading these prophecies would have been left thinking both that **someone** wonderful was coming and that **something** wonderful was coming. And that **whoever** it was and **whatever** it was, when these promises were fulfilled it would be a great and awesome day for the people of God!

That is what I think we can learn when we compare this prophecy in Joel 2 with these parallel prophecies, but let's focus now on the key phrase itself: "I will pour out my Spirit." What would our Old Testament scholar have thought about that specific language?

## The Spirit in the Old Testament

Let's start with the word "Spirit." What would someone, knowing only the Old Testament, have known about the Spirit of God?

Two of our previous handouts are very helpful in answering that question. We can look at the Handout for Lesson 14 to quickly review all of the verses in the Old Testament that directly refer to the Spirit of God, and we can look at the Handout for Lesson 16 to quickly determine the specific language that is used to describe the Spirit in the Old Testament.

After we do that, we should be able to say what our Old Testament scholar would have known about the Holy Spirit.

But why is it important that we look at all of that? Why is it important for us to know what someone in the Old Testament would have known about the Spirit of God?

It is important for us to know that because Joel 2 is a **prophecy** about the Spirit, and it is very unlikely that this prophecy is describing only those activities of the Spirit that were already known and were already happening. As with *most* prophecies, I think we can assume that this prophecy was telling us something new about the Spirit of God that would either occur or otherwise be revealed when this prophecy was fulfilled. (See a rare exception in Genesis 8:22.)

But for us to determine the new thing that is prophesied here about the Spirit, we need to know what the old things were. What did the people already know about the Spirit? What were they already experiencing when it came to the Spirit of God?

So, here then is our question: what would our Old Testament scholar have already known about the Holy Spirit?

- He would have known that sometimes the Holy Spirit is described in terms of its **location** - the Spirit is here, but not there. For example, in Genesis 1:2, we find the Spirit hovering over the face of the waters. In 1 Samuel 16:14, we find the Spirit departing from King Saul.

- But our Old Testament scholar would also have known that sometimes the Holy Spirit is described as being omnipresent - here, there, and everywhere. "Where shall I go from your Spirit," the Psalmist asks in Psalm 139:7.
- Our Old Testament scholar would have known that there are many different ways to describe the interaction of the Holy Spirit with man. The Spirit **abides** in man (Genesis 6:3); he **fills** man (Exodus 31:3); he is **put** on man (Numbers 11:17); he **rests** on man (Numbers 11:26); he **comes upon** man (Numbers 24:2); he is **in** man (Numbers 27:18); he **clothes** man (Judges 6:34); he **stirs** man (Judges 13:25); he **rushes upon** man (Judges 14:6); he **departs** from man (1 Samuel 16:14); he has **made** man (Job 33:4); he can be **taken** from man (Psalm 51:11); he **leads** man (Psalm 143:10); he can be **grieved** by man (Isaiah 63:10); he is put in the **midst** of man (Isaiah 63:11); he gives **rest** to man (Isaiah 63:14); he **enters into** man (Ezekiel 2:2); he **falls upon** man (Ezekiel 11:5); and he is put **within** man (Ezekiel 36:27).
- Our Old Testament scholar would have associated the Spirit of God with the word of God. The Spirit **speaks** by man (2 Samuel 23:2); he **instructs** man (Nehemiah 9:20); he **warns** man through prophets (Nehemiah 9:30); he gives **visions** to man (Ezekiel 8:3); and God had sent his **law** and his **words** by the Spirit through the prophets (Zechariah 7:12).
- Our Old Testament scholar would have known of, but been less familiar with, the title "Holy Spirit" because that phrase occurs in only two Old Testament passages: Psalm 51:11 and Isaiah 63:10-11. He would likely have referred to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit or as the Spirit of the Lord.
- Our Old Testament scholar would have known that the Hebrew word "ruah" translated "Spirit" can also just mean "wind" or "breath" depending on the context. For example, we find both of those usages in the description of the great flood: "Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the

**breath** of life died.” (Genesis 7:22) “And God made a **wind** blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.” (Genesis 8:1) And so, when he thought about the Spirit of God, he might be thinking about the Spirit in terms of the breath of God or a wind sent from God (perhaps even a mighty rushing wind!).

## What is new about the Spirit in this promise?

So now, with that all on the table, here is our question: what’s new? What new thing about the Spirit was God going to do afterward?

Let’s read verses 28-29 again.

**Joel 2:28-29** - And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

What’s new in those verses? I think the text gives us four big clues in answering that question.

The **first clue** is the word “pour” that is used twice in those verses.

That is not a word that is used in the Old Testament to describe something that was already true about the Spirit. Instead, that word “pour” is used in the Old Testament to describe something that God would later do with the Spirit, as shown on the Handout for Lesson 24.

The **second clue** is the list of the various activities that would occur.

The Holy Spirit would cause some to prophesy, would cause some to dream dreams, and would cause some to see visions.

Now those activities, of course, are not new; we see them all in the Old Testament, with two of them (prophesy and visions) being directly attributed to the Spirit (Ezekiel 8:3; Zechariah 7:12). And, although there is no passage that directly links the

Holy Spirit with dreams, we do see God speaking to people through dreams in the Old Testament. But here in a single verse we find all three of them together.

Maybe the clue is less about **what** is being done, and more about **how often** it is being done, which may take us back to our first clue and the phrase “poured out.”

Or perhaps this second clue is less about **what** is being done, and more about **who** is doing it, and that takes us to our third clue.

The **third clue** are the various people described in those verses.

Yes, we see prophecy and visions and dreams elsewhere in the Old Testament - but most of the time, those activities are performed by only a select few, such as Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah.

But that is not what we see here in verses 28-29. Instead, we see sons, we see daughters, we see old men, we see young men, we see male servants, and we see female servants.

And note the word that is used in verse 29 when we get to those servants - the word “even.” “**Even** on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.” God is with that word stressing the **tremendous breadth** of this promise. It will be enjoyed **even** by servants!

Our Old Testament scholar is very much accustomed to finding people such as Isaiah prophesying and to find people such as Ezekiel seeing visions. He is not surprised to find people such as Daniel dreaming dreams.

But his female servants? Is our Old Testament scholar accustomed to asking for his dinner and getting a prophecy from God instead? No. I think we can safely say that that would be a new experience for him!

Let’s think again about that key word - “pour.”

Perhaps when only the big-name prophets received the Spirit, we might have said that God was **dripping** out his Spirit to a select few - a drop here and a drop there while being careful not to spill any on anyone else.



But that is **not** the promise here. God is not promising to **drip** out his Spirit - instead God is promising to **pour** out his Spirit! And, again, with that word “pour” I think God is stressing the **tremendous breadth** of this promise. I think this **pouring** is what is new here.

When it comes to the Spirit, God is promising here to open the faucet as wide as it will go! God is promising to open the floodgates! God is not going to hold back.

God is not going to barely tip the pitcher so that we get a drip here on one person and drip there on another person. Instead, God is going to turn that pitcher over so that its contents will pour out on everyone. “I will **pour out** my Spirit on all flesh.”

And I think we find confirmation of that view with our fourth big clue from verses 28-29: the phrase “all flesh.” “I will pour out my Spirit on **all flesh**.”

Once again, I think God is stressing the **tremendous breadth** of this promise. I think that is what is new here.

- God is not **dripping** the Spirit, but is **pouring** the Spirit.
- And not just on **some** flesh, but on **all** flesh.
- And not just on the famous and important people, but **even** on the male and female **servants**.

But is that all? Is there anything else that might have been new in these prophecies about the Holy Spirit?

## All Flesh?

We haven't looked closely at the phrase “all flesh” yet, but what if that phrase includes Gentiles? Wouldn't that have been something new about the Spirit?

And the answer is no, that would not have been new. God's Spirit coming upon Gentiles is not something that we find only in the New Testament.

It was certainly an incredibly rare occurrence in the Old Testament, but it did happen at least once. And it happened to an Aramean (Numbers 23:7) who is mentioned by name in eight books of the Bible, including three books in the New Testament

that all condemn him. Have you guessed who it is yet?

**Numbers 24:2** - And **Balaam** lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. **And the Spirit of God came upon him.**

Balaam was a Gentile who is condemned in 2 Peter 2:15, Jude 11, and Revelation 2:14 - and yet we are told in Numbers 24:2 that the Spirit of God came upon him.

Do you mean that Balaam was lost, and yet Balaam was filled with God's Spirit in some way? Yes, that is what the Bible tells us.

And, for us today who have the New Testament, we know that was not the last time such a thing happened. It happened again in Acts 10:44 when the Holy Spirit fell on the household of Cornelius **before** they were baptized and **before** they had even heard the message by which they would be saved (Acts 11:14-15).

Why did that happen to Balaam? Why did that happen to Cornelius? I think that the answer is the same in each case.

The Holy Spirit fell on each of them to teach the people of God a lesson (Micah 6:5 and Acts 10:47) even though the people on whom the Spirit fell were not themselves among the people of God. Balaam was never numbered among the people of God, but Cornelius, of course, was saved shortly afterward (Acts 10:48).

God's Spirit coming upon a Gentile? God's Spirit coming upon someone who was not among the people of God? None of that was new. We can find both things in the Old Testament, although they were very rare.

So, perhaps, once again we can say that the new thing is that this would no longer be rare.

I think we will find that such is true about one of those events (God's Spirit coming upon a Gentile) but that it is not true about the other event (God's Spirit coming upon someone who was not among the people of God). That latter event was extremely rare in the Old Testament and is also extremely rare



in the New Testament - and each time we see it, God is doing it to teach someone else a lesson.

So how would our Old Testament scholar have viewed the phrase “all flesh”?

I know we like to sometimes say that in the Bible “all means all,” but that is not always true. The Apostle Paul is very clear that “all” does not always mean “all” in the Bible.

**1 Corinthians 15:27** - For “God has put **all** things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “**all** things are put in subjection,” it is **plain** that **he is excepted** who put all things in subjection under him.

In other words, “all” does not always mean “all” in the Bible. Sometimes there are **plain unstated exceptions** to the word “all.”

But what about here? Does “all” mean “all,” or is there a plain unstated exception? Who is included in “**all** flesh”?

Let’s cut to the chase on this question: does “all flesh” really just mean “all **Jewish** flesh”?

I suspect that our Jewish Old Testament scholar would have answered “yes” to that question. I suspect he would have viewed this promise as limited to the Jews.

I don’t think that is the correct view, and I think we will see that later when we turn to the book of Acts, but I still think our Old Testament scholar would have likely reached that wrong conclusion. Why?

After all, from one perspective, it does seem odd that our scholar would limit this promise to the Jews. He would certainly have known about God’s promise to Abraham to bless the entire world. And he would have been familiar with prophecies such as Isaiah 19:24, which says that “Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth.”

Doesn’t that all mean it would have been natural for him to interpret this great promise so that “all flesh” means both Jew and Gentile?

Maybe, but I still doubt he would have seen it that way. Why? Because we have an example of someone who didn’t see it that way - Peter.

I know we haven’t gotten to Acts 2 yet in our study of these verses, but we all know what happened. Peter quoted this very prophecy - including the phrase “all flesh” - but only later in Acts 10-11 did Peter seem to understand that “all flesh” actually meant “all flesh.” (And we’ll talk more about that later.)

But if even Peter saw Joel 2:28 that way at first, then I suspect our Old Testament scholar likely would have seen it that way as well.

And, he might have argued, he has some evidence for that view in the text itself. After all, his sons and his daughters are Jewish. The old men and the young men in his village were Jewish, at least the ones he talked to! And maybe even his servants are all Jewish, although maybe they were not (Leviticus 25:44).

And so where are we? I think that, based on those four clues, our Old Testament scholar would have seen this promise broadly - including even his female servants - but I’m not as sure that he would have seen it as broadly as God intended for us to see it - including both Jews and Gentiles.

## Why these activities?

Now let’s ask a different question: why these particular activities?

We see prophecies, we see visions, and we see dreams. Why those particular activities? And is this intended to be an exhaustive list? Is God saying that these three things will happen - or is God saying that **only** these three things will happen?

Well, I think that latter question is easy - the text does not use the word “only,” and I don’t see any reason to read that word in to the text. And later, when we turn to Acts, we may find some other activities occurring, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves.

That then leaves us with only the first question: why these three? Why does God focus here on prophecy, visions, and dreams?

If you read a lot of Pentecostal charismatic literature, you will be told that this prophecy in Joel

is all about the miraculous gifts of the Spirit that we see in the New Testament and that they claim we are still seeing today.

But is that what we see here? Healing the sick? Raising the dead? Giving sight to the blind? Making the lame walk? Calming a storm? Walking on water? Changing water to wine? Feeding the 5000? Casting out demons? Surviving a snake bite?

No, it is not. We see prophecy; we see visions; and we see dreams. And that's all we see here.

But why? Why just these three?

Well, what do those three things all have in common? They were all ways by which God conveyed his word to man. He did that through prophecy, through visions, and through dreams.

But, we should note, those were not the only ways that God spoke to man. For example, God also sometimes spoke to people through angels and sometimes spoke to people directly.

**Exodus 33:11** - Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses **face to face**, as a man speaks to his friend.

That example from Exodus 33 reminds us of a promise that we saw in one of our parallel "pour" prophecies from the Handout for Lesson 24.

**Ezekiel 39:29** - And **I will not hide my face anymore from them**, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD."

So where are we? We are looking at the question of why we see only these particular activities: prophecy, dreams, and visions. And we have seen that they all relate to how God speaks to man. And we have seen that our list gets a bit longer when we include the parallel prophecy from Ezekiel 39. "I will not hide my face anymore from them."

And, yes, I think we are seeing miracles here, depending on how broadly we define that term. But we are seeing a narrow range of miracles - much narrower than we see, for example, in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul discusses the "varieties of gifts."

What are we to make of that? Let's come back to that question when get to Acts 2. But for now, let's just make note that the focus here is on how God communicates his word to mankind. And perhaps Joel is just using a synecdoche here in which a part is used to represent the whole, but let's hold off on that question for now.

Let's instead ask another question: when the text says that the Spirit will be poured out on "all flesh," does that mean that "all flesh" will prophecy, dream dreams, and have visions?

I think the answer is no, unless we decide to read more into the text than what is written. Literally, here is what verses 28-29 say:

- God will pour out his Spirit on **all** flesh, even on servants.
- **Your sons and your daughters** shall prophesy.
- **Your old men** shall dream dreams.
- **Your young men** shall see visions.

Is that a promise that "all flesh" will prophesy or that "your sons and daughters" will do that? Is that a promise that "all flesh" will dream dreams or that "your old men" will do that? Is that a promise that "all flesh" will see visions or that "your young men" will do that? In each case, it is the latter.

But does it *mean* the former? Perhaps we are seeing another synecdoche in which these categories are used to represent a larger group, but I think we should at least consider the possibility that this great promise is not a promise that **everyone** will do **everything**. That is certainly not what the verses say on the their face.

Perhaps the promise here is that God would pour out his Spirit on "all flesh," and that, as a result, here are some of the miraculous ways by which you will receive God's word, and here is the extremely broad range of people from whom you will miraculously receive God's word - the children, the young men, the old men, and even the servants.

That is what those verses *say*. Is that also what those verses *mean*? (Any time we make that distinction we should be very careful how we proceed!) Let's hold off on that issue until we get to Acts 2. Maybe

Peter will clarify some of this for us (and maybe he will not!).

For now, let's just make this point: we should not be surprised if this promise about the pouring out of God's Spirit seems to be focused on the word of God and particularly on how the word of God is conveyed to man.

Even today, if I told you that I was going to pour out my spirit to you, wouldn't you expect me to start **talking**? And doesn't that view of pouring out my spirit agree with other verses in the Bible?

**apart** from God's word. I don't see such a thing anywhere in the Bible.

In fact, if, in our study of the Spirit, we ever move the discussion away from the word of God, then I think we have moved our discussion too far! And that would certainly be too far for verses 28-29, which seem to be entirely focused on various way in which God conveys his words to mankind.

**Proverbs 1:23** - If you turn at my reproof, behold, **I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.**

**1 Corinthians 2:10-13** - These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? **So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit,** interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Yes, we know that the Spirit of God is not the same as the Word of God - but we also know that the two are very closely related. They are intricately intertwined. And we know that the same is true about the Son of God, who is the word made flesh.

Sometimes we hear comments about the Holy Spirit dwelling in someone **separate and apart** from the word of God. But, whatever we conclude about the indwelling of the Spirit, I think we should immediately reject any notion that the Spirit does that or anything else in a way that is **separate and**

## Joel Lesson 25

We are still on our first pass through verses 28-32 of Joel 2, and in this first pass we are viewing these verses from the perspective of Joel's listeners. Later, we will take a second pass through these verses, looking at them from the perspective of Peter's listeners in Acts 2.

### Joel 2:28-29, Continued

**Joel 2:28-29** - "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

We have three more topics to consider in our first pass of these two verses: (1) a difficulty between these two verses and **Zechariah**; (2) a link between these two verses and **Moses**; and, (3) a link between these two verses and **locusts**.

### A Difficulty with Zechariah

There is a big difficulty with these verses involving the book of Zechariah.

As we saw on the Handout for Lesson 24, there is a passage in Zechariah that I believe is parallel to the passage that we are studying here in Joel 2.

**Zechariah 12:10** - **And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace** and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Not only is the language very similar, but the timing is also very similar. Peter tells us in Acts 2:16 that Joel 2:28-29 is describing a first century event, and

John 19:37 likewise tells us that Zechariah 12:10 is describing a first century event.

So what is the big difficulty? It is this - while Joel tells us that a period of prophecy will **occur** at this time, Zechariah tells us that prophecy will be **removed** at this time.

**Zechariah 13:2-5** - **And on that day**, declares the LORD of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more. **And also I will remove from the land the prophets** and the spirit of uncleanness. And if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, 'You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the LORD.' And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies. On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies. He will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive, but he will say, 'I am no prophet, I am a worker of the soil, for a man sold me in my youth.'

How can we explain that? How can it be that prophecy both occurs and does not occur at the same time?

I think the answer is simple, and it is an answer that agrees both with what we find elsewhere in the Bible and with what find from our own experience today.

God does not speak to us today with prophecies, dreams, and visions. Instead, God speaks to us today through the written word that he has given us.

But when did that change occur? When did God quit speaking to Christians with prophecies, dreams, and visions, and instead begin speaking to us only through his written word?

Doesn't that question answer itself? Wouldn't we expect God to make that change once we had the



written word? And didn't we have the written word after the last book of the Bible was penned - most likely by the Apostle John around AD 80 or 90?

I think that Joel and Zechariah, taken together, are showing us a window of time during which God spoke to the church as he promises to do in Joel 2. And the Bible tells us that that window of time both opened and closed in the first century.

Joel shows the window opening, and Zechariah shows the window closing, and Peter and John told us that both of those prophecies were fulfilled in the first century.

And the Apostle Paul also tells us that.

**1 Corinthians 13:8-10** - Love never ends. **As for prophecies, they will pass away;** as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For **we know in part** and **we prophesy in part**, but **when the perfect comes**, the partial will pass away.

We prophecy in part? Prophecies will pass away? Isn't that just what we see in Joel (**we prophecy in part**) and in Zechariah (**prophecies will pass away**)?

"When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away."

The Greek word translated "perfect" in that verse means "complete." A literal translation of the Greek is that "when the **complete thing** comes, the **in-part thing** shall be done away."

What is that "in-part thing"? Verse 9 tells us: "For we **know** in part and we **prophesy** in part."

And so what then is the "complete thing"? It must be the completion of the in-part thing - that is, it must be the complete knowledge that comes from the complete revelation of God that we find in his Word.

And how do we know that the word of God is complete? Because it makes us complete. When we have the Bible, we don't need another word from God to be complete and equipped for everything that we must do.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** - All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

When we look at all the Bible teaches on the subject, what we find is that there was a window of time during which God spoke to the church through prophecies, dreams, and visions. But that window closed when the last word of the Bible was penned near the end of the first century.

I'm not sure how we could explain the interaction of Joel and Zechariah in any other way. We know with certainty that both prophecies are focused on the first century, and we know with certainty that Joel promises a period of prophecy while Zechariah promises an end of prophecy.

Pentecostals, charismatics, and many others today tell us that this window has never closed - but is that what the Bible is telling us?

No, it is not. Zechariah tells us that this window closed in the first century. And Paul told us that as well.

## A Link with Moses

There are two themes that we have been seeing as undercurrents in the book of Joel. One of those themes is Moses, and the other theme is locusts. Let's look first at how Moses is used as a theme in Joel.

First, we have the obvious connection of Moses with locusts.

**Exodus 10:12-14** - Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left." So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning,

the east wind had brought the locusts. **The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again.**

No Jew could ever think about locusts without also thinking about Moses and the plagues against Egypt.

Second, we have also seen frequent allusions in Joel to the book of Deuteronomy, one of the books of Moses.

Deuteronomy 28 listed the punishments that would come if the people were disobedient and rebellious - and those punishments included locusts and a foreign invasion, both of which we have seen in Joel.

Third, I believe that we earlier saw a reference in Joel 2:23 to the great promise of Deuteronomy 18.

**Deuteronomy 18:18** - I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Recall that the Hebrew word translated “early rain” in verse 23 can also mean “teacher. And we know that this coming prophet was Christ because that is what Peter tells us in Acts 3.

But what about verses 28-29 of Joel 2? Is there a link to Moses somewhere in these two verses?

Yes, I think there is. And if someone asked me to explain that link, I would answer with two words: Eldad and Medad!

There is an event from the life of Moses recorded for us in Numbers 11 that I think is directly relevant to the great promise that we are studying here in Joel 2:28-29. Let’s read it:

**Numbers 11:23-30** - And the LORD said to Moses, “Is the LORD’s hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true

for you or not.” So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. Now two men remained in the camp, one named **Eldad**, and the other named **Medad**, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.” But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? **Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!**” And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

“Would that **all** the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit **on them!**” Doesn’t that sound familiar?

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on **all flesh**; your sons and your daughters shall **prophesy**, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.”

We know that Moses was a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:18 just told us that. And I think we are seeing a prophecy from the prophet Moses in Numbers 11: “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

And I think we are seeing that same prophecy again here in Joel 2 as well as in the parallel passages that were shown on the Handout for Lesson 24.

And when would that happen? When would Moses' prophecy be fulfilled? When could it be said that all the Lord's people are prophets and that the Lord had put his Spirit on them? Didn't Peter answer that question for us in Acts 2? That great prophecy of Moses was fulfilled in the church.

Moses is a theme in the book of Joel, and I don't think we can properly understand Joel without recognizing those links to Moses. And I think our Old Testament scholar reading Joel 2 would have thought about Eldad and Medad, and so I think we should as well. This prophecy in Joel 2 had been part of God's plan from long before the days of Joel!

## A Link with Locusts

The second theme that we have seen in Joel is hardly a surprising one - locusts. In fact, some commentaries say that Joel is about nothing more than locusts. That view is wrong, of course, but it does show that no one should be shocked to hear that locusts are a theme in the book of Joel.

In fact, we just mentioned locusts twice as we looked at the links between Joel and Moses. We were reminded of the plague of locusts in Exodus 10, and we were reminded of the punishment of locusts in Deuteronomy 28.

And so no one should be surprised to hear that locusts are a theme in the book of Joel. But what might be surprising is that I think locusts are **still** a theme in the book of Joel.

After all, we looked at some very strong evidence that the problem of locusts was just a Chapter 1 problem. Here in Joel 2, the problem was invading **people** rather than invading **locusts**.

But even then, we did not leave those locusts entirely behind. Instead, they continued lurking in the background as the text described the coming human army in ways that reminded the people of the terrible locust invasion that had just happened.

But what about now in these closing verses of Joel 2? What about these verses quoted by Peter in

Acts 2? Are there still some locusts lurking in the background? Yes, I think there are.

At its root, the locust disaster in Joel 1 was an agricultural disaster.

**Joel 1:10** - The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes.

And, in an agricultural society, an agricultural disaster was a life and death matter. Locusts did not just bring a food shortage; they brought famine and death. And that was especially true in Joel where the locusts were followed by a terrible drought (Joel 1:20).

But then we got to Joel 2. And in that chapter, God commanded the people to repent, and he told them what would happen if they did repent.

**Joel 2:23-26** - Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

In short, God would send them rain, and God would send them food. God would restore the years that the swarming locust had eaten.

But where is there such a link to locusts in verses 28-29?

The answer comes when we recognize that verses 28-29 were not written in a vacuum. These two verses are related to and come from the verses that

precede them. God is not changing the subject here, but rather God is enlarging the subject.

And, as we have already seen, God is asking the people to look up from their physical perspective to instead see things from a spiritual perspective.

And what happens when we do that with a physical famine caused by locusts and drought? What spiritual insights do we see? I think there is another prophet who directly answers that question - Amos.

**Amos 8:9-11** - "And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land — **not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.**"

Yes, a lack of physical food and physical water is very bad - but it is nothing compared to a lack of spiritual food and spiritual water.

And, yes, the people should have been praying that God would pour down rain upon them, but more than anything they should have been praying that God would pour down spiritual blessings upon them.

And what do we even today experience when the rains come after a terrible drought? In a word, we experience refreshment.

And what word could we use to describe what we see in verses 28-29? Couldn't we use the same word - refreshment? And isn't that, in fact, the same word we see used in Acts 3 to describe the time when verses 28-29 were fulfilled?

**Acts 3:19-21** - Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins

may be blotted out, that **times of refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Times of **refreshing**! The drought is over! The rain has come! The storehouses are full! We can all eat and be satisfied! Yes, it is wonderful when we can say that after a physical drought - but how much more wonderful when we can say that after a spiritual drought!

Yes, locusts are still a theme in Joel! Yes, agriculture is still a theme in Joel! But God has moved the discussion to the spiritual realm. And instead of rain pouring down from heaven, we find the Spirit of God pouring down from heaven!

"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord!"

That statement by Peter in Acts 3:19-20 is a pretty good summary of the entire book of Joel!

We will come back to verses 28-29 when we look at Acts 2, but for now let's move on to the next two verses, again looking at them first from the perspective of our Old Testament scholar living between the Testaments.

## Joel 2:30-31

**Joel 2:30-31** - "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes."

Many commentators today tell us that verses 30-31 are all about the end of the world, and, in particular, about the great battle that, they tell us, will occur



during the second coming of Christ. I think that view is completely wrong.

Why? **Because there will be no great battle at the end of the world.** We are **not** heading toward some cataclysmic battle between good and evil as so many false prophets proclaim today. There is nothing in the Bible to support that notion.

What the Bible teaches is that those opposed to Christ on the last great day will not be waging war but instead will be bending their knees. That last day will be a day of judgment, not a day of warfare. Jesus has already fought and won the war. There will not be another one.

And, after studying this far in the book of Joel, are we really expecting to see the end of the world here in verse 30? Is that what the context is telling us? Is that what the time frame is telling us?

Oh, but we must take everything literally, right? We hear that a lot, but does anyone do that with verse 30? **“The moon turned to blood?”**

Is that the *literal* moon and *literal* blood? If the answer is no, as I think it must be, then the question is no longer whether we should take verse 30 literally. Instead, the question is what the figures of speech in verse 30 mean.

And let's save that question for later when we get to Acts 2. But, for now, let's just notice that there are two events in verse 30 - and it is not immediately clear whether or how those two events relate to the pouring out in verses 28-29. Here is what we have:

- In verses 28-29, God promises to pour his Spirit out on all flesh. That is our first event.
- In verse 30, God promises to show various wonders in the heavens and on the earth. That is our second event.
- And, finally, in verse 30, God promises to show those various wonders in the heavens and on the earth **before** the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. That great and awesome day is our third event.

As for the order of those events, the only thing we are explicitly told is that the second event would occur “before” the third event.

As for the timing of the events, Peter will say that “this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel” and then proceed to read these verses from Joel. But what is “this” in Acts 2:16? Which event or events was Peter linking with Joel 2?

Those will be some of our questions when we take our second pass through these verses from the perspective of Acts 2 - but for now, let's just do what we did with verses 28-29. Let's ask the question of how our Old Testament scholar would have viewed these promises in verses 30-31.

For starters, I do not think our Old Testament scholar would have immediately thought about the end of the world. Why not? Because, being an Old Testament scholar, he would have known two very important facts about the language that is used here.

First, he would have known that such language is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe events that we know are not the end of the world.

For example, listen to Isaiah's description of the fall of Babylon at the hands of the Medes.

**Isaiah 13:10** - For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

That may sound like the end of the world, but it was not. Isaiah was telling us about the end of Babylon.

And second, our Old Testament scholar would have known that such language is used elsewhere (as it is here) to describe a day of the Lord, which he would have known does not automatically mean the end of the world.

For example, earlier in Joel we saw a day of the Lord that was not the end of the world.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! For **the day of the LORD** is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

That day of the Lord was coming and was near, and that coming and near day of the Lord is the day described in the first part of Joel 2.

**Joel 2:11** - The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For **the day of the LORD** is great and very awesome; who can endure it?

But then, later in Joel 2, God tells us what he would do “afterward.”

**Joel 2:31** - The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome **day of the LORD** comes.

What does that mean? What it means is that we have at least two different days of the Lord in the book of Joel - one day of the Lord that was coming and that was near in Joel 1-2, and another day of the Lord that would come after the first day of the Lord and after the wonders described in verse 30.

So there can be more than one day of the Lord? Is that what we are saying? Yes, we are saying that, but more importantly the text of Joel itself just told us that!

And there is another thing that our Old Testament scholar would have understood about verse 31. He would have known that a very similar prophecy is found near the end of the Old Testament.

**Malachi 4:5** - Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

I suspect that verse would have caused our Old Testament scholar living between the Testaments to believe that the great promise of Joel 2:30-31 had not yet come to pass but was yet future in his day.

Today, we can read Malachi 4:5 and then turn the page to read Matthew 1, but our Old Testament scholar was not able to do that. All he could do was what he did - remain faithful to God while awaiting the promised Messiah and his eternal kingdom.

We will return to these verses when we get to Acts 2.

## Joel 2:32

**Joel 2:32** - And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

We saw three events in verses 28-31, some of which may be the same event. Here we see a fourth event that would come to pass - “that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

And we are given a further description of that event: “For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.”

And we have many questions, some of which will hold until we get to Acts 2. But we should note that the entirety of verse 32 is not quoted by Peter in Acts 2. Instead, Peter ends his quotation of Joel with the first sentence in verse 31: “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

Let’s look at verse 31 from an Old Testament perspective.

**First, we have the timing: “And it shall come to pass.”**

Verse 28 described something that “shall come to pass afterward,” and verse 32 describes something that “shall come to pass.”

Is the event in verse 32 included with the event in verse 28, or does this event in verse 32 occur after the event in verse 28?

We aren’t told, but perhaps we can say that the failure of the text to again say “afterward” suggests that this event in verse 32 is a part of rather than after the event in verse 28, but we can’t say that for sure at this point.

In fact, the timing of these events remains difficult. There are two words in these verses related to the timing and the order of these events: “afterward”

in verse 28 and “before” in verse 31. But we still have questions despite the appearance of those two words. We saw that with verse 31, and we are still seeing it here in verse 32.

Let’s wait until we get to Acts 2 - maybe we will find some answers there.

**Next, we have the promise: “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”**

As we said, Peter’s quotation of Joel 2 in Acts 2 ends with this phrase.

What would our Old Testament scholar have thought about that promise? How would he have viewed “calling on the name of the Lord”? And how would he have viewed being “saved”?

When we read that sentence, we are immediately thinking about many New Testament verses, but what about someone who did not yet have the New Testament? What would he have thought?

He might have viewed this salvation as a physical salvation from an earthly enemy. If he had, I suspect he would have had a lot of company. I think many Jews expected the Messiah to appear as a warrior king to physically save them from the earthly kingdoms of this world.

Is that what this Old Testament scholar would have expected, or would he instead have expected the Messiah’s entrance into this world as a baby who would grow up to face a death by crucifixion at the hands of one of those earthly kingdoms?

And, yes, we know that those aspects of Christ’s life had been prophesied, but can we assume that our Old Testament scholar would have understood those prophecies?

We understand them, but that’s because they have been explained to us and because we can read the evidence of their fulfillment. But what about our hypothetical scholar who lived and died before there was a New Testament?

Later, when we get to Acts 2, we will see that this salvation was the reason why Jesus came and the reason why his kingdom was established as it was and when it was. But I suspect that wonderful truth would likely have been just a mystery to many who lived prior to the time of Christ.

Let’s be thankful that’s not us! We have the truth, and we can know the truth. The mystery of redemption is no longer a mystery for us.

**Ephesians 1:7-10** - In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight **making known to us the mystery of his will**, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Let’s come back to the topic of that mystery when we get to Acts 2. Perhaps when we get there it won’t be a mystery at all!

**Next, we have a further description of that promise: “For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.”**

Two words immediately stand out in that verse: “escape” and “survivors.” We have seen only one of those words so far in this book, and then only once.

**Joel 2:3** - Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing **escapes** them.

That verse told us that nothing would escape this terrible army that was coming and that was near, but here in verse 32 we are told that some will escape whatever is happening here.

Who are these escaping people in verse 32? And from what are they escaping?

Let’s start by looking at the Hebrew words used here.

The Hebrew word translated “escape” in verse 32 (Strong’s #6413) is used earlier in verse 3 (as

we said) and is also found elsewhere in the Old Testament:

**Ezra 9:8** - But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a **remnant** (#6413) and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery.



## Joel Lesson 26

I have posted six collections of articles about the Holy Spirit at [StudyJoel.com](http://StudyJoel.com). Each collection includes articles by a different preacher, and all of the articles came from the *Firm Foundation* between 1890 and 1973. The six preachers are Alexander Campbell, J.W. Jackson, Guy N. Woods, Luther G. Roberts, J.W. Roberts, and Roy Lanier, Sr.

Why did I post these articles? The short answer is that I found them helpful, and so I figured others might also find them helpful. I read many more articles than these, but these are the articles I pulled out of the stack after reading them.

And this collection is **not** one-sided. Instead, you will find opposing views and discussions in these articles, something which I also found very helpful. The last thing anyone needs when studying the Holy Spirit is an echo chamber.

So that is the reason why I posted these articles to the website - but I should mention something else that is most certainly **not** a reason why I posted these articles on the website. I did not post them so that we could engage in a battle of the famous preachers: "Yes, brother this or that may have agreed with you, but brother so and so agrees with me! So there!"

Yes, we have some difficult issues ahead, but we will find our answers only in the word of God, which is our only standard.

If we ever proceed instead by headcount, or by which preacher is the most famous, or by which preaching school agrees with us, then we will very quickly go astray.

We will not be quoting any preachers as any source of authority. Instead, we will be using the Bible as our only source of authority.

Also, you may want to find or download some of our earlier handouts for these upcoming lessons on the final verses of Joel 2. I have found those handouts helpful in preparing these lessons, and I suspect you may find them helpful as well.

- **Lesson 12 Handout:** 30 Questions About Joel 2

- **Lesson 14 Handout:** All Direct References to the Holy Spirit
- **Lesson 16 Handout:** Concordance of Key Words About the Holy Spirit
- **Lesson 17 Handout:** Statistics of the Holy Spirit
- **Lesson 24 Handout:** Parallel "Pour" Prophecies
- **Lesson 25 Handout:** More Statistics About the Holy Spirit

If you are missing any of these handouts and if you don't have access to the Internet, let me know so that I can print you a copy.

## Joel 2:32, Continued

**Joel 2:32** - And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

When we ended last week, we were looking at the second half of verse 32 from the perspective of our hypothetical Old Testament scholar living between the Testaments.

The second half of verse 32 explains the first half - the second half explains why it is that "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." And the explanation is:

For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who **escape**, as the LORD has said, and among the **survivors** shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Two words immediately stand out in that phrase: "escape" and "survivors."

The Hebrew word translated "escape" in verse 32 (Strong's #6413) is used earlier in Joel 2:3 and is also found in the book of Ezra (as shown on the Handout for Lesson 26):

**Ezra 9:8** - But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a **remnant** (#6413) and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery.

**Ezra 9:14-15** - Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no *remnant* (#7611), nor any to **escape** (#6413)? O LORD, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a *remnant* (#7604) that has **escaped** (#6413), as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.”

Those verses from Ezra link the same Hebrew word translated here as “escape” with the faithful remnant that had returned to Jerusalem under King Cyrus. Isaiah also uses that same Hebrew word to describe a faithful remnant.

**Isaiah 4:2** - In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the **survivors** (#6413) of Israel.

**Isaiah 10:20** - In that day the *remnant* (#7605) of Israel and the **survivors** (#6413) of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

**Isaiah 37:31-32** - And the **surviving** (#6413) *remnant* (#7604) of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go a *remnant* (#7611), and out of Mount Zion a band of **survivors** (#6413). The

zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

And, finally, we find that same Hebrew word in Obadiah. In fact, when we turn to Obadiah we find a verse that is remarkably similar to Joel 2:32.

**Obadiah 17** - But in Mount Zion there shall be those who **escape** (#6413), and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions.

**Joel 2:32** - ... For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who **escape** (#6413), **as the LORD has said**, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

And note that Joel writes, “as the Lord has said.” Is Joel quoting the book of Obadiah in that verse? Let’s come back to that question in a moment.

For now, let’s look at the other key word we find in verse 32 - the word “survivors.” As with the Hebrew word translated “escape,” the Hebrew word translated “survivors” (Strong’s #8300) is also found elsewhere in the Bible:

**Isaiah 1:9** - If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few **survivors** (#8300), we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

**Obadiah 14** - Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; do not hand over his **survivors** (#8300) in the day of distress.

**Obadiah 18** - The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no **survivor** (#8300) for the house of Esau, for the LORD has spoken.

We can make two immediate and very instructive observations about these verses.

- First, Isaiah 1:9 is quoted by Paul in Romans 9:29 to describe the faithful *Jewish* remnant in the church. (“And as Isaiah predicted, ‘If the Lord of hosts had not left us **offspring**, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.’”)
- And, second, we have now found **both** of the key Hebrew words from Joel 2:32 in the short book of Obadiah.

Let’s focus for now on the first of those two observations. We have now seen that both of these words (“escape” and “survivors”) are used in the Bible to describe the faithful remnant.

The Handout for Lesson 26 shows most of the verses that we just looked at, along with a few other verses. Each of those verses uses either a Hebrew or a Greek word related to a remnant - often the faithful remnant.

As listed at the bottom of the Handout, there are six Hebrew words and four Greek words that are used to describe a remnant in the Bible. Having looked at the definitions, the words seem to me to be close to synonyms, and it is not clear why so many different words are used.

If you also want to look at the original Hebrew and Greek words along with their definitions, I have provided their Strong’s numbers on the Handout.

For those not familiar with Strong’s numbers, they were created by James Strong in 1890 for use in his famous exhaustive concordance of the King James version of the Bible.

He assigned a number to each Greek and Hebrew root word, and those numbers, called Strong’s numbers, are still very widely used today. There are 8674 Hebrew root words and 5624 Greek root words in his list. If you want to look one up, the easiest and cheapest way to do that is with Google (e.g., Hebrew Strong # 6413).

Here are a few more things we can learn from the Handout:

- The Hebrew word translated “remnant” in Habakkuk 2:8 is interesting because it is

also found in Joel - in fact it is found three times in one verse of Joel! (Joel 1:4 - What the cutting locust **left**, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust **left**, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust **left**, the destroying locust has eaten.) Perhaps God wanted us to start thinking very early in the book of Joel about the faithful remnant that would be left, just like what was left by those locusts!

- Acts 15:16-18 is a quote from Amos 9:11-12.
- Romans 9:27 is a quote from Isaiah 10:22-23.

God’s people have been a faithful remnant for **almost** all of their history. Why do I saw “almost”? Because the faithful people of God have been in the majority only twice in the history of the world - immediately after creation and immediately after the flood. Other than those two times, we have always been in a distinct minority - what the Bible calls a remnant. And, of course, that is another reason why we should never proceed by headcount!

So how would our Old Testament scholar have viewed verse 32?

“For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.”

I think he would have viewed that description the same way those same words are used elsewhere in the Bible - as a description of the faithful remnant.

And I think the text of verse 32 supports that conclusion. The ending of verse 32 is an explanation of the beginning of verse 32. And what was the beginning of verse 32? “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Those who escape and survive in the second half of the verse are those who are saved in the first half of the verse.

We are looking here at those who are saved. We are looking here at those who call on God. We are looking here at those called by God. We are looking here at the faithful remnant - those who escape; those who survive. We see all of those things in this one verse.

And, yes, today we cannot read those descriptions without thinking of the church - but let's hold off on that until we get to Acts 2.

Let's look now at that question about Obadiah that we mentioned earlier.

**Verse 32 includes the phrase "as the Lord has said." When and where did God say this earlier? Is Joel quoting Obadiah?**

If the phrase "as the Lord has said" means "as the Lord has said in the Bible," then I think Obadiah must be the source of the quote. And perhaps we can say that view is strengthened by something we noted earlier - that **both** of the key Hebrews words we looked at in verse 32 are found in the short book of Obadiah.

But why does it matter - after all, God said it either way. And, yes, that is true - but if Joel is quoting Obadiah here, then we have an important piece of evidence as to the date of Joel - if Joel is quoting Obadiah, then Joel must have been written after Obadiah was written.

**So when was Obadiah written?**

The most common answer to that question is that Obadiah was written after the exile to condemn Edom for their pride and for their treachery against their brother, Judah, after Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem.

And, yes, the message of Obadiah certainly fits with how Edom behaved after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem - but it also fits pretty well with a much earlier event in Judah's history.

In the mid-ninth century BC, Edom revolted against Judah, and the Philistines and Arabians (likely aided or at least encouraged by the revolting Edomites) invaded Judah.

**2 Kings 8:20-22** - In his days Edom revolted from the rule of Judah and set up a king of their own. Then Joram passed over to Zair with all his chariots and rose by night, and he and his chariot commanders struck the Edomites who had surrounded him, but his army fled home. So Edom revolted

from the rule of Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time.

**2 Chronicles 21:16-17** - And the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabians who are near the Ethiopians. And they came up against Judah and invaded it and carried away all the possessions they found that belonged to the king's house, and also his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, his youngest son.

If Joel is quoting Obadiah here in verse 32, then I think that fact would help us date Obadiah rather than help us date Joel. I think that fact would tell us that Obadiah must have been written in response to the **earlier** event involving Edom rather than the event that occurred much later during the exile.

But, Joel may instead be quoting something God said earlier through another prophet that is not recorded elsewhere in the Bible. And if that is true, then the quotation in verse 32 provides no evidence as to the date of Joel.

My opinion? I think Joel is quoting Obadiah, and I think Obadiah should be dated in the ninth century rather than the sixth century - but that's just my opinion.

**So we have made it all the way to the end of Joel 2.**

What should we do next? Should we just move on to Joel 3?

No, we can't start Joel 3 quite yet. We aren't finished with Joel 2. There is something else we must consider, and I think we all know what that something else is! We have to study Acts 2 to understand Joel 2.

But why? Why should we consider something written hundreds of years after Joel was written? Shouldn't we instead focus entirely on what Joel meant to its original audience? That original



audience didn't have Acts 2, so why should we consider Acts 2?

The answer, of course, is that if we want to understand everything that we can understand on any topic, then we must consider everything that the Bible has to say about that topic.

And the prophecies in the Bible provide an excellent example of why that principle is so important. When we read the prophecy we, like those who first heard it, may have questions about when and how that prophecy would be fulfilled. But those questions are very often answered in the New Testament when the inspired text quotes the Old Testament prophecy and tells us when and how it has been fulfilled.

And that is precisely what happens with this prophecy from Joel 2. Many of the questions we had about it after considering only the Old Testament are answered when we open the New Testament. So, let's turn now to the book of Acts.

## Acts and Joel

Acts 2 is a very eventful chapter in the Bible, but so is Acts 1. Let's quickly review what happened in those two chapters before we consider how Joel 2 fits in.

What happened in Acts 1?

- Jesus appears to the apostles for 40 days, speaking to them about the kingdom of God.
- Jesus orders them to remain in Jerusalem and to wait for the promise of the Father, saying that "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."
- The apostles ask Jesus if he will "at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (I know that we sometimes criticize that question, but there is nothing wrong at all about that question, as Jesus' answer indicates and as Peter explains in Acts 2:30. Also, keep in mind two more things about that question: (1) the apostles had just studied the kingdom with Jesus for 40 days before asking it, and (2) "restoration" is one of the key themes in Joel.)

- Jesus tells them in response that the Father will determine the timing, but that "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
- Jesus ascends back to heaven. (We studied that wonderful event when we looked at Daniel 7:13-14. That was when Jesus "was given dominion and glory and a kingdom.")
- Two men in white robes appear and say, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."
- The apostles return to Jerusalem and stay in an upper room, devoting themselves to prayer with Mary and with Jesus' brothers. All in all, there about 120 people there.
- They choose two candidates to replace Judas, and, after casting lots, the lot falls on Matthias, who is then "numbered with the eleven apostles."

As I said, Acts 1 is an action-packed chapter! But so is Acts 2. What happens in Acts 2?

- The apostles are still all together in one place when the day of Pentecost arrives.
- And then something amazing happens: "Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."
- Devout Jews and proselytes from every nation under heaven hear the sound and come together. And they are bewildered "because each one was hearing them speak in his own language."
- They are amazed, astonished, and perplexed. Some ask, "What does this mean?," while others mockingly say, "They are filled with new wine."

- But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifts up his voice, addressing “men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem.”
- Peter assures them that they are not drunk, but rather Peter says that what is happening is what was uttered through the prophet Joel. And Peter then recites Joel 2:28 through the first half of Joel 2:32.
- After the Scripture reading, Peter’s sermon begins in verse 22 and continues uninterrupted through verse 36.
- In verse 37, we are told that those listening to Peter “were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”
- Peter answers their question in verses 38-39: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”
- And Peter says many more words, bearing witness, exhorting them, and saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”
- And those who received Peter’s word are baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.
- And those who were added to their number “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”
- And many wonders and signs were being done “through the apostles.”
- And all who believed were together and had all things in common sharing with each other as any had need.
- And day by day, they attended the temple together and broke bread in their homes, receiving their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

- And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

What a beginning! And why do I call it a beginning? Because that is precisely what Peter calls it later in Acts 11:15 - “the beginning.” Acts 1-2 tell us about the beginning of the Lord’s church.

Now, our task in this class is not to study Acts 2 with the same detail that we are studying Joel. I wish we could do that now, and perhaps we can do that someday, but our task now is much simpler: we need to figure out the relation between Acts 2 and those verses from Joel 2 that Peter quoted at the beginning of his sermon. And in doing that we need to consider the questions about Joel 2 that were listed on the Handout for Lesson 12.

Let’s start by looking at the verses from Joel 2 as they are quoted by Peter in Acts 2.

## Acts 2:16

**Acts 2:16** - But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

My High School English teacher did not allow us to ever use the word “this” in a sentence without answering the question “this what?” Peter’s Greek teacher, it seems, did not have such a rule!

And so we now have the question “this what?” This miracle? This event? This day? This period of history?

I think the context offers some help. Peter’s statement was prompted by the mocking accusation that the apostles were drunk on their new wine.

That accusation, by the way, establishes the fact that the apostles were already known to abstain from alcohol. How? Because new wine is just grape juice and because the accusation is described as mockery. The accusation was that the apostles had someone managed to make themselves drunk on their grape juice! That is why the accusation was mockery! If the Apostles drank alcohol, then the statement would not have been mockery but rather would have just been an alleged fact.

But back to our topic - that mockery is the context of Peter’s opening statement, and Peter’s point in that statement is to explain that what the people

are seeing and hearing - the apostles all speaking in different languages - is not evidence of drunkenness, but rather is evidence of the fulfillment of Joel 2.

That purpose suggests to me that the “this” in verse 16 refers to, or at least includes, the miracle in Acts 2:6 and likely also includes the sound like a mighty rushing wind that we are told caused the people to all come together to hear the apostles.

But, I say that the word “this” may “at least” include that miracle and that sound. Why? Because the quotation from Joel includes multiple events. And so, as we proceed, we may find that Peter’s quotation from Joel includes additional events in Acts 2.

Now, one of our questions about Joel 2 is why Peter chose to quote Joel 2 as he did. And, of course, in asking that question we are really asking why the Holy Spirit made that choice.

As for why Peter quoted a prophecy about God pouring out the Holy Spirit on all flesh, I think the answer is clear. Peter opens with that quote because, as he told us, this is that. That prophecy was being fulfilled.

But why the prophecy from Joel 2? Why not one of the parallel prophecies that we saw on the Handout for Lesson 24? Why not Isaiah 32? Why not Isaiah 44? Why not Ezekiel 39? Why not Zechariah 12?

And, of course, we don’t know the answer to that question. But it may be worthwhile to note that, of all the prophecies shown on that Handout, the prophecy from Joel 2 is the only one that includes the great promise that “everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

It is with that great statement that Peter ends his quotation from Joel 2, and it is with that same great topic of salvation that Peter ends his entire sermon.

## Acts 2:17-18

**Acts 2:17-18** - And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female

servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

The book of Joel was written in **Hebrew**, but later translated into **Greek** in the Septuagint. The book of Acts was written in **Greek**, but the recorded statements in Acts may have been originally spoken in **Hebrew**, **Greek**, or **Aramaic**. And our copies of Joel and Acts are in **English**.

What does all of that tell us? One thing it tells us is that we should not be surprised to find some wording differences between the text of Joel and the text of Acts when it quotes the text of Joel.

And we such a difference here: where Joel says “afterward,” Peter says “in the last days.” What should we make of that difference?

Possibly nothing. Peter may have simply used a different phrase that means the same thing as “afterward” - both may just mean “later.”

But it is also possible that Peter used that narrower phrase by inspiration to focus the prophecy on some specific period of time - not just a starting point of time, but a period of time. In other words, not just “later,” but in some period of time called “the last days.”

And, of course, we know that period of time includes the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 because Peter tells us that the prophecy was being fulfilled at least on that day.

What else might that period of time include? When might it end?

The two most common answers are that either “the last days” ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 or will end with the second appearance of Christ at the end of the world, in which case the “last days” might be called “the gospel age” or “the church age.”

Which is it? Let’s hold off on that question for now. Perhaps we will find some more evidence in our study of these verses.

## Joel Lesson 27

Last week we started our second pass through Joel 2:28-32.

In our first pass, we looked at those verses from the perspective of an Old Testament scholar living between the Testaments, and one of the questions we asked was what was new? Prophecies almost always announce something new, and so what was new about the Holy Spirit in this prophecy?

After looking at many Old Testament verses, what we discovered is that the new thing about the Holy Spirit in this prophecy was that the Spirit of God would be poured out on all flesh. Not just **dripped** out here and there on a **few** famous people such as Daniel and Ezekiel - but **poured** out on **all** flesh, even on male and female servants.

And, so, now we have started our second pass through this prophecy, and for our second pass we are reading the prophecy as it was spoken by Peter in Acts 2:17-21.

And we saw some minor wording changes between those two accounts of the prophecy. One change we talked about last week was the change from “afterward” in Joel to “last days” in Joel, and another change is that Acts 2:18 specifies that the male and female servants will prophesy. Joel 2:29 did not include that extra detail.

We ended last week at the doorstep of a big question: **what did God mean when he promised to pour out his Spirit on all flesh?**

The Old Testament included some parallel passages to the prophecy - is that also true of the New Testament? Is this promised pouring out of God’s Spirit described anywhere else in the New Testament? Yes, it is.

The Handout for Lesson 27 shows a number of potentially parallel verses to the great promise of Joel 2:28. I say “potential” because it is possible that some of these passages just use similar wording without being strictly parallel and that some are related to the promise in other ways. In any event, there are quite a few potential parallels.

In fact, Peter mentions the promise again himself in the immediate context of Acts 2.

**Acts 2:33** - Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, **he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.**

And we certainly see that same promised pouring later in a different context as well.

**Acts 10:44-46** - While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because **the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.** For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

**Acts 11:15-17** - As I began to speak, **the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning.** And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ **If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ,** who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”

And I think we see descriptions of that promised pouring out when Jesus told the apostles what was about to happen to them in a few days.

**Acts 1:4-5** - And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, **but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**”



**Acts 1:8** - But you will receive power **when the Holy Spirit has come upon you**, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

And, of course, based on that description by Jesus we should consider the promise of baptism with the Holy Spirit in Mathew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, and John 1.

**Matthew 3:11** - I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit** and fire.

**Mark 1:8** - I have baptized you with water, but **he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit**.

**Luke 3:16** - John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit** and fire.”

**John 1:33** - I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is **he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit**.’

Are there any other New Testament references to this promised pouring out of God’s Spirit? Yes, possibly a few more:

**John 7:37-39** - On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If **anyone** thirsts, let him come to me and drink. **Whoever** believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” **Now this he said about**

**the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.**

**Romans 5:5** - And hope does not put us to shame, because **God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**

**Titus 3:4-7** - But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration **and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior**, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

So what then is the promised pouring out of God’s Spirit?

I think our answer to that question largely depends on how we view the phrase “all flesh.” Let’s look at the possibilities.

(1) If the pouring out in Acts 2 **includes** the baptism with the Holy Spirit that was experienced by the apostles in Acts 2 and later by the household of Cornelius in Acts 10, then “all flesh” must include **at least** the 12 apostles and that one Gentile household.

(2) If the pouring out in Acts 2 **includes** those who prophesied, had visions, and dreamed dreams, then “all flesh” must include **at least** the apostles, the other New Testament authors such as James, the brother of Christ, and Jude, the brother of Christ, and some others such as Stephen (Acts 7:55), Ananias (Acts 9:10), and Agabus (Acts 21:10).

We don’t have a single example of anyone dreaming a dream after Acts 2, although we do have visions in the night in Acts 16:9 and Acts 18:9, which might have been dreams. And, of course, the New

Testament opens with God speaking to Joseph in a dream.

(3) If the pouring out in Acts 2 **includes** the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, then “all flesh” must include **at least** the apostles and those Christians in the first century who received miraculous gifts through the laying on of an apostle’s hands as described, for example, in Acts 8:15-19.

That requirement of having an apostle lay his hands on you immediately excludes any first century Christian who never met an Apostle, such as (most likely) the Ethiopian eunuch. And, of course, that requirement also excludes all Christians (such as us today) living after the last apostle died.

(4) If the pouring out in Acts 2 **includes** the “promised Holy Spirit” with which we were are “sealed” and “who is the guarantee of our inheritance **until we acquire possession of it**” (Ephesians 1:13-14) and includes those whose “body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God” (1 Corinthians 6:19) and includes the “promised Spirit” received “through faith” (Galatians 3:14), then “all flesh” must include **at least** all Christians for all time.

Why all time? Because if I see a promised blessing for Christians in the New Testament, then my initial presumption will always be that I am included in that promised blessing. That presumption can be overcome, of course, by verses that teach otherwise (such as with modern day miracles), but my starting point will always be that I am included in the promise. For example, why would this promised “seal” or this promised “guarantee” be limited to the first century? Neither is miraculous. And, more to the point, where is the verse that imposes such a limitation?

(5) If the pouring out in Acts 2 **includes** the proclamation of the gospel by “those who preached the good news to you **by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven**” (1 Peter 1:12), then “all flesh” must be just that - **all flesh** - because “the gospel is proclaimed in **the whole world**” (Matthew 24:14; Mark 14:9; Mark 16:15).

So, here are the possibilities for the promised pouring out of the Holy Spirit: (1) the baptism with the Holy Spirit, (2) prophecies, dreams, and

visions, (3) miraculous gifts, (4) the promised Spirit received through faith, with which we are sealed, and the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, and (5) the proclamation of the gospel to the world.

And so what now is our question? Is our question to decide which one of those possibilities is correct? That is, should we circle one of them and draw a line through all of the others? Is that our next task?

I don’t think so. After all, we just went through the list. Did we hear any on that list that we can just absolutely rule out from the start? Can we find a Scripture somewhere that allows us to just immediately draw a line through any of them? Can we be 100% certain that one or more of those possibilities is wrong?

Yes, we know that the promised pouring out of the Holy Spirit is related in some way to the baptism with the Holy Spirit because Jesus tells us that in Acts 1:4-5, but what is that relation?

Should we say that the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God **is** the baptism with the Holy Spirit, or should we say instead that the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God **includes** the baptism with the Holy Spirit?

And likewise with those first century miracles. Should we say that the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God **is** the first century miraculous gifts, or should we say instead that the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God **includes** those first century miraculous gifts?

And what about being “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (Ephesians 1:13-14)? Is that non-miraculous sealing with the Holy Spirit and guarantee of our inheritance included in the promised pouring out of the Spirit?

Do you see where I am headed with this? At each step we have a decision to make - do we read this promised pouring out broadly or narrowly?

And if neither choice violates the Scriptures, then which way should we jump? If neither view can be ruled out, should we prefer the broad view or the narrow view? How should we choose?

Here is my opinion on that question: **If I have a choice between a narrow view of the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God and a broad view of the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God, then I will choose the broad view.**

**Now, let me quickly say that this broad view cannot be so broad that it violates something in the Scriptures.**

For example, we know that the promised pouring out of the Spirit cannot be viewed so broadly that it would include modern day miracles. When I say that I prefer a broad choice over a narrow choice, I am referring to a broad choice **that violates no Scriptures** and a narrow choice **that likewise violates no Scriptures.**

And let me also say that **broad does not mean loose.**

We hear a great deal of loose language these days about the Holy Spirit, both in and out of the church. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 4:1 that the Spirit speaks **expressly**, and I think that is a good example for us to follow when we speak **about** the Holy Spirit. We should speak expressly.

We should plainly say what we believe on the subject. We should not hide behind vague, loose language that can be understood in different ways by different listeners. And, I should add, we should treat such loose language the same way whether that loose language is spoken or sung!

And so if I have a choice between a narrow view of the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God and a broad view of the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God, then I will choose the broad view.

**But why?** When I am faced with such a choice, why do I prefer the broader option? There are several reasons.

One reason is what we found when we studied these verses from just an Old Testament perspective.

We asked what was new about this prophecy, and what we found was that the thing that was new was the tremendous breadth of the promise. The Holy Spirit would not just be dripped out here and there on just a few famous people, but God would instead **pour out** his Spirit on **all** flesh and **even** on the servants.

A second reason why I prefer the broader choice is what we saw on the Handout for Lesson 25.

That Handout compared the direct references to the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments, and what we saw on that Handout can only be described as an **explosion** of the Holy Spirit!

We found only 73 direct references to the Holy Spirit in the entire Old Testament, but we found 179 of them in the New Testament. And quite a few from the Old Testament are pointing to the New Testament. Just the book of Acts alone has more direct references to the Holy Spirit than we find in all but three Old Testament books combined!

And there is a third reason why I prefer the broader choice.

When we open the Bible, we find only one criticism about how those present in Acts 2 understood the events in Acts 2. And what is that one criticism? It is the implied criticism in Acts 10-11 that some who were present on that great day described in Acts 2 understood the events of that day too **narrowly**.

And, of course, we know that implied criticism was directed at the very person who quoted the prophecy from Joel on that great day - Peter.

In hindsight, looking back at Acts 2, it is very interesting that it was Peter who later wrote about prophets struggling to understand their own prophecies.

**1 Peter 1:10-11** - Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours **searched and inquired carefully**, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

I think Peter knew something firsthand about that struggle. Why? Because I think Peter struggled to understand his own prophecy in Acts 2, which he quoted from Joel 2.

And why do I say that? Because of what we see in Acts 10-11 about Cornelius, who was a Gentile.



**Acts 11:17-18** - "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

I don't think Peter really understood the meaning of "all flesh" in Joel 2 until God showed him in Acts 10 what that phrase meant. Before that point, I think Peter was thinking that "all flesh" just meant "all **Jewish** flesh."

In fact, I think the only reason we have Acts 10 is because the apostles were viewing "all flesh" too narrowly in Acts 2.

So what does that all mean? I can tell you what I think it means. I think it means that I should read and understand that promise in Joel 2 as broadly as the Bible will allow me to understand it. I think Peter initially viewed the promise too narrowly, and I want to make sure that I don't make that same mistake!

I am not going to draw a line through any possibility unless there is a Scripture somewhere that tells me I must draw that line, such as what we find with the so-called modern day miracles and such as what we find with those who believe that the Holy Spirit is guiding or teaching us today apart from the written word of God.

And if there is a disagreement among us over whether the promise is **limited** to A or the promise is **limited** to B, then my inclination will be to say that the promise includes **both** A and B **if** the Bible will permit that broad of an understanding of the promise.

Has that always been my view? It has not.

In fact, I had not even thought to ask myself this question about broad versus narrow until I undertook this current study of the Holy Spirit. And why did I think to ask this question now? Because of what we saw when we studied Joel's prophecy from an Old Testament perspective and

what we saw when we asked about what was new in that prophecy.

**Look at it this way: after looking at the tremendous breadth of this promise in Joel 2, from which direction should we approach the promise?**

Should we start at the narrow end, asking whether the promise is limited to just this thing or limited to just that thing? Or should we instead start at the broad end, asking whether the Bible says the promise must exclude this thing or must exclude that thing?

In short, should we be trying to read this great promise as broadly as we possibly can or as narrowly as we possibly can?

**And let me ask a related question: why has there been so much agitation and uncertainty in the church about this particular promise?**

And if anyone thinks that is an overstatement, I encourage you to read every article on the subject in the *Firm Foundation* published since 1890 as I have done!

There are not too many topics in the church where we find such a broad range of opinions and such long lasting disagreements as we do with the Holy Spirit. Why is that?

I have a proposed answer to that question. I think it may be because of that "blind men and the elephant" problem that we mentioned in an earlier lesson.

Why did those blind men all disagree about what they were examining? The answer is that they all disagreed because they were each focused on only one specific aspect of a much larger topic!

One blind man was feeling only the elephant's leg, while another was feeling only the elephant's tail, and another was feeling only the elephant's trunk. And so, when asked to describe what was before them, one said it was a tree, another said it was a rope, and another said it was a snake.

What was the reason for those mistakes? Why did that first blind man make the mistake of thinking that the elephant was a tree?

The reason for the mistake was **not** that the blind man felt only the elephant's leg - **the reason for**



**the mistake was that the blind incorrectly concluded that the elephant was limited to just that leg.**

And the solution? The solution was to understand that the elephant included all three of those aspects and possibly even more.

Is there a lesson for us in that ancient parable? Have I been guilty of looking at only a single verse and concluding that the Holy Spirit is limited to that one thing, while you have been looking at another verse and concluding that the Holy Spirit is limited to this other one thing?

Is much of that disagreement in the church about the Holy Spirit just another example of the disagreement between these blind men? I think we should at least consider that possibility.

But perhaps, some might say, the disagreement is really over whether or not there is a verse that limits our view. And, yes, that is something we should always be asking. But we need to find that verse! That verse needs to exist!

Not just a verse telling us that the elephant sometimes feels like a tree - but also a verse telling us that elephant does **not** ever feel like a snake! Not just a verse telling us that the pouring out of the Spirit is this one thing - but also a verse telling us that the pouring out of the Spirit is never this other thing.

We have such verses when it comes to modern-day miracles and modern-day guidance apart from the Word; we know that those must be excluded.

For what other aspects of the Holy Spirit do we have such verses? What other aspects of the Holy Spirit must be excluded in this promised pouring out? And what are those verses?

So, back to our question: what is included in the promised pouring out of God's Spirit on all flesh if I follow my proposed approach of preferring a broad answer over a narrow answer if the Scriptures allow both answers?

- Does the promised pouring out of God's Spirit include the baptism with the Holy Spirit experienced by the apostles in Acts 2 and by the household of Cornelius in Acts

10? Yes, in my opinion, it does. It is limited to that? In my opinion, it is not.

- Does the promised pouring out of God's Spirit include the proclamation of God's word by those in the first century who miraculously prophesied, dreamed dreams, and saw visions? Yes, in my opinion, it does. It is limited to that? In my opinion, it is not.
- Does the promised pouring out of God's Spirit include the miraculous gifts of the Spirit that were done by the apostles and by those upon whom the apostles laid their hands in the first century? Yes, in my opinion, it does. It is limited to that? In my opinion, it is not.
- Does the promised pouring out of God's Spirit include the Holy Spirit given today as seal and a guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of that inheritance? Yes, in my opinion, it does. It is limited to that? In my opinion, it is not.
- Does the promised pouring out of God's Spirit include the fact today that your "body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God"? Yes, in my opinion, it does. It is limited to that? In my opinion, it is not.
- Does the promised pouring out of God's Spirit include the "promised Spirit" received today "through faith"? Yes, in my opinion, it does. It is limited to that? In my opinion, it is not.
- Does the promised pouring out of God's Spirit include the proclamation of the gospel by "those who preached the good news to you **by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven**" whether that good news was received directly in the first century or received by hearing the inspired word of God in our own century? Yes, in my opinion, it does. It is limited to that? In my opinion, it is not.
- Does the promised pouring out of God's Spirit include miracles and the direct leading of the Holy Spirit **after** the first century? No, it does not. I must draw a line through

those because the Scriptures plainly teach otherwise.

In short, I think the promised pouring out of God's Spirit includes the entire elephant! I want my understanding of the promised pouring out of God's Spirit to be as broad as the Bible will allow it to be understood.

But what if we disagree? What then?

A very common view is that this promised pouring out is just the baptism with the Holy Spirit and no more. What if that is your view? What will I say then? I will say two things.

First, I will say what I will likely say regarding many of the opinions about the Holy Spirit that we encounter today in the church - I will say that you may be right.

Yes, we hear a few things in the church about the Holy Spirit that are definitely wrong, but most of our disagreements are in the realm of opinion. And if I don't have a verse that makes me 100% certain that your view is wrong, then I have to admit that your view may be right. That is what it means not to be 100% certain. And that is always where we are when we leave behind matters of faith and venture into matters of opinion.

But second, in addressing our disagreement, I will give you my opinion. And my inability to be 100% certain that some view about the Bible is wrong does not mean that I can't be 90% certain! And, of course, others can and I'm sure do feel the same way about my opinions.

But what about the view that the promised pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all flesh is just the baptism with the Holy Spirit?

Yes, that view might be right, but in my opinion it is not right. My opinion is that it is too narrow. My opinion is that the phrase "**all** flesh" is an odd way to describe 12 Jewish men and the household of Cornelius! To me, that sounds more like "**almost no flesh**" than it does like "all flesh!"

But am I really saying that "all flesh" means "all flesh"? Am I really saying that "all flesh" includes **everybody** - both believers and unbelievers? Yes, that is what I am saying. I think this promise of

God to pour out his Spirit on all flesh is an example where "all" really does mean "all."

But, in saying that, I should add that I think there is an important difference between having the Spirit **poured out** on you and **receiving** the Spirit after it has been poured out on you. I don't think those two things are the same at all.

Nowhere in the Bible is there a promise that "all flesh" would **receive** the Spirit. Instead, in John 7:39, Jesus said that the Spirit would be **received** by those who believed in him. Also, John 14:16-17 tells us that the world **cannot receive** the Spirit of truth, and Jude 1:19 tells us that worldly people are "**devoid** of the Spirit."

But what about Cornelius? Doesn't Acts 10:47 tell us that Cornelius **received** the Spirit before he was baptized in Acts 10:48? Yes, it does - but that was not a result of the promise of the Spirit for believers.

We know that Cornelius was not a believer when he received the Spirit in Acts 10. How do we know that? We know that because Cornelius had not yet heard the gospel. There was nothing yet for Cornelius to believe.

In Acts 11:14, an angel told Cornelius that Peter would declare a message by which Cornelius would be saved, and Acts 11:15 tells us that the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius as Peter "began to speak." Cornelius had not yet heard the gospel, and so Cornelius could not yet have been a believer. "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" (Romans 10:14)

So what is the conclusion? The conclusion is that Cornelius' receipt of the Spirit was not the result of any promise from God to believers. Cornelius' receipt of the Spirit was not the promised receipt of the Spirit by believers in John 7:39, and it was not the promised receipt of the gift of the Spirit following baptism in Acts 2:38. We know that with certainty.

So what was it? Cornelius received the Spirit of God, not as a result of God's promise to believers, but rather to teach Peter something about God's promise to all flesh. The Holy Spirit fell on Gentile Cornelius to teach someone else a lesson, just as the Holy Spirit had much earlier fallen on Gentile Balaam to teach someone else a lesson.

In the Bible, God certainly on occasion gave his Spirit and miraculous experiences to those who were not believers. We see that with Cornelius' vision in Acts 10:3 and the subsequent events, but we also see it with Saul's heavenly vision in Acts 26:19. And, as with Cornelius, Saul's vision was also related to the conversion of the Gentiles (Acts 26:20).

Cornelius and Saul were both unbelievers when those events happened, and, in each case, God did what he did for a specific purpose at a specific time.

John 14:16-17 tells us that the world **cannot receive** the Spirit of truth, and so we know that any such promise of **receiving** the Spirit cannot be directed to "all flesh." And yet this promise of God pouring out his Spirit is specifically directed to "all flesh."

And so I think we must conclude that receiving the Spirit of God is different from having the Spirit of God poured out on you.

And that means we also have different promises. We have a promise of the Spirit being poured out on all flesh, and we have a different promise of the Spirit being received by believers. We have two different promises for two different (but overlapping) groups: all flesh and believers.

But how can we say that the Spirit of God is poured out on the disobedient?

I think we can say that because the Bible tells us that even the disobedient world has some interactions with the Spirit of God. Perhaps it is like water being poured out on all the earth - when that happened in Genesis, Noah and his family lived and the others drowned. But the water from God was poured out on all flesh.

What interactions do disbelievers have with the Spirit of God?

- They are **convicted** by the Holy Spirit.

**John 16:8** - And when he comes, **he will convict the world** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

- They **resist** the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 7:51** - "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, **you always resist the Holy Spirit**. As your fathers did, so do you."

- They **do not accept** the things of the Spirit.

**1 Corinthians 2:12-14** - Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. **The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**

- They **outrage** the Spirit.

**Hebrews 10:29** - How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has **outraged the Spirit of grace?**

- The gospel is **preached** to them by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

**1 Peter 1:12** - It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through **those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven**, things into which angels long to look.

If the world can resist, refuse, and outrage the Spirit, then doesn't that tell us that those in the world are having some sort of interaction with the Spirit? If they are convicted by the Spirit, then

doesn't that tell us the same thing? That those in the world are, as we say in the legal business, somehow in the jurisdiction of the Spirit?

The question is not whether the Spirit has been poured out on them. The question is whether they will receive the Spirit or reject the Spirit. The question is whether they will sink or swim. When the heavens open up and the water pours down, are you in the ship with Noah or are you outside that ship trusting in your own power to save yourself?

Here is what I think we are seeing in these verses:

- God's promise to **pour out** his Holy Spirit was directed to all flesh - to everyone.
- A different promise of the Holy Spirit is **received** by some - by believers.
- That different promise of the Holy Spirit is **rejected** by all others - by non-believers.

And remember what we said about Joel 2:28 when we looked at it the first time. The promise to all flesh is the outpouring of the Spirit. The prophecies, the visions, and the dreams are not promised by Joel to all flesh. Instead, those activities are promised to specific groups as evidence that the promised outpouring to all flesh had occurred.

So how then is the Spirit of God poured out on everyone in the world, including even unbelievers? Simple - through the proclamation of the gospel to everyone in the world. We just read about it a moment ago:

**1 Peter 1:12** - It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through **those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven**, things into which angels long to look.

And perhaps now we know why the evidence of the promise in Joel 2 was not all miracles, but was instead was just prophecy, visions, and dreams. As we said, each of those activities is a way by which God spoke to the world. I think the focus here is on the proclamation of God's word - "in the things that have now been announced to you through those

who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven."

And we don't have to leave Acts 2 to find an example of that. Those listening to the apostles in Acts 2, some of whom were mocking the apostles, were in the world. And what happened to all of those present on that great day when the Spirit of God was poured out on all flesh? What happened to all of them is that they all heard the gospel. In fact, they heard it in their own language. That miracle was specifically designed so that **all** would hear the gospel. Only some of them obeyed the gospel, but they all heard the gospel.

**Acts 2:33** - Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, **he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.**

"He has poured out **this** that **you yourselves are seeing and hearing.**" And what is **this**? This is the Holy Spirit. And what were they all **hearing**? They were all hearing the gospel.



## Joel Lesson 28

gifts in Romans 12, only one of which (prophecy) is a miraculous gift:

Last week we looked at God's great promise to pour out his Spirit on all flesh, and I explained why I have chosen to view that promise as broadly as the Bible will allow me to view it.

When we ended, we were looking at how God poured out his Spirit on all flesh, including even the disobedient, through the proclamation of the gospel. And we looked at an example of that in Acts 2, where all who were there that day miraculously heard the gospel proclaimed in their own language.

And I think one thing that event confirms for us is that pouring out the Spirit on all flesh does not mean that all flesh will experience the same thing.

The gospel is for all flesh. Salvation in Christ is available for all flesh. The blessings of God are available for all flesh. But not everyone will enjoy those blessings; not everyone will be saved. Some who hear the gospel will receive the Spirit of God, while others who hear the gospel will reject the Spirit of God.

Hearing the gospel in your own language was a great blessing from God, but those who obeyed what they heard received many more blessings from God. And then, later in Acts, some of those first century Christians received even more blessings from God when they received a miraculous gift through the laying on of an Apostle's hands.

And what about today? I think in one way the situation is the same, but in another way the situation is different.

The situation is the same in the sense that the great blessing of God's Spirit is poured out on all flesh through the proclamation of the gospel, with those who obey the gospel receiving greater blessings from God.

But the situation is different in the sense that those great blessings are not as varied today as they were in the first century. We do not receive the various miraculous gifts today that some received in the first century received through the apostles' hands.

But that doesn't mean we all receive the same gifts from God even today. Paul, for example, lists seven

**Romans 12:6-8** - Having **gifts** that **differ** according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if **prophecy**, in proportion to our faith; if **service**, in our serving; the one who **teaches**, in his teaching; the one who **exhorts**, in his exhortation; the one who **contributes**, in generosity; the one who **leads**, with zeal; the one who does acts of **mercy**, with cheerfulness.

And don't we all know people today with those gifts? Service? Teaching? Exhorting? Giving? Leading? Doing acts of mercy? When I go down that list, I think of names of people here today who fall into those categories. And how does Paul describe them? As "gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." They are not miraculous gifts, but they are gifts.

And, even in the first century, being filled with the Holy Spirit did not always result in the performance of *overt* miraculous signs. For example, Luke 1:15 tells us that John the Baptist was "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb," but John 10:41 tells us that "John did no sign" (although John was, of course, a prophet).

And so, although we do find miraculous gifts in the first century church, even there it was certainly not one size fits all.

But today, we no longer live in the age of miraculous gifts - and for good reason: we no longer need miraculous gifts today.

Remember where we started with this prophecy from Joel 2. We started by looking at people who were prophesying, seeing visions, and dreaming dreams. But how were the people to know that those prophesies, visions, and dreams were really from God? The answer is miracles.

And, again, we don't have to leave Acts 2 to see that. Why did the people in Acts 2 listen to the Apostles? Why did some of them believe the Apostles? What

made them decide that what the Apostles were telling them was in fact a message from God?

It was a miracle. It was the fact that those Galileans were suddenly able to speak every language on earth. The miracles confirmed that Peter's words were God's words.

Think about it this way - what if you said something about God today, and somebody then asked you, "How can I know that what you are telling me is true"? How would you answer that question? You would open your Bible and show that person the evidence.

Now take that situation back in time to the first century. You are in the first century church, you say something about God, and somebody then asks you, "How can I know that what you are telling me is true"? How would you have answered that question at that time?

You could have pointed to the Old Testament for some of what you were saying, but what about those things that were not revealed in the Old Testament? How would you answer?

Would you tell the person that you heard it from someone named Paul? Would you say, "I have a letter in my pocket from this person named Paul that arrived in the mail yesterday?" How convincing would such evidence have been? But what if you performed a miracle as evidence?

In the first century, the Old Testament was evidence, and the early church used the Old Testament that way. Apollos in Acts 18:28 "powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus."

But the New Testament was not yet that sort of evidence - it was too recent, and it wasn't even completed. And so what did God do?

**Hebrews 2:3-4** - How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, **while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit**

**distributed according to his will.**

Miracles had a special purpose for a special time. But that all changed when the last word of the New Testament was penned. In short, the New Testament, once completed, could be used along with the Old Testament as evidence without any need for signs and miracles.

The fact that we rely on the Bible today as authoritative evidence for what we are saying proves that we do not need signs and miracles. We are using the Bible today for the same reason that the early church used signs and miracles.

If we think we need signs and miracles as evidence today, then it must be because we do not think that the word of God is sufficient for that purpose. But is that what the Bible says about itself? No, it is not.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** - All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

And for our neighbors today who think they are being guided directly by the Holy Spirit, I suspect the spirit that is really guiding them is their own spirit.

And we know that is true when they are being guided to do things opposed to the teaching of Scripture. When what we teach changes with the culture, we can be certain that we are being guided by the spirit of the world and not be the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:12).

So am I guided today by the Holy Spirit? Absolutely I am, but **not** directly by the Spirit. I am guided by the Spirit today **only** indirectly through the written word of God.

**1 Corinthians 2:12-13** - Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might **understand** the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in **words** not

taught by human wisdom but **taught by the Spirit**, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

- Does the Spirit **lead** me today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.
- Does the Spirit **comfort** me today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.
- Does the Spirit **draw** people to God today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.
- Does the Spirit **guide** me today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.
- Does the Spirit **teach** me today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.
- Does the Spirit **reprove** me today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.
- Does the Spirit **correct** me today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.
- Does the Spirit **train** me today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.
- Does the Spirit **speak** to me today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.
- Does the Spirit **empower** me to live a godly life today? Absolutely, but **only** through the written word of God.

The gospel is “the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16). The “implanted word” “is able to save your souls” (James 1:12).

The Handout for Lesson 28 shows many of the blessings that we enjoy today because we have the written word of God. When I started making that handout, I had some verses in mind, and I thought I could probably fill the front side of a regular size sheet of paper with the blessings we have because we have the Bible.

But as I kept searching, I kept finding more and more verses showing us more and more blessings we have from the word of God - until finally I had filled the front and back of a *legal* sized sheet of

paper. Even then I could have kept going. **I didn't run of blessings - I ran out of space!**

And as we study the verses on that handout, here is the lesson that I think we should take to heart when it comes to our study of the Holy Spirit: **If anyone's view of the Holy Spirit causes that person to think less of the written word of God in any way or less about the written word of God in any amount, then we can be 100% certain that that person's view of the Holy Spirit is a false view.**

The purpose of miraculous gifts was to provide the written word and confirm the written word - not to replace the written word!

And if someone is waiting around to receive a nudge of some sort from the Holy Spirit, then that person just needs to open his Bible and read it. That is the only way that the Spirit of God nudges anyone today - by the written word of God. **And the more verses you know, the more nudges you get!**

**Psalm 119:11** - I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

We could say much more on that topic! Next week, our handout will focus on blessings we have from the Holy Spirit - one of which is the written word of God!

We have finished our look at the promised pouring out of God's Spirit on all flesh. Let's look next at the promise gift of the Holy Spirit for those who obey the gospel.

**What is the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38? And how is that gift related to Joel's prophecy?**

To begin, let's all just admit that this topic can be very confusing.

The exact phrase “gift of the Holy Spirit” is found only twice in the Bible - and one of those verses (Acts 2:38) promises the “gift of the Holy Spirit” to those who have been baptized, while the other verse (Acts 10:45) describes the “gift of the Holy Spirit” as having been received prior to baptism.

Are those two gifts the same gift? Can they be the same gift? In Acts 11:17, Peter describes the gift as “the **same** gift” that God “gave to us **when we**



**believed** in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Is that gift the same gift that we see in Acts 2:38? And when did Peter believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Wasn’t that long before Acts 2?

As I said, the questions here can be very complicated!

So, what is the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38?

Yes, there are many different opinions about the answer to that question in the religious world, but there are also many different opinions about the answer to that question in the church.

And, in my opinion, some (but not all) of those proposed answers fall in the realm of opinion because there is no verse in the Bible requiring us to draw a line through them.

So, as with the various views about the pouring out of the Spirit of God, all I can do here is look at the various views, look at the evidence, and then give you my opinion along with the basis for my opinion.

And I plan to apply the same rule in Acts 2:38 that I applied in Acts 2:17. I want to be as broad here in Acts 2:38 as the Bible will allow me to be.

Why? Because I think that approach is the safest approach given that Peter’s entire sermon began with a promise of “pouring” out God’s Spirit on “all flesh.” When I think about “pouring out” and when I think about “all flesh,” I am thinking in broad terms.

So, when it comes to the promise of salvation and the promised blessings from God, I want to be as broad as the Bible will allow me to be. When it comes to the gift of the Holy Spirit, I don’t want to find just one blessing that is included in that great gift, and then stop. I want to find all of the blessings revealed in the Bible that are or could be included in that great gift.

And so I plan to keep thinking in broad terms as long as the Bible allows me to keep thinking in broad terms.

What do I mean by that? How could the Bible cause me to narrow things here in Acts 2:38?

Well, look at the first word Peter says in verse 38: “**repent!**” That word imposes at least one condition on what follows, and so we see a **narrowing** of the promise right from the start.

Yes, the Spirit may have been poured out on **all** flesh, but this promise in verse 38 has now added a condition - repentance. And the next thing Peter says adds another condition - baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.

That is what I mean when I say that I won’t narrow things unless the Bible requires me to narrow things. And when it comes to repentance and baptism, the Bible has required me to narrow things.

I know that sometimes we are accused of being unloving when we stand up for the truth about God’s plan of salvation, but, in fact, the most **unloving** thing I could ever do to anyone would be to convince that person that he is right with God when he is not right with God.

Yes, we must preach the truth in love, but I have always like what R.L. Whiteside said on that subject:

“Much is said about preaching the truth in love and so it should be preached. But in love of what? The preacher should so love the truth that he will not sacrifice any of it nor pervert it, and he should so love people that he will not withhold from them even one unpleasant truth. He that does either of these things loves neither the truth nor the people.”

Yes, there is a promise in Acts 2:38, but it is not an unconditional promise. We find two conditions at the beginning of that verse - repentance and baptism. And when we look at the entirety of God’s word on the subject of salvation, we find some additional conditions.

So what then is the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38? What are our options?

- Some say that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not the Holy Spirit himself but rather is a gift from the Holy Spirit, and they identify that gift as either salvation, eternal life, the Bible, or miraculous gifts.
- Others say that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself, and they identify that gift as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, either personally or representatively



through the word. For those that consider the indwelling to be personal, some hold that it is the miraculous indwelling enjoyed only during some portion of the first century while others hold that it is a non-miraculous indwelling still enjoyed by Christians today. Some say that the gift of the Holy Spirit was or is always accompanied by miraculous gifts, while others say it was not or is not.

I'm not sure that list exhausts all of the different opinions, but I think that list includes most of them.

Let's start with a threshold issue - **is the gift of the Holy Spirit a gift from the Holy Spirit, or is the gift of the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit himself given as a gift?**

The grammar in verse 38 would allow either interpretation, but in my opinion the broader context does not. In my opinion, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself rather than something the Holy Spirit gives to us.

Why is that my opinion? Because, while the grammar in verse 38 might allow either interpretation, the grammar in other related verses does not.

In Acts 5, for example, Peter responded to the High Priest with what appears to be a short summary of what Peter proclaimed in Acts 2.

**Acts 5:29-32** - But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, **and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.**"

And the grammar in Acts 5:32 is very clear - the Holy Spirit himself is the gift. I think the same is true in Acts 2:38.

And, of course, we could cite other verses as well.

**Acts 15:8-9** - And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by **giving them the Holy Spirit** just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

**Romans 5:5** - And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through **the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**

**2 Corinthians 1:22** - And who has also put his seal on us and **given us his Spirit** in our hearts as a guarantee.

**2 Corinthians 5:5** - He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has **given us the Spirit** as a guarantee.

**1 Thessalonians 4:8** - Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who **gives his Holy Spirit** to you.

**1 John 3:24** - Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by **the Spirit whom he has given us.**

And, so, in my opinion, the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38 is the Holy Spirit himself given by God as a gift.

And, in some ways, that makes our task easier. If the question is what is the gift of the Holy Spirit, then the answer is now very simple: **the gift of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit!** The Holy Spirit himself is the gift.

So, if the question is whether the gift of the Holy Spirit is miraculous gifts, the answer is no - it is not. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit.

Or if the question is whether the gift of the Holy Spirit is the sealing or the guarantee, again the answer is no - it is not. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit.

Now, it may be that miraculous power was a blessing that came from this gift, or that the sealing and the guarantee were blessings that came from this gift - but they are not the gift itself. **The gift of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit given as a gift.**

I think all that means is that we need to rephrase our question. Rather than asking what the gift is, we should be asking what it means when receive that gift. I think we can assume that great blessings of some sort are involved when someone receives the gift of God's Spirit - but what are those great blessings? I think that is our question.

But before we look at the blessings that came or come with that great gift, let's look at another threshold issue. **To whom was or is the gift given?** Was the gift in Acts 2:38 only a first century gift, or is the gift in Acts 2:38 still given today?

**In my opinion, the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38 is a gift for all Christians for all time. In my opinion, I have that promised gift today.**

Why is that my opinion? That is my opinion about Acts 2:38 because of Acts 2:39.

In verse 38, Peter proclaims a promise from God:

**Acts 2:38** - Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And, in verse 39, Peter describes who that promise is for.

**Acts 2:39** (ESV) - For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, **everyone** whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

**Acts 2:39** (KJV) - For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, **even as**

**many as** the Lord our God shall call.

That statement by Peter in verse 39 about who the promise in verse 38 is for includes four groups of people.

- **"You"** - that is, the people listening to Peter in Acts 2.
- **"Your children"** - that is, the descendants of the people listening to Peter in Acts 2.

Yes, I could read the word "children" narrowly in verse 39 to exclude some people from receiving this promise, but remember my rule! I will not understand this promise narrowly unless the Bible requires such an understanding, and here it does not.

The Bible sometimes uses the word "children" to mean descendants, such as in Exodus 20:5 - "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the **children** to the third and the fourth generation" and in Romans 9:7 - "not all are **children** of Abraham because they are his offspring." And so I will understand the word that way here absent a verse telling me to do otherwise.

- **"All that are far off"** - that is, the Gentiles.

Peter may have initially understood this phrase to mean Jews living outside of Jerusalem, but I think Acts 10 and Ephesians 2:13 tell us that it means the Gentiles.

- **"Everyone** whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (ESV) or **"Even as many as** the Lord our God shall call" (KJV) - that is, everybody else if anyone is not already included in the prior categories.

And, again, my plan is to read that final phrase as broadly as I can, which is pretty easy here given that the phrase includes the word "everyone."

And even if "children" meant literal children earlier in the list, I think all of the descendants would still be included in this final catch-all phrase.

In my opinion, that final phrase is a summary of the preceding phrases. For whom is the promise? The promise is for Jews (you and your descendants), the promise is for Gentiles (those who far off), and

(in summary) the promise is for everyone God calls (both Jew and Gentile).

If my goal is to understand verse 39 as broadly as I can without violating the Scriptures, then I think that is it. The promise is for everyone God calls.

And I think that translation “as many as” in the KJV is very instructive. The promise in verse 38 is to “**as many as** the Lord our God shall call.”

The Greek word translated “everyone” or “as many as” in verse 39 is the word *hosos* (Strong’s # 3745). It is the same Greek word that we find in Galatians 3:27.

**Galatians 3:27** - For **as many of you** as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

In each case, I think we are seeing a numerical equality. Acts 2:39 says that the number of people receiving the promise equals the number of people called by God. And Galatians 3:27 tells us that the number of people baptized into Christ equals the number of people who have put on Christ. Each verse uses that Greek word meaning “as many as.”

We find that same Greek word in other verses as well:

**John 1:12** - But to **all** who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

**Acts 13:48** - And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and **as many as** were appointed to eternal life believed.

**Romans 8:14** - For **all who** are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

I think the same Greek word is used the same way in Acts 2:39.

And I think we all understand the promise that way for the promise of forgiveness in the first half of

Acts 2:38. I simply understand the promise of the gift in the second half of Acts 2:38 that same way.

If there is a time limit on the promise of the Spirit in Acts 2:38, then how do we avoid imposing that same time limit on the promise of forgiveness found in that same verse?

And, finally, let’s compare what Peter says in Acts 2:39 with what Peter quotes from the prophet Joel in Acts 2:21.

**Acts 2:39** - “Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

**Acts 2:21** - “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Aren’t those two verses two sides of the same coin? Don’t we see both those whom God calls through the gospel and those who answer that call? And don’t we see salvation from sin with both calls - those whom God calls and those who call upon the name of the Lord?

In summary, my opinion about the breadth of the promise in Acts 2:38 is largely determined by my understanding of the breadth of the recipients of the promise in Acts 2:39. If our question is to whom was the promise directed, I think Peter answers that question in verse 39.

**But what is this gift of the Holy Spirit that, in my opinion, is promised to all who obey the gospel for all time?**

And, again, the question is not really what the gift is - the gift is the Holy Spirit - but rather the question is what are the blessings that come from being given that gift.

**What are the blessings that someone receives when that person receives the gift of the Holy Spirit promised in Acts 2:38?** That is our question.

Before we answer that question, I think we need to look at some more evidence - and especially at some evidence that has been rather hotly debated over the years: the Samaritans in **Acts 8** and the household of Cornelius in **Acts 10**.

Let's start with Acts 8. In that chapter, Saul's persecution of the church caused a scattering of those who were preaching the word. One of those preachers, Philip, went to Samaria, where he proclaimed the gospel and performed miracles. Many who heard Philip believed and were baptized, including even a magician named Simon.

When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard what was happening in Samaria, they sent Peter and John. Let's read what happened next:

**Acts 8:14-17** - Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them **that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.** Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

What can we conclude from those verses? There are two primary views:

- The first view is that the Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit in any way prior to the arrival of Peter and John. And, because we know the Samaritans had believed and been baptized, the logical conclusions of this first view are that we do not receive the Holy Spirit in any way at our baptism and that we, today, cannot receive the Holy Spirit at all given the lack of Apostles.
- The second view is that Acts 8 is focused on the receipt of miraculous gifts and that the receipt of the Holy Spirit and the falling of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans are both describing their receipt of miraculous gifts from the Apostles. But, according to this second view, that does not mean the Samaritans did not receive the Holy Spirit in some other way at their baptism.

If you read the six collections of articles from the Firm Foundation that I posted to [StudyJoel.com](http://StudyJoel.com), then you read three collections that hold to the first

view and three other collections that hold to the second view.

And, once again, all I can do is give you my opinion along with the basis for my opinion. And my opinion is that the second view is the better view.

Why? We have already looked at one big reason - Acts 2:39.

If I were to adopt the first view, then I would have to limit Acts 2:39 to include only first century Christians. But that is not what I see in Acts 2:39. Instead, I see "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And so Acts 2:39 is one reason why I prefer the second view of Acts 8.

But there is also a second reason why I hold that second view about Acts 8 - and that second reason is Acts 9.

### What happened in Acts 9?

Saul's persecution of the church in Acts 8 was why Philip went to Samaria, and those persecutions by Saul are continuing at the beginning of Acts 9. But then Saul heads out for Damascus, and, as they say, the rest is history!

Jesus appears to Saul on that road to Damascus, and Jesus commands Saul to continue on his way to that city where he would be told what he needed to do. Paul is left blinded by that experience, and after arriving in the city, he neither eats nor drinks for three days.

In verse 10, we meet Ananias, who was a disciple living in Damascus. Jesus appears to Ananias in a vision and tells him where to find Saul. Let's read what Ananias then does:

**Acts 9:17-18** - So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came **has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**" And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and **he regained his sight.** Then he rose and was **baptized.**



According to verse 17, Ananias (who, like Philip in Acts 8, was **not** an Apostle) came to do **two things** for Saul - restore his sight and cause him to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And then in verse 18, **two things** happen: Saul's sight is restored and Saul is baptized.

**Was Saul filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism?** I think he was. Ananias was sent to Saul by Jesus specifically for that purpose - "so that you may regain your sight **and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**" Did Ananias accomplish that purpose? I think he did.

And if that was true of Saul when he was baptized and before he met any Apostles, then can't we then say that the same was true for the Christians in Acts 8 if we simply replace Ananias with Philip?

So where are we? I am explaining why I prefer the second view about Acts 8 - the view that the receipt of the Holy Spirit that had not yet happened in Acts 8 was the receipt of miraculous gifts. And so far my reasons for preferring that second view are **Acts 2:39** and **Acts 9:17-18**.

Another reason why I prefer the second view is how the Bible describes those outside of Christ.

**Jude 1:19** - It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, **devoid of the Spirit.**

**Romans 8:9** - You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. **Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**

If the Samaritans in Acts 8 had not received the Spirit in any way at all after they were baptized, then couldn't we say that they were devoid of the Spirit and that the Spirit did not dwell in them? But, if so, how would such Christians have been any different from those out in the world?

And couldn't we ask the same questions about that Ethiopian eunuch? Was he devoid of the Spirit when he went on his way rejoicing after his baptism in Acts 8:39? In my opinion, **the Ethiopian eunuch received exactly what Acts 2:38 offered**

**- forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

Are those my only reasons for preferring that second view about Acts 8? They are not, but they are the only reasons that I will list for now. Later will we look at some things that I believe the Holy Spirit does for all Christians for all time - and those activities by the Holy Spirit will provide some additional reasons for my view about Acts 8.

## Joel Lesson 29

Last week we started looking at the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38 and its relation to the prophecy of Joel 2.

And we started with two threshold questions: (1) whether the gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift from the Holy Spirit or is instead the Holy Spirit himself given as a gift; and, (2) whether the gift of the Holy Spirit was a promise for some Christians for some time or a promise for all Christians for all time. And I gave you my opinions on those two questions along with the bases for those opinions.

After looking at those two threshold questions, we then moved on to the big question: what is the gift of the Holy Spirit - or, more precisely, **what are the blessings that come from receiving the Holy Spirit as a gift?**

But before looking at that question, we started looking first at two difficult related sections of the Bible: Acts 8 and Acts 10. Last week, we looked at Acts 8. Today we will look at Acts 10.

**So, let's take a closer look at Acts 10 and Acts 11.**

In my opinion, the case of Cornelius is one of the most difficult topics in the New Testament. And so we could spend a great deal of time talking about Cornelius, but for our purposes here, I think we can focus our attention on some questions that arise from a single statement made by Peter in Acts 11.

**Acts 11:16-17** - And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then **God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ**, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

**Here is the key statement from Peter:** "God gave the **same** gift to them as he gave to us **when** we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ."

**And here are our questions:** What is that gift? In what way was that gift the **same** gift that Cornelius was given? And why did Peter say that he was given

that gift **when** he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? When was that?

**What is the gift in Acts 11:17?**

I think Peter answers that question in verse 16: "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, **but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**'"

I think the gift given to Cornelius in Acts 11 was the baptism with the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised the Apostles in Acts 1:5 and that John had promised in Mark 1:8.

**Acts 1:5** - For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

**Mark 1:8** - I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

And what is the baptism with the Holy Spirit?

**First**, we know the baptism with the Holy Spirit is different from water baptism. That is what both Jesus and John just told us in Acts 1:5 and Mark 1:8. "I have baptized you with water, **but** he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

**Second**, we know the baptism with the Holy Spirit is not the baptism of the great commission. And how do we know that? We know that because the baptism of the great commission is **water** baptism.

**Acts 8:36-39** - And as they were going along the road they came to some **water**, and the eunuch said, "See, here is **water**! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the **water**, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the **water**, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

**Third**, we know that the baptism with the Holy Spirit was just for a limited time. And how do we know that? We know that because later Paul told us that there is only one baptism.

**Ephesians 4:5** - One Lord, one faith, **one baptism**.

And we know that one baptism in Ephesians 4:5 is water baptism.

**Ephesians 5:26** - That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of **water** with the word.

**Fourth**, we know that the Apostles received the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.

**Acts 1:5** - For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit **not many days from now**.

**Acts 2:4** - And they were **all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

**Fifth**, we know that Cornelius and his household received the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 10.

**Acts 11:16-17** - And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

**Sixth**, we know that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is called "the gift of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 10.

**Acts 10:45** - And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were

amazed, because **the gift of the Holy Spirit** was poured out even on the Gentiles.

**Seventh**, we know that "the gift of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 10 is **different** from "the gift of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 2 in at least one respect - the gift in Acts 2:38 was promised to those who had been baptized, while the gift in Acts 10:45 was given to Cornelius **before** he was baptized in Acts 10:48.

And that important fact is further confirmation that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is **not** the water baptism of Acts 2:38.

**Eighth**, we know that those two examples - the apostles in Acts 2 and Cornelius in Acts 10 - are the **only** examples of the baptism with the Holy Spirit found anywhere in the Bible.

**What can we conclude from all of those facts?**

What I conclude is that the baptism with the Holy Spirit was specifically given to confirm the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2:28 that God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh.

That is why we see the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. In fact, that is the explanation that Peter gives for the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 - it confirmed the fulfillment of the promised pouring out on all flesh.

**Acts 2:33** - Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, **he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing**.

And then we see the baptism with the Holy Spirit one and only one more time - and, again, for the **same purpose** - to show that "all flesh" in Joel 2:28 really means "all flesh."

That is why we see the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 10, and, again, that is the explanation that Peter gives for the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 10 - it confirmed the fulfillment of the promised pouring out on all flesh.

**Acts 11:15-18** - As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be **baptized with the Holy Spirit.**' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "**Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.**"

**But in what way was the gift given to Peter in Acts 11:17 the "same gift" that Cornelius was given?**

I think we just answered that question - they were both the baptism with the Holy Spirit. That is **not** the same gift that we find in Acts 2:38, but it is the **same** gift that we find in Acts 1:5 and Acts 2:4.

The conclusion is, I think, inescapable: we are looking at **two different gifts** in Acts 2 - one gift promised to all flesh, and another gift promised only to baptized believers.

**But why did Peter say that he was given that gift when he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? When was that?**

This is a difficult question. Why? Because Peter believed in Jesus years prior to the events in Acts 2 and Acts 10. We can read about Peter's introduction to Christ in John 1:40-42. So let's work backward and see if we can figure this one out.

We know that the gift in Acts 11:17 was the baptism with the Holy Spirit because that is what we are told in Acts 11:16. And we know that Peter received the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 (and not before) because that is what we are told in Acts 1:5.

Thus, whatever Peter meant when he said "**when we believed** in the Lord Jesus Christ," he cannot have meant when he **first** personally believed. Why not? Because that happened about three years prior to Acts 2.

So what did Peter mean? I think Peter must have been referring to something that someone believed **in Acts 2**, which was the first time the baptism with the Holy Spirit was given.

Perhaps Peter meant that he, Peter, believed in Acts 2 what Jesus had promised in Acts 1. Or perhaps Peter was using the word "we" to rhetorically include himself with those who **first** believed in Jesus in Acts 2.

I prefer the second explanation - that Peter is grouping himself with the converts in Acts 2. After all, Peter does not say that this was when he **first** believed - he just says that he believed on that day, which was certainly true. I suspect that Peter's belief was strengthened by the wonderful things that occurred on that great day.

Also, that explanation fits nicely with the previous verse in Acts 11.

**Acts 11:15** - As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us **at the beginning.**

The beginning of what? The beginning of the church in Acts 2.

I think the phrase "when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ" is just another way of saying "at the beginning." Both phrases are describing the great events in Acts 2.

We could say much more about Cornelius, but I think that is enough for our purposes here.

**Back now to our question, which we still haven't answered completely - what does it mean to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit after we obey the gospel? What wonderful blessings from God come as a result of that wonderful gift from God?**

When we looked at what it meant for God's Spirit to be poured out on all flesh, we listed various blessings from God that I think are a part of that great promise.

And when we read the entirety of the New Testament, I think we can identify some other blessings that are related in some way to the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, the written word



of God inspired by the Holy Spirit is one of those blessings.

I have listed the blessings I could find on the Handout for Lesson 29, which is entitled “A Holy Spirit Worksheet.” And why is it called a *worksheet*? Because there are some blank spaces for you to complete!

The first column on the Handout lists various blessings described in the Bible that are related in some way to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The second and third columns show who it is who enjoys (or enjoyed) those blessings and for what time those blessings are (or were) provided.

- The blessing of the gospel and the blessing of the Bible can be enjoyed by everyone. People leave the kingdom of darkness and enter the kingdom of Christ by hearing and obeying the gospel. The blessing of the gospel was available from Acts 2 onward, and the blessing of the Bible was available from its completion date late in the first century onward.
- The baptism with the Holy Spirit, as we saw, was a great blessing, but it occurred only twice, each time for a specific purpose - in Acts 2 and in Acts 10. Those two events were both first century events.
- The prophecies, dreams, and visions were enjoyed by some first century Christians (such as the Apostles and Stephen) and by some first century unbelievers (such as Saul and Cornelius). We know from Zechariah 13:2 and 1 Corinthians 13:10 that this blessing was only a first century blessing.
- The miraculous gifts given by an Apostle was enjoyed by those Christians on whom the Apostles laid their hands. We know from at least 1 Corinthians 13:10 that this blessing was only a first century blessing, and we know from Acts 8 and Acts 19 that this blessing was only for those who had previously been baptized into Christ.
- The Holy Spirit, by whom we are sealed for the day of redemption, bears witness to God that we are children of God, intercedes with

God on our behalf, and serves as a guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire it. I think these are blessings that have been enjoyed by all of those in the church since the day the church was established in Acts 2. Why? One reason is that two of those blessings include built-in time periods: until we acquire our inheritance and for the day of redemption. I don't think those blessings are limited to the first century.

Now there may be a few disagreements in the church over some of the information in those first three columns, but I think most of us are in agreement about most of it.

I think the disagreements are likely focused on some of the boxes in the final two columns, which is why I have left some of those boxes blank. I will tell you shortly how I fill them out, but you may want to fill them out differently. So what are in those final two columns?

The fourth and fifth columns on the Handout ask two questions about each of the blessings listed in the first column:

- Was that blessing a blessing that was enjoyed as a result of God pouring out his Spirit on all flesh?
- Was that blessing a blessing that was enjoyed as a result of someone being baptized and receiving the promised gift of the Holy Spirit?

I suspect there is only one box in the fourth column about which we all agree - and that is the box that asks whether the baptism with the Holy Spirit was a blessing that came from the pouring out of God's Spirit. I think Jesus answered that question for us in Acts 1:5. (We might also all agree about the prophecies, dreams, and visions, but I will let you fill that one out.)

And, as for the fifth column, I suspect we all agree that the first three boxes and the final box should **not** be included. Why? Because the blessings that come from hearing God's word (either today from the Bible or back then through prophecies, visions, and dreams) **precede** salvation. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Also, I suspect that most in the church understand that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is **not** the baptism of Acts 2:38, although that is certainly not what we hear from the denominations.

The disagreements in the church about the fifth column are centered on the blessing of miraculous gifts and the blessing of the promised Spirit who is both a seal and a guarantee.

And those disagreements are, of course, okay. I think that for the most part we are firmly in the realm of opinion when it comes to those issues about those final two columns.

And what is my opinion?

- I would place the word “YES” in every box of the fourth column. In my opinion, each of those blessings is a blessing that came as a result of God pouring out his Spirit on **all flesh** as he promised to do in Joel 2 and as he did in Acts 2. And I have already explained why that is my opinion for the fourth column.
- And the fifth column? I would place the word “YES” in **both** of those unanswered boxes.

And why is that my opinion for the fifth column? Based on the articles I read, I think most in the church would choose one box or the other, but **not** both. Why do I choose both?

I think we should turn that question completely around - **why NOT choose both?**

If we can show that both of those blessings are blessings that came or come through the Holy Spirit **after** someone is baptized, then why not include them both as blessings that come from the gift of the Holy Spirit promised to “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself”?

**Why would I start by drawing lines through blessings from the Holy Spirit when I am looking for blessings from the Holy Spirit?** Yes, we may find that some of those blessings were given for a specific purpose at a specific purpose - but why must that be true of all of them?

So, let’s look at each of the blessings, and rather than asking why we should **include** it, let’s ask why we might want to **exclude** it.

**Let’s start with the first blessings - miraculous gifts - and ask why we might exclude that blessing as a blessing that came in the first century from the promised gift of Acts 2:38.**

One reason why we might exclude the miraculous gifts is that the gift of Acts 2:38 was promised to “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” but those miraculous gifts were enjoyed only by **some** living in the first century and by **no one** at all living **after** the first century.

Is that reason enough to exclude miraculous gifts from the blessings promised in Acts 2:38? I think not.

As long as we can find **some** blessings that apply to **all** Christians for **all** time, then I think the wide scope of Acts 2:39 will be satisfied.

But that would leave open the possibility that some Christians might have received **additional** blessings in the first century. I don’t see any requirement in these verses that every Christian must receive exactly the same blessings as every other Christian.

The promise is that we will all receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, not that we will all receive the same blessings from that gift.

And if the concern is that such a thing would mean that God is showing partiality, we know that is not the case. No matter how we end up on these issues, we know that some in the first century performed miracles while we do not. That does **not** mean that God showed partiality to those first century Christians.

If we include the miraculous gifts among those blessings, then we know that some first century Christians received some blessings that we do not have today.

Another reason why we might exclude the miraculous gifts is that those gifts, even when they were received, were not received immediately upon baptism but rather only later (if at all) after an **additional requirement** was satisfied - having an Apostle lay his hands on you.

Is that reason enough to exclude miraculous gifts from the blessings promised in Acts 2:38? I think not.

And the reason is similar to what we just saw. As long as we can find **some** blessings that apply to **all** Christians for **all** time and that are received as soon as we are baptized, then I think the wide scope of Acts 2:39 will be satisfied.

But that would leave open the possibility that some Christians might have received additional blessings in the first century after satisfying some **additional** requirement.

In fact, we see some additional requirements elsewhere in the Bible such as **believing** in God and **confessing** that Jesus is the Son of God. Perhaps **some** blessings had **yet another additional requirement** involving a personal meeting with an Apostle.

And so, while some may have the opinion that those first century miraculous gifts should be struck off the list of blessings that come with the gift of Acts 2:38, I do not plan to strike them off my list. I think they can be included as long as we recognize that they were blessings available **only** during the first century and that they were not the only blessings.

**What about the so-called non-miraculous blessings that Christians have through the Holy Spirit? Is there a reason they should be excluded?**

And what do I mean by **non-miraculous**? There are many ways we could attack that question, but perhaps the simplest answer is this: a non-miraculous blessing from the Holy Spirit is a blessing that we don't know we have absent being told by God that we have it.

For example, I think the Bible tells us that God has written his name on every one of his faithful children. I think that is what it means when the Bible says in Ephesians 1:13-14 that we are "**sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.**"

**Is it a blessing to know that God has written his name on me?** Yes, it absolutely is a blessing. It is a tremendous blessing!

**And how do I know that I have received that tremendous blessing?** The only way I know I have that blessing is because God has told me that I have

it. I can't feel it. I can't see it. But I can most certainly know it, and I know it because I have faith in God. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, **the conviction of things not seen**" (Hebrews 11:1). God's name is written on me. I know that!

That is what I call a non-miraculous blessing. **And our question here is whether there is some reason for us to exclude such blessings from the blessings we are promised in Acts 2:38.**

One reason to exclude non-miraculous blessings from the gift of the Holy Spirit might be that no one would ever have expected to receive such blessings.

When people thought about the Holy Spirit, they thought about miracles, and the blessings from the pouring out that we see in Acts 2 were miraculous. And so, who would have expected non-miraculous blessings in verse 38?

Is that reason enough to exclude non-miraculous blessings from the blessings promised in Acts 2:38? I think not.

First, is it really true that the pouring out of the Spirit in Acts 2 involved **only** overt miraculous blessings? Wasn't the first gospel sermon in Acts 2 also one of those blessings? Isn't that what the people were hearing on that day? That first gospel sermon is certainly on my list!

But, second, there were a lot of unexpected things that happened in Acts 2! I think Joel himself might have been surprised, and I think even angels might have been surprised (1 Peter 1:10-12). And I think Peter himself was surprised later in Acts 10.

Joel 2 is a **prophecy** about Acts 2, and prophecies almost always announce something new. And it may have been the case that some of things that were new about the Holy Spirit on that day had to be new **because they were not possible prior to the cross.**

Another reason to exclude non-miraculous blessings from the gift of the Holy Spirit might be that we don't really know how they work. How are we sealed with the Holy Spirit? How does the Holy Spirit intercede to God on our behalf when we pray? How is the Holy Spirit a guarantee of our inheritance?



Is that reason enough to exclude non-miraculous blessings from the blessings promised in Acts 2:38? I say no.

In fact if we go down this road I don't think that the non-miraculous blessings will be the only blessings on the chopping block! Does anyone know how miracles work?

How the blessings work is not the issue. The issue is whether God has promised those blessings - and I think he has - some to all Christians for all time and some to some Christians for a limited time.

In short, I think there are some blessings from the gift of the Holy Spirit that all Christians have in common, but I also think there are some blessings from that great gift that were enjoyed only before the New Testament was completed.

**Let's focus now on the non-miraculous blessings that I believe we have today from the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

What are those non-miraculous blessings, and why do I think we have them today? Let's start with that second question first.

I think we have blessings from the gift of the Holy Spirit today because I think we have been given the Holy Spirit today. And I think there are many verses (in addition to Acts 2:38) that tell us that.

- **Luke 11:13** - If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father **give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**
- **Acts 5:32** - And we are witnesses to these things, **and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.**
- **Romans 5:5** - And hope does not put us to shame, because **God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**
- **Romans 8:9** - You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. **Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**

- **1 Corinthians 3:16** - Do you not know that you are God's temple and that **God's Spirit dwells in you?**
- **1 Corinthians 6:19** - Or do you not know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?** You are not your own.
- **Galatians 3:2** - Let me ask you only this: **Did you receive the Spirit** by works of the law or **by hearing with faith?**
- **2 Timothy 1:14** - By **the Holy Spirit who dwells within us**, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.
- **1 John 3:24** - **Whoever** keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, **by the Spirit whom he has given us.**
- **1 John 4:13** - By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because **he has given us of his Spirit.**

That is why I believe that we today have the gift of the Holy Spirit as promised in Acts 2:38.

**But what are those non-miraculous blessings that we enjoy from the great gift?** Again, I think there are quite a few verses that describe those blessings.

- **Romans 8:16** - The Spirit himself **bears witness** with our spirit that we are children of God.
- **Romans 8:26-27** - Likewise **the Spirit helps us** in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but **the Spirit himself intercedes for us** with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because **the Spirit intercedes for the saints** according to the will of God.
- **2 Corinthians 1:22** - And who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts **as a guarantee.**
- **2 Corinthians 5:5** - He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit **as a guarantee.**



- **Ephesians 1:13-14** - In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it**, to the praise of his glory.
- **Ephesians 4:30** - And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom **you were sealed for the day of redemption**.

The Holy Spirit bears witness to God that we are children of God. The Holy Spirit intercedes with God on our behalf. The Holy Spirit communicates with God about our prayers. The Holy Spirit operates as a guarantee of our inheritance. God writes his name on us - he sets his seal to us - with the Holy Spirit. And how long will God do that? Until we acquire possession of our inheritance and until the day of redemption.

That is *some of what* the Bible says the Holy Spirit does for a child of God, and I believe God is still doing those things today for his children.

And why do I say that is “some of what” the Spirit does for a child of God? I say that because those are things that the Spirit does *directly* for a Christian, but that is far from all that the Spirit does for us. Every time we open our Bibles, we find and enjoy great blessings from the Holy Spirit of God! Every time we open our Bibles, we find the Holy Spirit bearing witness to us.

- **Hebrews 10:15** - And the Holy Spirit also **bears witness to us**; for after **saying**, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds.”

A great part of the pouring out of God’s Spirit on all flesh is the pouring out of God’s written word to all flesh. And a great part of the blessings we enjoy from the Holy Spirit come from the inspired word of God that we have through the Holy Spirit and that is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).

So where are we? Which is it? Are the blessings that we enjoy from the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38 the miraculous gifts enjoyed by first century Christians? Or are the blessings that we enjoy from

the gift of Holy Spirit the seal, the guarantee, and the intercession enjoyed by all Christians across all the centuries?

So which is it - **A or B**? My answer is **yes!** My answer is **A and B!**

**Why do we think we have to choose?** What is it about the great promise from Joel 2 that has us suddenly wanting to draw lines through what the Spirit has done for Christians in the past or through what the Spirit is doing for Christians in the present?

Is there something in the Bible that says that the blessings we enjoy from the gift of the Holy Spirit could not have changed over time? In fact, don’t we know that they did change over time?

Doesn’t the Bible itself - in both the Old Testament and the New Testament - tell us that the Spirit would interact with people differently in the first century? Didn’t Zechariah tell us that prophecy would cease in the first century? Didn’t Paul tell us the same thing?

But does that mean the Holy Spirit ceased to do anything for Christians? Did Zechariah say that **everything** would cease? We know that the work of the Spirit changed; did the work of the Spirit **stop**? Where is the verse saying that the work of the Holy Spirit **stopped**?

So where are we? Here is where I am: **I think God promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to all who obey the gospel throughout all time.**

As for what that means to the one who receives that gift, I think some of those blessings were limited to the first century when the children of God did not yet have the complete word of God.

I think that we today receive that gift of the Holy Spirit when we obey the gospel, and I think we enjoy certain **non-miraculous** blessings from that gift that were also enjoyed by those who received the gift in first century.

So, am I saying that the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians in some way today? Yes, I am saying that, and I think Paul is saying that:

- **1 Corinthians 3:16** - Do you not know that you are God's temple and that **God's Spirit dwells in you?**

question of how the Spirit of God dwells in me. But until then, I am not going to speculate.

Instead, I will just accept what the Bible tells me on that subject - that the Holy Spirit of God dwells in all Christians for all time in some way. And I will just leave the "how" up to God.

But what do I mean when I say that the Holy Spirit dwells in us "**in some way.**" **What way? How** does the Holy Spirit dwell in all Christians for all time?

A great deal of ink has been spilled in attempting to answer that question, but perhaps we can simplify the issue by first asking a related question that should be a very easy question for all us to answer. After we answer this easy question, we can go back to the hard question.

And here is the easy question: **How does my own spirit dwell in me?**

That question should be easy, right? After all, that is something that I know is happening, and that is something that I experience 24 hours a day. Surely we can answer that question, right? That question should be a piece of cake for us, and then we can move on to the harder question. Does that sound like a good plan?

It may sound like a good plan, but it is a terrible plan. Why? Because no one knows how the spirit of a person dwells in that person. James 2:26 tells us that "the body apart from the spirit is dead," but how does that work? We just don't know.

As a Christian, I know that my spirit is not limited to my brain because one day my brain will be in the grave while I am elsewhere. But how is my spirit related to my brain? Where is my spirit located? How does my spirit enter my body when I am born? How does my spirit leave my body when I die?

No one knows - and yet we sometimes seem very confident that we can answer that same question about the spirit of God!

And, yes, I have read many of the arguments. The Holy Spirit is in you, but not with you. Or the Holy Spirit is with you, but not in you. The Holy Spirit can't dwell in people because that would mean that the Holy Spirit would be divided into pieces. The Holy Spirit dwells in us only through the Word, or in conjunction with the word, or separate and apart from the word. And on and on and on.

Here's my plan. When I can tell you how my own spirit dwells in me, then I will move on to the harder

## Joel Lesson 30

This is our eighth (and, I believe, final) lesson on the final five verses of Joel 2. So, yes, after today, we will have had eight lessons on five verses! But, as we have seen, the prophecy in those five verses is crucial to our understanding of the great events that we find in the opening chapters of Acts.

Our plan today is to finish our study of the second chapter of Joel by looking at the final two and a half verses from Joel 2 that Peter quoted in Acts 2.

### Acts 2:19-20

**Acts 2:19-20** - And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, **before** the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

In these two verses from Acts 2, Peter quotes Joel 2:30-31, which we looked at previously from just an Old Testament perspective. Let's now look at these two verses again to see what more we can learn about them in the New Testament.

And, as we said before, there are two events in these two verses, with the first event explicitly said to occur "before" the second event.

- The first event is described as "wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke" and "the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood."
- The second event, which happens after that first event, is described as the coming of "the day of the Lord," "the great and magnificent day."

And our question, of course, is what are these two events?

Let's start with the second event. **What is this great and magnificent day of the Lord?**

I think there are three possibilities (which you can find listed on the Handout for Lesson 30).

- This great and magnificent day of the Lord is the last great day at the end of the world.
- This great and magnificent day of the Lord is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70.
- This great and magnificent day of the Lord is the day of Pentecost when the eternal kingdom of Christ was established in Acts 2.

And what then about the first event - **the wonders and signs**? For each of those possible second events, what is the most likely *preceding* first event?

- **Option 1:** If the great and magnificent day of the Lord is the end of the world, then the wonders and signs are most likely the events described in 2 Peter 3.

**2 Peter 3:12** - Waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

- **Option 2:** If the great and magnificent day of the Lord is the destruction of Jerusalem, then the wonders and signs are most likely some of the events described in Matthew 24. (And, yes, Matthew 24:29 does sound a bit like the end of the world, but we know it is **not** the end of the world because we have also read Matthew 24:34.)

**Matthew 24:29** - Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

- **Option 3:** If the great and magnificent day of the Lord is the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, then the wonders and signs are most likely the events in the life of Christ that are described by Peter in Acts 2.

**Acts 2:22-24** - Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a

man attested to you by God with mighty works and **wonders and signs** that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Can we rule out any of these three options? I don't think so. In my opinion, one of these options is more likely than the other two, but I think any of them could be correct - and each of them certainly has its defenders!

And we should note that, if we wanted to, we could create a few more options from these three options that we are considering.

For example, the first event could be the signs and wonders from the life of Christ, and the second event could be the end of Jerusalem or the end of the world - both of which occurred **after** those signs and wonders from the life of Christ. But I think the most natural way to read these two verses is with a more immediate connection between the first event and the second event, which is why are looking at only these three pairs of events.

So, in my opinion, which of these three possibilities is more likely than the other two? I prefer the **third** option - that the day of the Lord is the Day of Pentecost, and that the signs and wonders are describing the life of Christ before the establishment of his eternal kingdom.

Why do I prefer that third option? Several reasons.

First, I like the **time frame** with the third option.

When Peter quotes Joel 2 in Acts 2, Peter says "this is that." We know the word "this" in Peter's statement includes at least the outpouring of God's Spirit that we find in the first part of the quotation from Joel, but, with the third option, the word "this" also includes the great and awesome day of the Lord that we find in the second part of the quotation from Joel.

In short, the third option keeps the focus of Joel's prophecy on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The second option, by contrast, would push things ahead about 40 years, and the first option would push things ahead 2000 years and counting. So, the time frame is one reason I like the third option.

Second, I like the **context** with the third option.

Peter quotes verses from Joel 2 to explain what was happening on the very day that he quoted those verses. Only the third option maintains that same context into these two verses.

The second option shifts the context of Joel 2 to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the first option shifts the context of Joel 2 to the end of the world. But with the third option, the context of Joel 2 remains on the events in Acts 2, and (as we will see) that same context will continue into Joel 3. In short, there is much less jumping around with the third option.

Third, I also like the third option because of the evidence for that option that I can see in Peter's sermon.

Yes, we found potential scriptural support for each of the three options, but the scriptural support for the third option came from Peter *himself* in Acts 2 *itself* immediately after Peter's quotation of Joel 2 in that same chapter.

**Acts 2:19-24 - And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;** the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, **a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst**, as you yourselves know — this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed



by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

In my opinion, that is pretty strong evidence, and that evidence by itself might be reason enough for me to prefer the third option.

And, yes, I think there is some figurative, apocalyptic language being used here to describe these events as involving “blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke” and as a day when “the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood” - but such figurative language is also used in Matthew 24 for the second option.

Also, this vivid language about the darkening of the heavenly bodies fits very well with what was happening in both the **spiritual** realm and in the **physical** realm while Jesus was being crucified.

**Luke 23:44-45** - It was now about the sixth hour, and there was **darkness over the whole land** until the ninth hour, **while the sun's light failed**. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

The sixth hour and the ninth hour are noon and 3 PM, and so there was darkness over the whole land in the middle of the day.

And keep in mind that this strange event had happened just 50 **days** earlier! Many of the people listening to Peter had just experienced total darkness in the middle of the day. I suspect that most of them were still talking about and wondering about what had happened.

And now these same people were hearing Peter talk about a prophesied time when “the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood.” What do we think those people would have been thinking about when they heard that part of Joel’s prophecy?

But what about the great and magnificent day of the Lord? Can that great and magnificent day really be this day of Pentecost in Acts 2? Was that day in Acts 2 really great, magnificent, and awesome? **Absolutely it was!**

If someone favors option one or option two over option three, then, as I have said, that person may be right. I don’t think we can entirely rule those other two options out.

But, if someone rejects option three because that person doesn’t think the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 was great enough, or magnificent enough, or awesome enough - **then we have a problem!**

Why? Because the day when the eternal kingdom of Christ was established was most certainly a great and awesome day! It was most certainly a great and magnificent day!

Let’s just think for a moment about all of the great things that happened on that day in Acts 2.

I think we all know the events of Acts 2. We know what was seen and heard on that day. But what about what was not seen or heard? What was going on behind the scenes, so to speak, on that great day when the kingdom of Christ was established?

I think we can point to quite a number of things that were happening on that great day in Acts 2.

- The great promise in Joel 2, Isaiah 32, Isaiah 44, Ezekiel 39, and Zechariah 12 of the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit was fulfilled on that day.
- God’s promise in Daniel 2:44 to “set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed” was fulfilled on that day.
- God’s promise in Daniel 2:44 to “break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end” was also fulfilled on that day while the church was still in its infancy. (See also Daniel 2:35.)
- The great promise of Isaiah 2:3 that “out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” was fulfilled on that day.
- The great prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14 of “dominion and glory and a kingdom” being given by the Ancient of Days to the Son of Man was fulfilled on that day.
- Jesus’ great promise in Matthew 16:18 to build his church was fulfilled on that day.

- Jesus' great promise in Matthew 16:19 to give Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" was fulfilled on that day when Peter preached the first gospel sermon.
- The great prophecy in Zechariah 13:1 that "on that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness" was fulfilled on that day.
- The restoration of the kingdom to Israel that the apostles asked Jesus about in Acts 1:6 after being taught by Jesus about the kingdom for 40 days happened on that day when Jesus, a descendant of King David, occupied the throne of David. (See also Acts 2:30.)

What can we say about such a day? What we can say is that it was a **great** day! It was a **magnificent** day! It was an **awesome** day! It was a **day of the Lord**!

And so I prefer the third option over the other two options. I think the great and awesome day of the Lord in Joel 2 and Acts 2 was the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 rather than the last day of Jerusalem or the last day of the world.

But is there any more evidence for that view? Yes, perhaps there is.

One of our questions about Joel 2 is why Peter quoted Joel 2, or, more precisely, why Peter was inspired to quote Joel 2. With the third option, the answer to that question is pretty easy: **Joel 2 was Peter's sermon outline!** They match point by point!

- Joel 2 starts with the outpouring of God's Spirit, and Peter's sermon started with that event as well.
- Joel 2 then talks about how God's word would be conveyed to man at that time after the outpouring of God's Spirit, and Peter's sermon itself was an example of God's word being conveyed to man.
- Joel 2 then talks about the signs and the wonders that happened prior to the day of the Lord, which for Option 3 are the signs and wonders of Christ, including his death and resurrection. That is what Peter discusses next in Acts 2:22-32 - the signs

and wonders in verse 22, the crucifixion in verse 23, and the resurrection in verse 32 - all of which happened prior to the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

- The quotation from Joel 2 then ends with those who call on the name of the Lord being saved - and that is precisely where Peter ends his sermon in Acts 2:38-39 ("For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, **everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself**").

I think Joel 2 was Peter's sermon outline. And several of our questions about Joel 2 are answered when we view Joel 2:28-32 that way.

As we just saw, it explains why Peter quoted Joel in the first place, but I think it also explains why Peter ended his quote halfway through verse 32. Peter could have continued his quotation to the end of Joel 2 or even into Joel 3 without leaving the subject of Acts 2, so why did Peter stop where he did?

I think the answer is simple. Peter ended his quote of Joel 2 at the same point where Peter ended his sermon - with the gospel call!

Yes, the second half of verse 32 explains the first half, but the first half of verse 32 ends at the point of salvation, which is precisely the point where Peter's first gospel sermon ended. (And, I might add, also precisely the point where **every** gospel sermon ends! If a sermon does not end with the gospel call, then that sermon may be many things, but it is not a *gospel* sermon. One of the many patterns that we find in the book of Acts is the pattern gospel sermon in Acts 2.)

But what about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70? Could that day be this great and awesome day of the Lord?

As I have already said, it could be, but I don't think it is. And one reason I don't think it is comes from the last verse in the Old Testament - Malachi 4:6. And we will read that verse, but let's start a verse earlier in Malachi 4:5.

**Malachi 4:5** - Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Malachi 4:5 contains a prophecy that I think is parallel to the prophecy in Joel 2:30-31. They both describe something that would happen “before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” - one being the ministry of John the Baptist and the other (in my opinion) being the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. But let’s look at the next verse:

**Malachi 4:6** - And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with **a decree of utter destruction**.

What is that decree of utter destruction that would come if the people did not heed the message of John the Baptist? I think it is the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

And, if so, what does that tell us? I think it tells us that the great and awesome day of the Lord and the destruction of Jerusalem are two **separate** events.

I think Malachi 4:5 tells us that the first of those two events was going to happen **no matter what**. But Malachi 4:6 describes the fall of Jerusalem as a **conditional** event that could be averted if the people turned their hearts to God.

And so I think Malachi is describing two different events in the final two verses of the Old Testament - the **unconditional** establishment of the eternal kingdom in verse 5, and the **conditional** destruction of Jerusalem in verse 6. And that is another reason why I favor the third option over the second option.

## Acts 2:21

**Acts 2:21** - And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

When we looked at this verse from only an Old Testament perspective, we said it would very likely have been viewed at that time as a promise of **physical** salvation from the **earthly** kingdoms threatening Judah.

But, now, from a New Testament perspective, we know exactly what was being promised in Joel 2 - the salvation from sin and death made available **only** through the gospel of Christ and possible **only** because of the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

The promise here is **spiritual** salvation rather than **physical** salvation. And how do we know that for sure? We know that for sure because Peter was not the only Apostle to quote Joel 2:32 - Paul also quotes that great prophecy.

**Romans 10:12-17** - For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. **For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all **obeyed the gospel**. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” **So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**

Paul confirms what we just said. The salvation in Joel 2:32 is spiritual salvation. It is the salvation that we preach. It is the salvation that comes when people hear the gospel and obey the gospel. It is the salvation through faith that comes from hearing the word of Christ. That is what Paul tells us in Romans 10.

And what does it mean to call upon the name of the Lord? Paul also answered that question, or rather Ananias did when he spoke to Paul.

**Acts 22:16** - And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and



wash away your sins, **calling on his name**.

We call on God's name when we answer God's call - and God calls us through the gospel of Christ.

**2 Thessalonians 2:14** - To this **he called you through our gospel**, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And one more point - what we are seeing here is yet another reason why I prefer the third option for the previous verses.

With that third option, the temporal order here is **linear** - the life of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the day of Pentecost, and the gospel call. Those events are all lined up in order on the time line.

But with the other two options, we leap ahead in time to either AD 70 or the end of the world **prior** to the gospel call at the end of Peter's sermon. The events are not in temporal order with those other two options.

But what about the end of Joel 2:32 that Peter did not quote in Acts 2?

We know that the end of Joel 2:32 is connected to the beginning of Joel 2:32 because the end of the verse begins with the connecting word "for." And we know that the first half of Joel 2:32 is discussing our salvation through the gospel because Paul tells us that in Romans 10, where he quotes Joel 2:32.

And so, what I think we know is that our hypothetical Old Testament scholar was right about the **end** of verse 32 - it is discussing **the faithful remnant**. Those who escape and those who survive are those who obey the gospel of Christ. That view fits both the context and the time frame. Those who obey the gospel are those who have escaped.

**Hebrews 2:3** - How shall we **escape** if we neglect such a great salvation?

**2 Peter 1:4** - By which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through

them you may become partakers of the divine nature, **having escaped from the corruption that is in the world** because of sinful desire.

So where are we? Where we are is that we now have only one remaining question about Joel 2.

What period of time is or was "the last days"?

In Acts 2:17, Peter begins his quote of Joel by saying: "And **in the last days** it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh..." The verse Peter is quoting says: "And it shall come to pass **afterward**, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh..."

Why the difference between "last days" and "afterward," and to what do the "last days" refer?

Let's start with that second question because in answering it I think we will also answer the first question.

Here are the most likely options for the second question (which are also listed on the Handout for Lesson 30):

- **OPTION 1:** The time period of the "last days" refers to the church age starting in Acts 2 and extending until the last day.
- **OPTION 2:** The time period of the "last days" refers to the time leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.
- **OPTION 3:** The time period of the "last days" refers to the age of miracles, which ended at or around the death of the last apostle, likely John and likely around AD 80-90.
- **OPTION 4:** The time period of the "last days" refers to what is today usually called the "end times." That is, the "last days" is a time period close to and leading up to the end of the world.

Of those four options, I think we can draw a line through one of them. As to the remaining three, I think any of them could be correct, but I think one of them is more likely than the others.

Which option can we rule out?



I think we can rule out Option 4, which is the “end times” option. Whatever period of time Peter is referring to, I think we know it must include the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter says that very plainly in Acts 2:16-17. Peter says **this is that**. Option 4 says **this is not that**. And so, I think we can draw a line through Option 4.

What about Option 2 and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70?

When it comes to the fall of Jerusalem, there are two big mistakes that seem to come up a lot - some people see the fall of Jerusalem everywhere, and some people see the fall of Jerusalem nowhere.

The first mistake causes some to misinterpret what the Bible says about the end of the world (such as in the second part of Matthew 24), while the second mistake causes others to misinterpret what the Bible says about the end of Jerusalem (such as in the first part of Matthew 24).

Some may say that I am falling into that second error here, but I don't think so. In any event, **I do not think that Acts 2 is telling us anything about the fall of Jerusalem**. I think that both Joel 2 and Acts 2 are both telling us about the establishment of the kingdom of Christ and telling us about the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

What about the third option, the end of the age of miracles? If, in fact, Peter has **narrowed** what Joel proclaimed so that “afterward” has become a short period of time called the “last days,” then this option is the most likely.

And perhaps we can say that it would make sense for the duration of the “last days” to be determined by the specific activities that are said to occur: prophecy, dreams, and visions.

The third option is my second favorite option, but my favorite option is the first option - that the period of the “last days” refers to the church age.

Why do I like the first option the best?

First, it does not require us to interpret Acts 2:17 (which says “last days”) any differently than Joel 2:28 (which just says “afterward”). With the first option, they both just mean “afterward,” which means that Peter was not necessarily referring to a short period of time with his use of the word “days.”

Second, the church age fits nicely with what Peter promises in his sermon. Yes, there are some things that ended soon (such as prophecies, dreams, and vision), but not everything ended soon. The promise of salvation in verse 38, for example, is a promise for the entire church age.

But again, if you tell me that you prefer the first or second option, I will just say that you may be right. (But if you prefer the fourth option, I will say that I think you are wrong.)

We have reached the end of chapter two - **again!**

And, yes, I suspect we are not all in agreement about the details of this prophecy. And, as I said when we started, that sort of disagreement over matters of opinion is a good thing. It shows that we are studying our Bibles trying to figure these issues out, it shows that we care about these issues, and it confirms that we do not have any creed or counsel telling us what we must think about these issues.

But with such disagreements aside, I want to end Joel 2 with something about which I am certain that we all agree. I want us to end this chapter by looking at the big picture of this prophecy - and that big picture is great blessings from God.

God promises here to pour out his Spirit on all flesh! Whatever that means, we know it is a promise of great blessings! And we know that the entire world was blessed by the Messiah just as God had long before promised to Abraham, and we know that the people of God were blessed by the kingdom of Christ just as God had long before promised to Daniel, Isaiah, and the other prophets.

Most of our disagreements in the church about the Holy Spirit are really just disagreements about how God has blessed the world and blessed his people!

And we should not let any such disagreements obscure the big picture of this wonderful prophecy. **Christ brought great blessings to the entire world and even greater blessings to the faithful people of God.**

So far, Joel has moved from a locust invasion at the beginning of Joel 1 to the great blessings of Christ and the kingdom of Christ at the end of Joel 2! What's next? Joel 3 is next!

## Joel 3:1

**Joel 3:1** - “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,

What part of verse 1 is the most important clue in properly interpreting and understanding verse 1?

Is it just the part that says “when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem”? No, it is not. That phrase is certainly crucial, but if that was all we had we would have a big problem with verse 1. Why? Because there are numerous times in the Bible where we see God restoring the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem. For example, we saw such an event when we studied the book of Ezra and learned all about the return of the exiles under King Cyrus.

So how do we know which restoration is under discussion here? The answer is that we look at the time frame in first half of verse 1. That time frame is the most important clue we have in properly understanding this verse.

And, having studied both the Bible and many commentaries about the Bible, I think I can say two things about prophetic time frames in the word of God: (1) most prophecies have them, and (2) most commentaries ignore them! And that fact likely explains why so many commentaries take so many wrong turns. But rest assured that we will not ignore any time frames in our study of Joel!

So, what is the time frame of the prophecy at the beginning of Joel 3? The time frame is this: “In those days and at that time.”

**What days? What time?** The Bible answers those questions for us. Just look at the previous verse at the end of Joel 2.

**Joel 2:32** - **And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.** For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

When Joel 3:1 refers to those days and that time, it is referring to the days and the time when the previous verse occurred. I don't think there is any other way to read Joel 3:1.

And when did the previous verse occur? Again, we don't have to guess. The Bible answers that question.

Peter quoted Joel 2:32 in Acts 2:21, and, referring to the great establishment of the church in Acts 2, Peter in Acts 2:16 said **this is that**. And Paul quoted Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13, again confirming that it was fulfilled in the church and in the first century.

And so, we know with complete certainty that “those days” and “that time” refer to the time when the gospel would be proclaimed to all and when those who obeyed the gospel would be added to the Lord's church, which all started in Acts 2.

I think we know all of that from looking at Joel 3 and Acts 2, but I also think we can reach that same conclusion another way.

As math teachers like to ask, can we check our answer by working the problem another way? Yes, we can. We can get to the same result by looking, not at Joel 3 and Acts 2, but by looking at Joel 3 and Acts 1.

When Acts 1 opens, verse 3 tells us that Jesus appeared to the apostles during forty days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. We don't know for sure, but I suspect Jesus taught the apostles a great deal about these prophecies from Joel, along with many other Old Testament prophecies.

And, if so, I suspect Jesus taught them about this prophecy right here in Joel 3:1 - that God would **restore** the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem. And note the keyword in that prophecy - **restore**. Some sort of **restoration** had been promised in Joel 3:1 for the people of Israel.

Now, jump ahead a few verses in Acts 1, and what is the question that we hear from those same apostles?

**Acts 1:6** - So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time **restore** the kingdom to Israel?”

Now isn't that interesting. The prophecy in Joel 3:1 is that God would **restore** the fortunes of Judah and

Jerusalem, and the question in Acts 1:6 is when God would **restore** the kingdom to Israel.

I think that in Act 1:6 the apostles were simply asking Jesus when Joel 3:1 would be fulfilled! And how did Jesus respond?

**Acts 1:7-8** - He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

In short, Jesus told them to leave the timing to God, but they would know the timing when they received the promised Holy Spirit. They would know when Joel 3:1 was fulfilled. And they did know.

When the apostles received the promised Holy Spirit happened at the beginning of Acts 2, what did Peter then know? Peter knew the timing of Joel 3:1! And Peter knew the timing of the previous verses in Joel 2! Instead of asking "when," we suddenly hear Peter proclaiming "this is that!"

Peter now knew when! In Acts 2, Peter and the other apostles all discovered the answer to the question they asked in Acts 1!

And what can we conclude from that? What we can conclude is that Joel 3:1 was fulfilled in Acts 2.

And, given that we have now reached the same conclusion by taking two different paths, I think we should be pretty confident in our answer to the question of when Joel 3:1 was fulfilled.

And that leads us to our next question: If that is our time frame, then what is this promised restoration in Joel 3:1? How did God "restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem" in Acts 2?

I think we will find a number of ways in which God did that, but one way God did that is explained to us by Peter himself in Acts 2.

**Acts 2:29-31** - Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died

and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, **and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne**, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

One way in which God restored the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem was by restoring the throne of David - that is, by restoring the kingdom to Israel as Acts 1:6 describes it.

The throne of David had been unoccupied since the days of King Zedekiah. We should recall that he was the king whose rebellion against Babylon led to the destruction of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. And what happened to Zedekiah?

**2 Kings 25:6-7** - Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon.

Zedekiah was the final occupant of the throne of David in the Old Testament, and that throne was still unoccupied when the events of the New Testament began to occur.

But that throne would not remain unoccupied for much longer! And who was the first person in the New Testament to be told that? Mary. Mary was told that she was to be the mother of an eternal king.

**Luke 1:30-33** - And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. **And the Lord God will give to him the throne**

**of his father David, and he will  
reign over the house of Jacob  
forever, and of his kingdom  
there will be no end.”**

And what word can we use to describe that great event? I can't think of a better word than the word that is used in Joel 3:1 and that is used in Acts 1:6 - the word “**restoration**”! God restored the kingdom to Israel by setting Christ on the throne of David to reign forever over a kingdom that has no end!



## Joel Lesson 31

### Joel 3:1, Continued

**Joel 3:1** - “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,

Last week we focused first on the phrase “in those days and at that time.” That phrase links the time frame of this verse to the time frame of the previous verse, which Peter and Paul tell us was the time when the gospel was proclaimed and the church was established in Acts 2.

We then reached that same conclusion a second way by noting how the apostles’ question in Acts 1:6 about “restoring” the kingdom parallels the language of Joel 3:1, with Jesus directing them to wait for the Holy Spirit, which they received in Acts 2.

And so, so far, we have figured out the time frame of Joel 3:2 in two different ways. How about a third way? Let’s look at Daniel again.

**Daniel 7:13-14** - I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. **And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.**

In Daniel 7, we see the Son of Man ascending to God the Father and receiving a kingdom. And what do we see in Acts 1 and 2? We see the same two things - Jesus ascending to God the Father and receiving a kingdom!

Daniel 2 earlier told us when that kingdom would be established - in the days of the Romans kings. But I think Daniel 7 just told us the same thing - the

kingdom of Christ was established in Acts 2. That is what we see when we line Daniel 7 up with Acts 1 and 2.

And when we look at Acts 1 and 2 we also find a restoration of the kingdom to Israel when Jesus sat down on the throne of King David. And we see that same restoration in Joel 3:1.

So where are we? We have now shown the timing of Joel 3:1 in **three** different ways - and each way has given us the same answer. Joel 3:1 was fulfilled in Acts 2.

When we looked at Joel 2:32, we considered the question of why Peter ended his quotation halfway through that verse. Why didn’t Peter keep quoting all the way to the end of Joel 2?

I think that’s the wrong question. I think now we can ask a better question: why Peter didn’t keep quoting all the way to the end of Joel 3:1. And why is that a better question? **Because the subject has not changed.** Joel 3:1 is still telling us about the establishment of the church in Acts 2.

And, I think what we may discover is that the **entirety** of Joel 3 is still all about the establishment of the church. What we may discover is that Peter could have kept quoting Joel all the way to the end of the book! What we may discover is that the book of Joel never changes the subject after Joel 2:28. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves.

Instead, let’s ask this question: do we find this prophecy from Joel 3:1 anywhere else in the Bible? Yes, I think we do.

**Jeremiah 23:5-6** - Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. **In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.** And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

**Jeremiah 33:14-16** - Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. **In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely.** And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

**Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.** Those promises of a restoration of the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem are the same promise that we find here in Joel 3:1.

And when would that happen? Jeremiah tells us - "in his days" and "in those days." It would happen when God raised up for David a righteous Branch to reign as king. It would happen when God caused a righteous Branch to spring up for David to execute justice and righteousness in the land.

And so what would happen with the promised restoration of Joel 3:1?

Earlier we saw one answer to that question: the throne of David would once again be occupied. But Jeremiah gives us two more answers to that question: Judah would be saved, and Israel would dwell securely. And I think we will see yet another answer later in Joel 3.

And, of course, we know that all of the those promises were fulfilled by Jesus. It is through the gospel of Christ and only through the gospel of Christ that anyone is saved and is able to dwell securely. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (not because we made him so, as we are sometimes asked to sing) but because God the Father made him so.

Jesus brought these blessings to the entire world, including to the faithful remnant from *physical* Judah and *physical* Jerusalem.

**Romans 11:26-27** - And **in this way all Israel will be saved**, as

it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

And when did Jesus do that? In the first century when he established his church and became the mediator of a new covenant.

So what does that all tell us? What it tells us is that we have now established the time frame of Joel 3:1 a **fourth** way! We have checked our answer four different ways, and we have gotten the same answer each time.

On a math test that means we can move on to the next question! I think it means the same thing here.

But before we take a close look at the next verse, let's first step back and take a broader view of what we are going to see in Joel 3.

Beginning with verse 2 of Joel 3 and continuing almost through the end of the book, Joel describes a great judgment scene. We see the defendants; we see the charges; we see the decision; and we see the judgment.

And the big question for us is **when**. When is this great judgment scene? Is it the judgment that is coming at the end of the world? Many commentaries answer yes. But is that correct?

However we answer that question, let's not answer it by nose-count! The majority view about the Bible is very often the wrong view. In fact, when it comes to Bible study, I think we should always heed the advice of Mark Twain: "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect."

But what's wrong with the end of the world here? We certainly see a judgment scene, so why not just conclude it must be the final judgment?

Perhaps we should - but, as Mark Twain just advised, perhaps we should first pause and reflect. And when we do that, I think we may see some problems with that majority view.

And the first problem we see is **the time frame**.

We find an explicit time frame in verse 1 - "in those days and at that time." And, as we saw from the

prior verse, those days and that time are pointing to the days and the time in Acts 2. I think both Peter and Paul told us that.

Joel 2 is not about the end of the world, and Joel 3:1 is not about the end of the world. We know that with certainty.

So, if we conclude that Joel 3:2 is about the end of the world, then that means we are inserting 2000 years and counting between verses 1 and 2. And while that could be true, it would certainly seem odd.

But what if instead we could understand Joel 3:2 in the same time frame as Joel 3:1? If we could do that, then wouldn't that be the preferred approach? Why insert thousands of years between verses 1 and 2 if we don't have to?

And that brings us to the second problem with the end of the world viewpoint of Joel 3 - **the context**.

The context at the end of Joel 2 is all about how God was planning to bless the world through the coming Messiah and the coming kingdom of the Messiah. That is why Peter quoted Joel 2 on the very day that the kingdom of Christ was established in Acts 2 and the doors of that kingdom were opened for all who would obey the gospel of Christ.

And then, in Joel 3:1, we find yet another blessing from God that would come on that day - the kingdom would be restored to Israel. God restored the fortunes of Jerusalem and Judah by giving Jesus the throne of David. And, again, we are looking at something that happened in Acts 2.

And now we are looking at a judgment scene in Joel 3:2. Is that something that also happened in Acts 2? Or is there instead a huge change in context between verses 1 and 2?

Before we answer that question, let's look at a related question: does the Bible elsewhere describe a judgment of some sort that occurred in Acts 2? Because, if it does, then perhaps that judgment is this judgment, and then our time frame and our context would be the same for verses 1 and 2.

So can we find such a judgment that happened in Acts 2? I think we can.

And the first clue in finding such a judgment is to look very closely here in Joel 3 at **who** is being judged. When we do that what we find is that **nations** are being judged - not individuals, but nations.

- **Verse 2:** "I will gather all the **nations**."
- **Verse 4:** "What are you to me, **O Tyre and Sidon**, and all the regions of **Philistia**?"
- **Verse 9:** "Proclaim this among the **nations**."
- **Verse 11:** "Hasten and come, all you surrounding **nations**."
- **Verse 12:** "For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding **nations**."
- **Verse 19:** "**Egypt** shall become a desolation and **Edom** a desolate wilderness."

That does **not** sound to me like the final judgment. When I think about the final judgment, I think about individual people being individually judged. I do not see God grouping us together by nation and then judging us based on the nation listed on our passports.

**2 Corinthians 5:10** - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Does that sound like what we are seeing here in Joel 3? Is God addressing **individuals** here? Or is God addressing **nations**? We can all read it - God is addressing **nations** in Joel 3.

So maybe that observation will help as we look through the Bible for a judgment of some sort that occurred in Acts 2. Is there anywhere in the Bible where we find a judgment of nations that occurred when the church was established? Yes, there is. We find that precise thing in Daniel 2.

Daniel 2 is one of the great chapters of the Bible. In fact, I don't think it is possible to properly understand Acts 2 apart from Daniel 2. I think Daniel, more than any other prophet, tells us what was going on **behind the scenes** when God established the kingdom of Christ in Acts 2.



And what does Daniel tell us? What Daniel tells us is that one of the things going on behind the scenes in Acts 2 was **a judgment of the nations**.

When Daniel 2 opens, the great King Nebuchadnezzar has had a dream that has left him troubled. And only Daniel is able to tell the King both what he dreamed and the meaning of his dream.

And what was Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

**Daniel 2:31-35** - You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. **But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.**

Keep that last sentence in mind - it will be very helpful in just a moment. But first, let's listen as Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

**Daniel 2:37-45** - You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all — **you are the head of gold.**

**Another kingdom** inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a **third kingdom** of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a **fourth kingdom**, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of those kings **the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end**, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

What is the time frame of that prophecy? When would it come to pass?

Daniel tells us in Daniel 2:44 - it would come to pass "in the days of those kings," referring to the kings of the fourth kingdom.

And when was that? We answered that question in great detail when we studied the book of Daniel verse by verse, but, as a review, the first kingdom was Nebuchadnezzar's own kingdom, Babylon;



the second kingdom was Persia, which conquered Babylon; the third kingdom was Greece, which conquered Persia; and the fourth kingdom was Rome, which conquered Greece. And so the kings of the fourth kingdom were the kings of Rome.

And we know that the events in Acts 2 occurred in the days of those Roman kings. In fact, Rome ruled most of the known world at that time.

What all does Daniel tell us would happen at that time?

- Daniel tells us that God would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed.
- Daniel tells us that this new kingdom would never be left to another people - that is, it would never be conquered by another people.
- Daniel tells us that this new kingdom would break in pieces all these other kingdoms and bring them to an end.
- Daniel tells us that this new kingdom would stand forever.
- Daniel tells us that, unlike the kingdoms of this world, this new kingdom would **not** be made with human hands.

We could listen to an entire sermon about each of those points, but for our purposes here, let's focus on the relation between the kingdom made by God and the earthly kingdoms made by men. And what is that relation? Simple - **this new kingdom would break in pieces all those other kingdoms and bring them to an end.**

And, yes, the immediate focus in Daniel is on four specific kingdoms - but I think Daniel's prophecy applies with equal strength to every kingdom of this world.

I think that is why Daniel 2:44 tells us that God's kingdom would not be "left to another people." The kingdom of Christ would destroy Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and every other nation of this world. No earthly nation could ever stand against the kingdom of Christ. There is only one eternal kingdom.

Is that a judgment of the nations? Absolutely it is. As with Babylon in Daniel 5, they have all been weighed in the balances and found wanting! In Daniel 2, God judges every nation of this world and sentences them all to death! There is only one kingdom that "shall never be destroyed," which tells us that all of the other kingdoms will be destroyed.

Yes, the kingdoms of this world like to think of themselves as eternal kingdoms that will see no end - but we know that is false. They will all end, and many of them much more quickly than they expected. Hitler's Thousand-Year Reich turned out to be a 12 year Reich, and none of the kingdoms of this world will ultimately fare any better than it did. All of the nations of this world are destined for the dust bin.

And now comes the million dollar question - **when?** When would the nations in Daniel 2 be judged? When would they be destroyed?

Daniel answers that question for Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome - and in answering the question for those four kingdoms, I think Daniel simultaneously answers the same question for every kingdom of man. I think all of the kingdoms of men rise or fall together when it comes to the kingdom of God. And in Daniel 2, we see them all fall together.

When that great statue crumbled to dust in his dream, I think Nebuchadnezzar was witnessing the fate of not only his own kingdom, and not only the three kingdoms that would follow his own kingdom, but the fate of every earthly kingdom of man. They would all crumble to dust. None would ever be able to stand against the eternal kingdom of Christ.

But is that crumbling a first century crumbling or a final century crumbling? Is that crumbling something that happened when the church was established, or is that crumbling something that will not happen until the end of the world when the kingdom is delivered to God the father?

Daniel answers that question. We read the answer just a moment ago.

**Daniel 2:35** - But the stone **that struck** the image **became** a great

mountain and filled the whole earth.

Yes, the kingdom of Christ established in Acts 2 would later become a great mountain that fills the whole earth - but that is not what it was when it struck those kingdoms. That is not what it was when those kingdoms crumbled into dust. Daniel tells us that the stone that struck that giant statue was still just a stone when that happened. It had not yet become a great mountain filling the whole earth.

I don't think there is any other way to understand Daniel 2:35 than that. The church destroyed the nations of this world while the church was still in its infancy! And I think the church did that on the day of its birth in Acts 2. I think that statue crumbled to dust in Acts 2.

But how? Of those four kingdoms, three were already history by the time of Acts 2, and the fourth, Rome, was as the height of its power in Acts 2. How can those kingdoms be said to have crumbled to dust in Acts 2?

And what about all of the other kingdoms that have come along since then? What about the earthly kingdoms of today? How could they have crumbled to dust before they even existed?

Simple - they were all given to another people on that day.

Remember what Daniel said in Daniel 2:44 about the kingdom of Christ? **"Nor shall the kingdom be left to another people."** Is that true of any earthly kingdom? No, it is not. In fact, the opposite is true of every earthly kingdom. That is what Daniel tells us later in Daniel 7.

**Daniel 7:27 - And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;** his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

To which earthly kingdoms does that prophecy in Daniel 7 apply? It applies to all earthly kingdoms - "the kingdoms under the whole heaven."

And what will happen to every kingdom under the whole heaven? Their kingdom, their dominion, and their greatness "shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High."

And that's us! The kingdom of Christ will never be left to another people - but not so with the kingdoms of this world! Not only will they all be left to another people - they will all be left to us! To the saints of the Most High!

And what happens to an earthly kingdom when it loses its kingdom, when it loses its dominion, and when it loses its greatness? What happens is that it crumbles to dust.

And, yes, to us that earthly kingdom may look very much alive, or it may look as if it has already been long dead, or it may look like it hasn't even risen yet to become a kingdom - but that is not how it looks to God.

If we want to know how God views the earthly kingdoms of this world, we need to look at Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. And when we do that, I think what we will find is that kingdom of Christ shattered them to all to dust in Acts 2.

And I think we see that same shattering in yet another great "Church Chapter Two" - Psalm 2.

**Psalm 2:6-9** - As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. **Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.**"

And we also see that same judgment of the nations in Zechariah, which (like Joel) provides us with a time frame for its fulfillment.

**Zechariah 12:9-10 - And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace** and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

And on what day would that happen? On what day would God destroy all the nations? Didn't Zechariah just tell us? **It would happen on the day when God poured out his Spirit.** It happened in Acts 2.

So where are we? I think where we are is that it now makes perfect sense for the time frame and the context of Joel 3:2 to be the same time frame and the same context of the preceding verses - the time frame and the context of Acts 2.

Let's now take a closer look at these verses.

## Joel 3:2-3

**Joel 3:2-3** - I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.

Based on all that we just looked at, I think the simplest interpretation of Joel 3:2 is the best interpretation: Joel 3:2 is just an explanation for Joel 3:1.

What did God mean when he promised to restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem? I think God begins answering that question in verse 2. And I think we will see that God's answer continues all the way to the end of the book. And if that is correct,

then the time frame of Joel 3:1 is the time frame for the remainder of the book of Joel.

Now, we looked earlier at the question of what God meant in verse 1 when he promised to restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem. And we came up with several answers.

- The throne of David would once again be occupied by a son of David.
- Judah would be saved.
- Israel would dwell securely.

And, as we saw earlier, those promises were all fulfilled by Christ and in the kingdom of Christ. Christ rules the universe from the throne of David, Judah is saved through the gospel of Christ, and Israel dwells securely in the church. And, of course, those blessings of salvation and security are enjoyed by the faithful remnant

And I think all of those answers are correct. We find them in other prophecies as well as in Acts 1-2. But I think we need to add another blessing to that list. I think in Joel 3 we find yet another way that God would restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, and it is this: God would give them the kingdoms of this world! That is the same promise that we read earlier from Daniel 7.

**Daniel 7:27** - And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven **shall be given** to the people of the saints of the Most High...

I think Joel 3 is showing us Daniel 7:27. I think Joel 3 is showing the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness being taken from the kingdoms of this world and given to the people of God.

What Judah and Jerusalem were never able to accomplish on their own, God is doing for them here in Joel 3. And if the timeline of Joel 3:1 is the timeline for all of Joel 3, as I think it is, then God did this in Acts 2.

Let's look now at what God said he would do.

**"I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat."**



Before we look at the difficult question of what and where is the Valley of Jehoshaphat, let's start with an easy question: what is this statement really saying?

When we look at the opening statement of verse 2 in the context of what follows, its meaning is immediately clear even if we may have some trouble locating this particular valley.

And what is that meaning? I think it is captured by this paraphrase: "I will gather all the nations and bring them to the **woodshed!**"

This gathering of the nations of the world is not going to be a happy occasion for those nations. Instead, they are being gathered together for punishment. They are about to be tried, judged, and sentenced because of what they have done to God's people.

And so, with that clear meaning, why does God gather them in the Valley of Jehoshaphat? Where and what is that valley?

Despite showing up on some maps as we see on the Handout for Lesson 31, no one is really sure about the location of this valley. Some view the valley as purely figurative and not an actual place, while others believe it is an actual place, perhaps with a figurative meaning.

Later in verse 14 we will find the famous "valley of decision," which seems to be more easily viewed as a figurative valley. Perhaps it is (we will see later), and perhaps the same is true of this valley in verse 2. We will also find the "Valley of Shittim" in verse 18, where we will again have the same question.

But back now to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. What are our options for identifying this valley? If the Valley of Jehoshaphat is an actual place, then there are three most likely options.

### **Option 1: The Valley of Jehoshaphat is the Valley of Beracah**

This first valley is the only one of the three that is actually associated with King Jehoshaphat. You can see the location of the Valley of Beracah in the upper left map shown on the Handout for Lesson 31.

As we recall, King Jehoshaphat was the fourth king of the divided southern kingdom of Judah. He reigned from 873 to 848 BC, and we can read about him in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 17-21.

And we might think that finding the name of a king in Joel might help us date the book of Joel, but not really. Jehoshaphat's reign occurred just prior to our earliest option for the date of the book, and so he is too early in history to be of much help in dating the book.

And how is the Valley of Beracah associated with Jehoshaphat? We can read about it in 2 Chronicles 20. That chapter describes a great victory by Judah over Ammon and Moab in which Judah didn't even have to lift a finger.

In verse 15, God told them: "Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's." And God then turned the Ammonites and Moabites against each other, so that they were all already dead by the time when Judah arrived.

**2 Chronicles 20:26-27** - On the fourth day they assembled in the **Valley of Beracah**, for there they blessed the LORD. Therefore the name of that place has been called the **Valley of Beracah** to this day. Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies.

This option has at least two things going for it. First, as we said, this valley is actually associated with King Jehoshaphat. But second, it is a valley where God won a great victory for his people without his people having to even draw their swords. That is precisely the same sort of victory over the nations that we find in Daniel 2, in Joel 3, and, we could also add, in Revelation 19.

### **Option 2: The Valley of Jehoshaphat is the Valley of Jezreel**

This option is the favorite of those who think Joel 3 is all about some great cataclysmic battle that



will supposedly occur at the end of the world. And that observation might cause us to just skip to the next option, but let's not be too hasty. Just because they got one thing wrong does not mean they got everything wrong!

Next week we will look at **Option 3** - the Kidron Valley.

The Valley of Jezreel is shown in the upper right map on the Handout for Lesson 31. And you might also notice the name of the little town on the lower side of that valley - Megiddo. The Valley of Jezreel is the site of the most famous battlefield in the world, which is also the location where many teach that the so-called Battle of Armageddon will be fought.

The Valley of Jezreel has seen constant warfare throughout history. Napoleon reportedly remarked that all the armies of the world could make battle at Megiddo. The area has been fought over by numerous peoples including Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, Romans, Crusaders, Muslims, British, and many others.

But why do some link the Valley of Jehoshaphat with the Valley of Jezreel? Because of how this particular valley is associated with God's judgment of the nations.

**Revelation 16:14-16** - For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to **the kings of the whole world**, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ... And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called **Armageddon**.

But why then would it be called the Valley of *Jehoshaphat*? Not because of something that king did, but rather because of the meaning of that king's name. The name "Jehoshaphat" means "God has judged!" And, of course, that name fits perfectly with what we find in these verses: God's judgment of the nations.

So, even though we are most certainly **not** looking for some great earthly battle at Megiddo at the end of the world, I don't think we can rule this option out entirely. God may have used this valley in Joel 3 just as God later used the same location in Revelation 16 to describe the great victory of God's people over the nations of this world.

## Joel Lesson 32

### Joel 3:2-3, Continued

**Joel 3:2-3** - I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.

When we ended last week we were looking at the question of what and where is the Valley of Jehoshaphat mentioned in verse 2, and we had looked at two of three options for the location of that valley. (Those three options were shown on the Handout for last week's lesson.)

The first option was the **Valley of Beracah** where God had given King Jehoshaphat a great victory over his enemies without the King or his people having to lift even a finger.

The second option was the **Valley of Jezreel**, which is the most famous battlefield on earth and which we saw is associated with a judgment of the nations in Revelation 16.

#### **Option 3: The Valley of Jehoshaphat is the Kidron Valley**

The Kidron Valley is located east of Jerusalem, in between the city and the Mount of Olives.

Throughout history, this third option has been the most popular option of these three. It is so popular, in fact, that many older maps label the Kidron Valley as the Valley of Jehoshaphat. You can see three examples of that at the bottom of the Handout for Lesson 31 from last week.

And why has this option always been so popular? Again, it is not because of King Jehoshaphat, but rather because of the meaning of his name ("God has judged") and the association of the Kidron Valley with the judgment of God.

How was Kidron associated with judgment? When we look at the Kidron Valley in the Old Testament what we often find is that it was the location where the people disposed of their idols.

**1 Kings 15:13** - He also removed Maacah his mother from being queen mother because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. And Asa cut down her image and burned it **at the brook Kidron**.

**2 Kings 23:6** - And he [King Josiah] brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to **the brook Kidron**, and burned it at **the brook Kidron** and beat it to dust and cast the dust of it upon the graves of the common people.

**2 Chronicles 29:16** - The priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse it, and they brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it and carried it out **to the brook Kidron**.

**2 Chronicles 30:14** - They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw into **the brook Kidron**.

So what then can we say? I think what we can say is that Kidron was a dumping ground for anything that was opposed to God!

But I think we can say much more than that. I think we can say that the Kidron Valley is not just associated with judgment - it is also associated with the Judge!

When Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem in Matthew 21, he came from the Mount

of Olives, which means that he crossed the Kidron Valley and entered the eastern side of the city. Later, after the Last Supper, Jesus again crossed the Kidron Valley to reach the Garden of Gethsemane in John 18.

And from what direction did the glory of God return to the temple in Ezekiel 43? From the east, meaning that God's glory passed over the Kidron Valley before entering through the eastern gate.

**Ezekiel 43:2** - And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming **from the east**. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory.

This possible link between Ezekiel and Joel is interesting. Why? Because it is not the only possible link between those two prophets that we will see. In fact, we saw an earlier link when we looked at the promise of God pouring out his Spirit in Joel 2. We find that same promise in Ezekiel 39 (as shown on the *right* side of the Handout for Lesson 32).

And I think we will see other links when we look at the specific judgments in Joel 3 (as shown on the *left* side of the Handout for Lesson 32). In fact, the more I study these connections, the more I am inclined to think that the book of Joel may have been given by God as a preview of the book of Ezekiel. And, if so, that would go very far toward settling the question of when Joel was written. But let's leave that discussion for later.

**Our question now is which is it? Which option for the Valley of Jehoshaphat is the correct option?**

As before, I don't think we can rule any of them out entirely. In fact, it may be that none of them is correct, either because another valley was meant or, more likely, because no literal valley was meant. It is possible that this Valley of Jehoshaphat just means a Valley of Judgment, just as later in this same chapter we will see a Valley of Decision.

But, if I had to choose, I would go with Option 1, which is the least popular of those three options. (Option 3 is a close second due to its possible link

with Ezekiel, but, at least for now, I still favor the first option.)

And why do I favor the least popular option? Because the Valley of Beracah is the only valley that is actually associated with King Jehoshaphat, and because it is a valley where God defeated the great enemies of his people. And remember how God described it.

**2 Chronicles 20:15** - And he said, "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, **for the battle is not yours but God's.**'"

I love that! **"The battle is not yours but God's!"** When I see that verse and when I read Joel 3, I have a hard time picking any valley other than the Valley of Beracah!

And even more so when we look at the beautiful prayer of King Jehoshaphat that preceded the great victory given to him by God.

**2 Chronicles 20:12** - O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

But, whichever valley we choose, and whether we choose a literal valley or a figurative valley, the first thing that happens in verse 2 is that God gathers all the nations and brings them down to this valley.

What happens next?

**"And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel."**

What happens next is **judgment**. And why is God gathering and judging the nations? Verse 2 tells us. God says that he is doing that "on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel." God is judging these nations because of what they had done to God's people and God's heritage.

And **when** does God do this? When does God gather these nations for judgment?

I think we have already answered that question. I think the time frame of Joel 3:1 is also the time frame of Joel 3:2. And, if so, then God gathered these earthly kingdoms for judgment on the day that he established his eternal kingdom in Acts 2. We earlier looked at a lot of evidence for that view.

Do we have any more evidence for that view now that we have read verse 2? I think we do. Compare Joel 3:2 with this verse from Zephaniah 3.

**Zephaniah 3:8** - "Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. **For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger;** for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.

Doesn't that sound familiar? And when did that happen? Keep reading in Zephaniah 3.

**Zephaniah 3:9** - **For at that time** I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, **that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord.**

Doesn't that sound like the church? Doesn't that sound like Joel 2:32? "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

I think Daniel 2, Joel 3, and Zephaniah 3 are all describing the same thing - God's judgment of the kingdoms of this world on the day that he established the eternal kingdom of Christ. On that day, all of the nations of this world were weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Now, this part of verse 2 creates a bit of a problem for those commentaries that have seen nothing but locusts so far in the book of Joel.

Are we still looking at locusts? Is God gathering insects here so that he can judge them? I am not aware of any commentary willing to go quite that far.

But, if not, then how do they explain this sudden jump from locusts in Joel 1 and Joel 2 (as they view Joel 2) to nations in Joel 3? Are these **nations** really being judged because of what the **locusts** did to Judah? Were these nations responsible for the locusts?

The answer, and I might suggest the *only* answer that makes any sense, is that Joel 2 is *not* just about an army of locusts. Instead, Joel 2 is about what Joel 2:2 said it was about - an army of **people**.

Joel 1 tells us about an army of locusts that had already come, and then Joel 2 tells us about an army of people that was coming and that was near. And, yes, in some ways that army of people was a bit like that earlier army of locusts - but there were also some important differences between the two. And now, in Joel 3, God judges that nation from Joel 2 along with all the other nations of this world that set themselves against God and against the people of God.

In short, Joel makes perfect sense when we recognize that Joel 2 is **not** about locusts, but Joel makes little sense when locusts are all we can see in this wonderful book.

But what specifically had these nations done? Verses 2 and 3 tell us.

**"Because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it."**

We still have not yet decided on the date of this book. When was Joel written? We have been considering three options: the early view, the pre-exile view, and the post-exile view. And, although we haven't picked a winner yet, the pre-exile view is pretty far ahead based on the evidence we have seen so far.

This evidence in Joel 3:2 is one reason we haven't reached a decision yet. This verse is important evidence for us to consider. In fact, some



commentaries tell us that this verse is the most important evidence when it comes to dating Joel.

Is it? I'm not so sure. Why not? Because this description is not about a single nation. Verse 2 is about "nations" (plural) and about what "they" (plural) have done. So it does not make sense to me to read these descriptions and ask whether they are describing Assyria or Babylon or some other nation. They are not describing any single nations, but instead they are describing multiple nations.

But we can certainly ask whether any specific nations are included in this description. For example, is Assyria included? The first thing mentioned here is scattering, and Assyria was the great scatterer of Israel.

**2 Kings 17:6** - In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

But Assyria was not the only scatterer. In fact, Assyria was itself later scattered by another nation, Babylon.

**Nahum 2:1** - The **scatterer** has come up against you. Man the ramparts; watch the road; dress for battle; collect all your strength.

What about dividing up the land? The picture here is of some group of people taking the land and then dividing it up among themselves as spoils of war. And, of course, that happened very often in the history of Israel. In fact, all we need to do is look at the shrinking map of the twelve tribes to see how their land was taken and divided up throughout their history.

And not only did these nations divide up the **land**, but they also divided up the **people** among themselves. They cast lots for God's people, they traded a boy for a prostitute, and they sold a girl for wine, which they then drank.

The picture here is one of nations who care nothing for the people of God beyond what they can get when

they conquer them or sell them. They scatter them, they take their land, and they sell their children.

And did those nations value those children? They did not. They sold them for just enough money to spend on a night with a prostitute or on a little wine to drink.

**"They cast lots for God's people."** That sentence really speaks volumes, and especially to those of us today who have the New Testament.

**John 19:23-24** - When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, **but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.**" This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They **divided** my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things.

Casting lots and dividing up - we see both of those things here in Joel 3:2-3. It is certainly not explicit, but there may be an implied prophecy here about Jesus.

As the world here placed no value of the children of God's people, this evil world would later likewise place no value on God's only begotten Son, but would instead crucify him and cast lots for his clothing.

**1 Corinthians 2:8** - None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The sad truth is that this world has never placed any value on the people of God or on the things of God. We see that here, and we see that later when the world rejected, refused, and crucified God's greatest gift of all - his only Son.

## Joel 3:4

**Joel 3:4** - “What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily.

Some commentaries tell us that this verse must be something that someone other than Joel added later to this book.

And why do they say that? They say that because they think it would have been odd for Joel to move from a discussion of the judgment of the nations at the end of the world to a discussion of what they call “some relatively minor incidents of ethnic crimes against Israel.” And so they conclude that verse 4 could not have been in the original version of Joel.

Well, that’s one way of proceeding. But what about this way instead? What if, when the Bible doesn’t agree with some theory we have about it, we change our theory instead of changing the Bible? Doesn’t that sound like a better approach than crossing through verse 4 because it doesn’t fit with our pet theory about verses 2-3?

Liberal scholars are lacking in many areas, but one area in which they have no lack at all is the exalted view that they have of their own opinions about the Bible! They place their theories about the text above the text itself, as evidenced by their willingness to quickly discard any text that disagrees with their theories.

So, rather than toss verse 4 because it doesn’t look like the end of the world, I propose that we instead decide (or rather, continue in our decision) that verses 2-3 are not talking about the end of the world at all. Verses 2-3 are instead, I think, talking about the judgment of the nations that occurred in Acts 2 and that was also prophesied in Daniel 2, in Daniel 7, in Psalm 2, in Zephaniah 3, and in Zechariah 12.

And, if that is correct, then verse 4 is just doing what we also saw in verses 2 and 3 - verse 4 is giving us more reasons why those nations are being judged. The only difference is that verse 4 names names!

“What are you to me, O **Tyre** and **Sidon**, and all the regions of **Philistia**?”

Tyre and Sidon were **Phoenician** cities, and so in verse 4 we see two ancient kingdoms - the Philistines and the Phoenicians.

And perhaps the first thing we should notice here is that Joel is being unusually specific.

There are 16 proper names in the book of Joel. If we exclude Joel, his father, Judah, Jerusalem, Israel, Eden, two valleys, and Zion, that leaves seven proper names: Edom, Egypt, Greeks, Philistia, Sabeans, Sidon, and Tyre.

And what can we say about those seven proper names? They are all in chapter three. Chapter two by contrast described a human army without ever naming it, but now in Chapter three we see all sorts of names. Why?

We looked earlier at why the book of Joel might have been intentionally vague when it came to the identification of the army in Joel 2, but why don’t we see that same vagueness here?

I think the most likely answer is something else that we talked about earlier - **poetry**. A common feature of Hebrew poetry is a movement from general to specific. Here the text moves from “all nations” in verse 2 to Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia in verse 4. It is a literary technique that makes the broader message more concrete through specific examples.

And I think we see even more poetry in verses 2 and 3 with its repetitive and parallel structure: they have **scattered**, they have **divided**, they have **cast**, they have **traded**, they have **sold**, and they have **drunk**.

We looked at the poetry in Joel earlier. Why do I mention it again now? Well, look at your Bibles. If you are using the ESV, for example, you will notice that these verses are not typeset the same way as most of the other verses in Joel. These verses are typeset as prose rather than poetry. Why? Good question! I think we are clearly still seeing Hebrew poetry here.

But let’s get back to the Phoenicians and the Philistines, which were both coastal neighbors of Israel.

The Philistines, of course, were Israel's longstanding enemies. Just how longstanding you ask? Well, there is a word that we hear a lot today in the news that came from the word *Philistia*. And what is that word? **Palestine**. So, yes, this conflict is most certainly longstanding! In fact, Ezekiel 25:15 describes it as a "never-ending enmity."

The Philistines' proximity to Israel made them especially dangerous. The Philistine city of Ekron was only 22 miles west of Jerusalem with no natural boundaries between them. From the period of the judges until the rise of Assyria, the land between Philistia and Jerusalem experienced regular warfare, but the Philistines were defeated by the Assyrians around 712 BC.

The Phoenicians were similar to the Philistines in one way - they were both coastal neighbors of Israel. But they were different in another way - the Phoenicians, unlike the Philistines, sometimes enjoyed friendly relations with Israel. David and Solomon were trading partners with Hiram, the king of Tyre. And King Ahab of Israel married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon.

The Phoenicians cities of Tyre and Sidon were located about 35 and 60 miles north of Mount Carmel as shown on the Handout for Lesson 32. They had accumulated great wealth through trade and commerce.

**Zechariah 9:3** - Tyre has built herself a rampart and heaped up silver like dust, and fine gold like the mud of the streets.

But, past friendly relations or not, Tyre and Sidon are both listed among the great enemies of God's people. Judges 3:1-3 tells us that the Sidonians were among those nations that God left in the land to test Israel. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel devote entire chapters to condemning Tyre (Isaiah 23 and Ezekiel 26-27).

And who was behind Tyre? Who occasionally used Tyre with temptations of friendship and great riches but at other times used Tyre as an openly hostile enemy or as a source of false gods and false worship? Who was pulling Tyre's strings? I think the Bible answers that question indirectly.

Let me describe someone, and you tell me who I am describing:

- He was full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
- He was in Eden, the garden of God.
- He was an anointed guardian cherub.
- He was on the holy mountain of God.
- He was blameless until unrighteousness was found in him.
- God cast him as a profane thing from the mountain of God.
- His heart was proud because of his beauty.
- God cast him to the ground.

Who does that sound like? To me, it sounds like Satan. He was in the garden; he was filled with pride; unrighteousness was found in him; and God cast him down.

But each of those descriptions comes from the same chapter, and each of those descriptions is about someone other than Satan - that chapter is Ezekiel 28, and that person other than Satan is the king of Tyre.

Why is such language used to describe the king of a city? I think, and this just my opinion, much of the language in Ezekiel 28 about the king of Tyre is describing the one who was pulling that king's strings from behind the scenes - Satan. I think Ezekiel sometimes looks past the king of Tyre to describe the real source of the trouble.

And, if that is correct, then I think it really drives home just how terrible Tyre was as an enemy of God's people. Yes, the Philistines were bad - but they were easy to figure out. There was nothing subtle about a Philistine, either then or now.

But not so with Tyre and Sidon. They were sometimes openly hostile, but sometimes not. Instead, what they did was dangle great riches and false gods in front of God's people. And, yes, we sometimes hear people called Philistines today - but I think the people today that we really need to guard against are those who could be called people of Tyre and people of Sidon. Their enmity against God's people was most often subtle, and I think Satan is also very subtle. I think Satan also prefers



to attack us from the side rather than with a frontal assault.

Now, with that background, let's look at what God says to them:

What are you to me...? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily.

"What are you to me?" That is not something we ever want to hear from God! It would be like hearing Jesus say, "I never knew you!," as he says in Matthew 7:23. I think both statements are describing the same sad situation: these people are not God's people.

And, as evidence of that, we are told that these people are trying to pay God back for something. They are seeking vengeance against God! They are trying to get even with God!

And how is that working out? Not well. God says that he is going to return their payment back on their own head swiftly and speedily! And that, I think we will all agree, is yet another example of something we never want to hear from God!

What had these nations done to God's people? And what had God done to these nations that caused them to seek revenge? And how did God pay them back swiftly and speedily?

I think these questions are answered in part by something that Philistia, Tyre, and Sidon all had in common - they were not good neighbors! Instead, I think they all liked to gloat and rejoice anytime something bad happened to Israel. We know that was true of Tyre and Sidon after Jerusalem was attacked by the Babylonians.

**Ezekiel 26:2-3** - Son of man, because Tyre said concerning Jerusalem, '**Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken; it has swung open to me. I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste,**' therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will bring up

many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves.

And, of course, when Tyre and Sidon gloated over Israel's misfortunes, they were also gloating over what they thought was a failure by God to protect his people. I think that is why God characterizes their taunts as he does here - "What are you to me? Are you paying me back for something?" In short, why are you bringing me into this - and are you really sure that you want to bring me into this? Be careful what you ask for!

And perhaps we should add here that this attitude of Tyre and Sidon hasn't gone anywhere! We hear it all the time even today.

"Did you see all of those people praying to God before the storm hit? They lost their houses just like those who didn't pray. Doesn't that prove that God doesn't care about them? And what about those people praying for their sick relative to recover and then watching as that person dies? Doesn't that prove that God doesn't care about them? Doesn't that prove that God does not hear them?"

That is nothing more and nothing less than what Tyre and Sidon said to the Jews when they suffered misfortune. That is what Satan said to Eve in the Garden. And I suspect that is what Tyre and Sidon said when the locusts of Joel 1 showed up and what they said when the great army of Joel 2 showed up.

And God's response - both then and now? "What are you to me? Are you paying me back for something?" Are you really sure you want to know the difference between being a child of mine versus being a child of Satan? Because you will find that out one of these days, and you won't like the answer!

I think that attitude is one reason why we are seeing Israel's neighbors in this verse. I think that attitude is one reason why God tells them what he does in this verse. But that is not the only reason. We will find some other reasons in verses 5 and 6.

I think another thing we can say about verse 4 is that an attack against God's people is an attack against



God. That was certainly true about Saul's attacks against the church as shown by Jesus's question in Acts 9:4 - "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

So that is why we see Philistia, Tyre, and Sidon - but what about who we don't see? Where is Assyria on this list? Where is Babylon? Why start off with Tyre and Sidon when we have Assyria and Babylon? After all, as Jeremiah 50:17 tells us, Assyria had devoured God's people, and Babylon had gnawed their bones.

Some see this failure to mention Assyria or Babylon as evidence of either a very early or a very late date for the book of Joel. Either Joel was written before Assyria and Babylon were world powers or after Assyria and Babylon were no longer world powers.

But I think that view is wrong. Why? Because of what we find when we look at another Old Testament book - the book of Ezekiel.

We know that Ezekiel was written after the Babylonian exile. In fact, Ezekiel received his vision and wrote his book while the prophet was in Babylon.

Joel has three chapters, but Ezekiel has 48 chapters. And in how many verses does Ezekiel mention Assyria? In only 8 verses. So the fact that Joel does not mention Assyria does not mean that Joel was written very early or very late. Ezekiel likewise had very little to say about Assyria.

And, as for Babylon, Ezekiel does mentions it quite a bit more than Assyria - but not always in condemnation of Babylon.

**Ezekiel 29:19** - Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: **Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon;** and he shall carry off its wealth and despoil it and plunder it; and it shall be the wages for his army.

**Ezekiel 30:24** - **And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put my sword in his hand,** but I will break the

arms of Pharaoh, and he will groan before him like a man mortally wounded.

If we are looking for the nations condemned by Ezekiel, then here is what we will find:

- **Tyre** is condemned in Ezekiel 26:1 through Ezekiel 28:19, which is almost three chapters of Ezekiel.
- **Sidon** is condemned in Ezekiel 28:20-24.
- **Philistia** is condemned in Ezekiel 25:15-17.
- **Egypt** is condemned in Ezekiel 29-32, which is four chapters.
- **Edom** is condemned in Ezekiel 25:12-14.

And what can we say about those five nations and cities? We find those same five nations and cities right here in Joel 3.

And, again, we know when Ezekiel was written. Ezekiel was written just after the Babylonian exile. And what that means is that, far from providing evidence of the early view or the late post-exile view, I think Joel 3 (when viewed in light of Ezekiel) may provide the best evidence we have for the pre-exile view.

And perhaps the time has finally arrived for us to make a decision on that issue. And here is my decision - I think Joel was written just before the Babylonian exile. I favor the pre-exile view.

That horse has been leading the race for quite a while, but now I am ready to declare a winner! And yes, that is just my opinion, of course, but I have also given you the evidence for my opinion.

I think Joel was written not long **before** the exile, and I think Joel provides a preview of what Ezekiel would later write not long **after** the exile.

Both Joel and Ezekiel have a great deal to say about Christ and about the kingdom of Christ. Ezekiel 40-43, for example, contains a detailed architectural blueprint describing a huge temple where God would abide forever. And when we study those chapters, we quickly see that Ezekiel is describing the church - the same church that was established in Acts 2 when Peter quoted Joel 2.

And so why don't we see Assyria mentioned in Joel? Likely because Assyria was past history and because Assyria had been much more of a problem for Israel in the north than for Judah in the south.

And why don't we see Babylon mentioned by name in Joel? Likely because Babylon was still in their future and could have been averted entirely if the people had repented, and also because (as Ezekiel 30:25 tells us) God was using Babylon as his tool and for his purposes at this time.

And perhaps we can also say that the Philistines and the Phoenicians were mentioned, not because they were great powers, but because they were **not** great powers. Perhaps the message here is that no nation would escape this judgment. God would not just gather and judge Assyria and Babylon, but God would gather and judge **all** nations (which, in fact, is precisely what Joel 3:2 says: "I will gather **all** the nations").

If the Philistines or the Phoenicians thought they could hide in a corner while God punished Assyria and Babylon, they were badly mistaken. Not only could they not hide - but God was planning to start the judgment with them!

## Joel Lesson 33

### Joel 3:4, Continued

**Joel 3:4** - “What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily.

Last week we almost finished looking at verse 4, but when we ended we were about to look at the final words in the phrase: “I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily.”

What does it mean that the judgment would come **swiftly** and **speedily**?

Again, I think we are seeing a reference to Babylon here. Babylon famously besieged the city of Tyre for 13 years, and dominated all of Phoenicia. Edom started off as an ally, but Babylon later subjugated it. And as for Egypt, Babylon defeated them at the Battle of Carchemish and tossed them out of Palestine. And Babylon also conquered the cities of Philistia, destroying some of them.

And so, once again, I think we are seeing evidence of Babylon here with the word “speedily” and “swiftly” because that is just how it happened.

But let’s stop and notice something important about these specific prophecies against these specific nations. I think they have dual fulfillments.

They have an immediate fulfillment in the near term when we look at what happened to these nations when Babylon showed up in the 6th century BC. But they also have a longer term fulfillment when we look at what the stone of Daniel 2 did to them in Acts 2 in the first century AD.

I think that judgment in Acts 2 looks backward in history and looks forward in history at what has happened or what will happen to any kingdom that is not the one eternal kingdom of Christ. No earthly kingdom is eternal. They will all fall. They will all crumble to dust before the eternal unshakable kingdom of Christ.

And, yes, we see that throughout history, and we will continue to see that, but I think it is the great judgment of Daniel 2 and Acts 2 that gives all of those past and future judgments their permanence and their finality. It was in Acts 2 with the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ that all of the promises to Israel and Judah were fulfilled.

**2 Corinthians 1:20** - **For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.** That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

Acts 2 has rightly been called the hub of the Bible. We are sometimes accused of overstating the importance of Acts 2, but I don’t think it is possible to do that! It was in that great chapter that the kingdom of Christ was established and the gospel of Christ was proclaimed beginning in Jerusalem. Absent Acts 2, there would be no church, no body of the saved, and absent Acts 2, Satan and the kingdoms of this world would be triumphant with no kingdom to challenge them and defeat them.

### Joel 3:5-6

**Joel 3:5-6** - For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border.

Yes, Philistia and Phoenicia had **said** things against Judah, but they had also **done** things against Judah - and we see two examples here. They had stolen silver and gold, and they had stolen people. The silver and gold had ended up in their own temples, and the people had ended up in Greece.

“Greeks! Greeks! We have Greeks! And therefore Joel must have been written in 300 BC!” It is truly amazing how often we see that ridiculous argument. We saw it when we studied Daniel, and we often see it about the book of Joel as well.

And why is it ridiculous? Because by the time Alexander came along in 336 BC, Greece had

already been a player on the world stage for over 400 years. The first Olympic Games were played in 776 BC, and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written by Homer in the late 8th or early 7th century BC.

In short, Greek culture had penetrated the Near East long before the Babylonian period, and so seeing a reference to the Greeks in Joel does not tell us much about when the book was written and most certainly does not rule out a date in the 6th century BC.

In fact, when we look at what is said about the Greeks here, we find evidence for an early date rather than a late date.

Joel writes: "You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them **far from their own border**." If this had been written in the 4th century BC, then it could hardly be said that the Greeks were located **far** away! Joel's statement makes sense only if the Greeks were located at the end of the world, just like they were in the 6th century (as we can see on the Handout for Lesson 32). Later in verse 8, God will threaten to sell the Philistines and Phoenicians to the Sabeans, a people that is far away in the opposite direction (again as shown on the Handout for Lesson 32).

As for the specific charges in verses 5-6, we don't know of any historical incidents that match these descriptions - but, of course, that doesn't mean they didn't happen, but only that they weren't written down. I agree with the commentator who wrote: "Probably Joel simply alluded to incidents of plundering Jewish wealth that were known to him (and his listeners) but are unknown to us."

And if we allow ourselves to go further back in history looking for an example, we can find one for the Philistines.

**2 Chronicles 21:16-17** - And the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the anger of the **Philistines** and of the Arabians who are near the Ethiopians. And they came up against Judah and invaded it and carried away all the possessions they found that belonged to the king's house, and also his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to

him except Jehoahaz, his youngest son.

And, in fact, that example shows us evidence for both of the charges listed in verses 5-6 - stealing treasures and stealing people.

And speaking of stealing people, the history of Greek slave trading also supports an early date rather than a late date for the book of Joel. The economic expansion of Greece in the 7th century led to a heavy reliance on slave labor, and Greek trading colonies from the 6th century have been found in the Near East.

As we said, the Philistines and the Phoenicians were very bad neighbors. They rejoiced when tragedy struck Judah; they stole gold and silver from Judah; and they sold people from Judah into slavery far away.

And God knew all about it. But what would God do in response? Keep reading!

## Joel 3:7-8

**Joel 3:7-8** - Behold, I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them, and I will return your payment on your own head. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away, for the LORD has spoken."

What goes around comes around! Now the Jews were living in slavery far away, and their neighbors were living in their homes. But soon the tables would be turned - the Jews would be back home, and their neighbors would be living in slavery far away (but in the opposite direction on the map).

And yes, there is word for what is happening here - and that word is **vengeance**. And there is nothing wrong with vengeance *per se*. The Bible tells us that vengeance can be a good thing. But the Bible also tells us that vengeance is not **our** thing.

**Romans 12:19** - Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written,



“Vengeance is mine, I will repay,  
says the Lord.”

We are not to take vengeance ourselves. Why not? Because when we do, we are putting ourselves in the place of God. Vengeance belongs to God, and that is what we are seeing here - God taking vengeance on the enemies of his people.

Was this punishment *literally* inflicted? Were Philistines and Phoenicians *literally* sold to the Sabeans?

I don't think we *must* answer yes to those questions. In fact, I think we are missing the point here if we try to check off each item in the judgments of Joel 3 on a list of historical events from the days of Joel.

Why do I say that? I say that because of our time frame. I say that because of our context. We spent a great deal of time on those issues when we started Joel 3, and now is the time for us to use them!

The judgments in Joel 3 are first and foremost the judgments against the nations that happened in Acts 2 when the kingdom of Christ was established. That is what we saw when we looked at Daniel 2, Daniel 7, Psalm 2, Zephaniah 3, and Zechariah 12. And that is what we see when we look at the time frame of Joel 2 from Acts 2, and when we look at the time frame of Joel 3:1.

And what does that mean? What I think that means is that at least some aspects of this judgment are being described figuratively, as we saw in Daniel 2 when the stone struck the feet of that giant statue and crumbled it to dust.

Yes, there are some dual fulfillments in Joel 3, but that does not mean everything in Joel 3 has a dual fulfillment. The primary, and I think in some cases only, fulfillment is the one that fits our time frame and our context - which Peter tells us is Acts 2.

And if (as I think we have shown) these judgments against the nations occurred in Acts 2 when the kingdom of Christ was established, then the specific people who had done these specific things to the Jews were long dead, as were the Jews to which they had done these things.

These judgments in Joel 3 are not judgments against those individuals; these judgments are judgments

against nations - against “all the nations” as Joel 3:2 tells us.

And I think this point will become increasingly evident as we move through this third chapter. Later in verse 13 we will read “put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe” and “go in, tread, for the winepress is full,” and then in verse 15 we will read that “the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.” Those aspects of the judgments are clearly figurative, and I think the aspects we are looking at now are likewise figurative.

As one commentator said, it is better to take these judgments “more rhetorically than literally.” And I think we must reach that conclusion if we are to maintain the time frame that we were given in Joel 3:1.

As for the Sabeans, they are described here as “a nation far away.” They are not shown on the Handout for Lesson 32, but the direction you would need to travel to reach them is shown, and that arrow points toward what is today the nation of Yemen. Perhaps the most famous Sabean was the Queen of Sheba, whom Jesus said had come “**from the ends of the earth** to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (Matthew 12:42).

I think the point here is not that the Jews would *literally* sell their enemies into Sabean slavery, but rather is that God would, as verse 4 says, return their payment on their own head swiftly and speedily.

God would avenge his people by sending their enemies as far away in the opposite direction as they had sent the Jews. And, again, that makes sense only when Greece is still very far away, which points to an earlier rather than a later date for the book of Joel.

## Joel 3:9-10

**Joel 3:9-10** - Proclaim this among the nations: Consecrate for 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 a warrior."

Do we remember what Elijah said to the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel?

There are a few verses from Joel 3 that are very often the subjects of sermons. Verse 10 is one of them: "Let the weak say, 'I am a warrior,'" and verse 14 is another one with its famous "Valley of Decision."

And while I'm sure many of those sermons are quite good, I am equally sure that their reliance on these two verses is often misplaced.

Verse 10 has nothing at all to do with a weak child of God who needs a shot of courage, and verse 14 has nothing at all to do with people who need to decide whether or not to obey the gospel.

Remember where we are in Joel 3. God is judging all the nations of the world. And before that judgment is announced, God is gathering all the nations of the world together in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Verses 9 and 10 are part of that gathering of the nations.

Likewise, later in verse 14 we will find that the famous Valley of Decision is not a place for us to decide what to do with God, but rather is a place where God decides what to do with these nations. We will see that God is the one doing the deciding in the Valley of Decision just as God is the one doing the judging in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

Verses 9 and 10 are a proclamation to the nations - and the first few words of the proclamation provide a good summary of the entire proclamation: **"Consecrate for war!"**

First, why the word "consecrate"? What does it mean to "consecrate" for war?

In ancient days, war was not seen as a secular activity. Instead, it was always seen as a religious activity. The pagan world would prepare for war by sacrificing to their false gods and by asking their false gods to grant them victory. And if they won the battle, then they would always see that victory as evidence that their gods were more powerful than the gods of their enemies.

And so why do we see a call here to "consecrate for war"? In a word, I think what we are seeing here is **sarcasm**. And, yes, there is sarcasm in the Bible. No one who has ever read the Bible could possibly say otherwise.

**1 Kings 18:27** - And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."

I think we see something similar here. God is telling these nations to go ahead and sacrifice to their false gods to seek their help in defeating him! Far from making God afraid as they no doubt hoped, God taunts them here by saying, "Don't forget to pray to your gods! You are going to need all the help you can get!" There is a wonderful message lurking in that word "consecrate!"

Second, what is this war? Who is fighting whom?

This war is a war between God and all the nations of this world. God has gathered all of these nation in this valley for the purpose of this war. These nations have spent their time mopping up with the people of God, and so now God is planning to gather them all together for the purpose of mopping up with them instead! We might say that the picture here is that of the big brother showing up to take out the bullies who have been making life miserable for his little brother!

Do we remember what we saw back in Joel 2?

**Joel 2:6-7** - Before them peoples are in anguish; **all faces grow pale**. Like **warriors** they charge; like **soldiers** they scale the wall. They march each on his way; they do not swerve from their paths.

And now what does God say here?

Consecrate for 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 a **warrior**."

These mighty men thought they were really tough back in Joel 2 when they charged like warriors against the people of God, making their faces grow pale. And so, now, God says bring it on! Let's see who turns pale this time!

There is a wonderful reminder in verse 10 that we are looking at a judgment that occurred in Acts 2 when the church was established. I think we have already shown that in several ways, but I think we see it again here in verse 10.

One of the great prophecies about the church is that it would be a kingdom of peace - not of peace with the world, but of peace with God and with each other - and especially between Jew and Gentile.

We find some wonderful prophecies of the peace between Jew and Gentile in the kingdom of Christ.

**Isaiah 2:4** - He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; **and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;** nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

**Micah 4:3** - He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; **and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;** nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

And, of course, we find the fulfillment of that great prophecy in the church, as described for us in Ephesians 2.

**Ephesians 2:14-16** - For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create

in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

But here in verse 10 that wonderful prophecy is **reversed!** Instead of beating swords into plowshares, God tells the nations here to beat their plowshares into swords!

God's command here is a stark reminder that the peace in the kingdom of Christ is **not** peace with this world. We are at war with this world!

**2 Corinthians 10:4-5** - For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

But that war has already been won! Jesus has already overcome this world. God has already defeated all the nations of this world. We wage that war today and we overcome that world today by being born into the kingdom of Christ. And our faith is the victory!

**1 John 5:4** - For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.

The command here in verse 10 to beat plowshares into swords is an unmistakable reference to the church.

When we read verse 10 we think immediately of the great prophecies about the church in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4. But we also immediately notice the reversal here in verse 10.

While the children of God will experience peace with God, the nations of this world will experience war with God. And, of course, there is no doubt at all about how that war will turn out!

**Isaiah 54:16-17** - Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals and produces a weapon for its purpose. I have also created the ravager to destroy; no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, declares the LORD.

And no one opposed to God is exempt from this command to gather for battle. Even those who might normally stay home (such as the weak) are told here to mobilize for war - let the weak say, "I am a warrior." No one arrayed against God will escape this coming judgment against the nations of this world. No one is on the sideline.

## Joel 3:11

**Joel 3:11** - Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O LORD.

From the standpoint of textual criticism, one commentary describes verse 11 as "the most difficult verse in the book."

The big issue is whether the warriors at the end of the verse are fighting **for** God or fighting **against** God.

In the ESV, as we just read, the warriors are fighting **for** God - they are God's warriors. "Bring down **your** warriors, O LORD."

But the Latin Vulgate is quite different, as we can see from the Catholic translation of the same verse:

**Joel 3:11** - Break forth, and come, all ye nations from round about, and gather yourselves together: **there will the Lord cause all thy strong ones to fall down.**

So which is it? Are these warriors fighting for God or against God? As usual, we can't say for sure. And,

also as usual, we can make perfect sense of either reading.

If these are God's soldiers, then they are most likely us - the church - given the time frame. We are God's army today while wearing the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11) and destroying arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5).

And that may be correct, as most English translations have concluded - but I'm not so sure.

Remember where we are. We are in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And remember what we saw earlier about the only choice for that valley that is actually associated with King Jehoshaphat - the Valley of Beracah in 2 Chronicles 20. And remember what happened to God's people in that valley - God destroyed their enemies without the King or the people having to even lift a finger!

**2 Chronicles 20:15** - ...Thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, **for the battle is not yours but God's.**'

If this Valley of Jehoshaphat is the Valley of Beracah, then I think we must conclude that these soldiers in verse 11 are not God's soldiers but instead are soldiers fighting against God. But no matter how many soldiers show up on the other side, God will defeat them.

If, instead, these soldiers are God's soldiers, then perhaps that means we need to rethink what we said about this valley. Perhaps it is the Valley of Kidron or the Jezreel Valley rather than the Valley of Beracah - but I still favor the Valley of Beracah, which means I also favor the view that the soldiers in verse 11 are fighting against God. Rather than bringing down **your** soldiers, I think the prayer here is that God will bring down **their** soldiers, which, of course, God does.

Now that we have looked at the **second** half of verse 11, let's back up and look at the **first** half: "Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there."

Think back for a moment about what we saw in the previous verse: "Beat your plowshares into



swords.” As we saw, that statement immediately made us think about the great prophecy of the church in Isaiah 2, but with a reversal. Rather than those **inside** the church beating their swords into plowshares, we saw those **outside** of the church beating their plowshares into swords.

those who obey the gospel and those who reject the gospel. Isaiah 2 tells us about the first group. Joel 3 tells us about the second group.

I think we see something similar here.

- **Joel 3:11** - “**Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there.**”
- **Isaiah 2:2-3** - It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; **and all the nations shall flow to it**, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

In each case we see a gathering of the nations - but for a different purpose. Just as we saw in verse 10, I think in verse 11 we again are reminded of a great prophecy about the church - but with a reversal.

In Isaiah 2, God is calling and gathering the nations to come and hear the word of the Lord so that they can all be taught about his ways and walk in his paths. God is calling the nations in Isaiah 2 to hear the gospel so that they can obey it and be added to the kingdom of Christ.

But not so here in verse 11. Yes, God is calling and gathering the nations in verse 11, but he is doing so for a different purpose - **judgment**. Those nations being gathered in verse 11 are not coming to be taught by God, but instead they are coming to wage war against God. These nations are opposed to God. They are arrayed against God.

And perhaps we are just seeing two sides of the same coin in these two verses. In Isaiah 2:2 we see those who obey God, but in Joel 3:11 we see those who disobey God.

The gospel of Christ is the great divider of this world. The gospel splits the world into two parts -

## Joel Lesson 34

Once again we are reminded of a prophecy from the book of Isaiah.

### Joel 3:12

**Joel 3:12** - Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

Last week, we looked at the question of whether the soldiers in verse 11 are fighting **for** God or fighting **against** God. I favored the view that they are fighting **against** God. And I think verse 12 supports that view.

If those soldiers were God's soldiers, then we might have expected to see a great battle here in verse 12 between the soldiers of Satan and the soldiers of God - but that is not what we see in verse 12. Instead, what we see is judgment. **What happened to the battle?**

What happened is that the outcome of this battle is so certain that the text skips right over it! By the time God's people show up, the battle has been won and the judgment has begun.

And doesn't that once again remind us of the Valley of Beracah in 2 Chronicles 20? When King Jehoshaphat and the people showed up there, the battle had already been won by God! Here in verse 12 the nations come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, not to wage war, but to be judged.

And, again, we are reminded of Daniel 2. We don't see a battle in Daniel 2 between the golden statue and the stone. Instead, we see that stone striking that statue and shattering it into dust. In Daniel 2, we see the judgment, but not the battle. And, likewise, here, we see the judgment, but not the battle.

### Joel 3:13

**Joel 3:13** - Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.

**Isaiah 63:3-6** - I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.

There, as here, the overflowing winepress depicts the great evil of those who are being judged.

If our view of the date for Joel is correct, then the book of Joel was written about 100 years after the book of Isaiah. And I think we find some support for that in verses such as this one that seem to be referring back to imagery used by Isaiah. And while the reliance could be in the reverse direction (if there is reliance), that direction is harder to justify with the reverse imagery that we also find in Joel 3, such as we see in verses 10 and 11.

One difference between Isaiah 63 and verse 13 is that in Isaiah 63 the verbs are **singular** - "I have trodden the winepress alone" - but here in verse 13 the verbs are **plural**.

Perhaps that fact should make us rethink what we said about the soldiers in verse 11, but I think not. The plural in verse 13 is not describing the battle, but rather the plural is describing the judgment - and we know that we have a role to play in God's judgment.

**1 Corinthians 6:2-3** - Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you

incompetent to try trivial cases?  
Do you not know that we are to  
judge angels? How much more,  
then, matters pertaining to this  
life!

That verse is talking about the final judgment, but perhaps verse 13 is telling us that the church likewise had a role to play in God's judgment of the nations in Acts 2. We didn't fight the battle, we didn't win the war, but perhaps we shared in the judgment.

After all, what is that stone that rolled down that hill and struck that statue? That stone was the church in its infancy, which began in Acts 2. That stone was people - people who obeyed the gospel of Christ and were added to the church of Christ. So doesn't even Daniel 2 show us that the church shared in the judgment of those nations? I think we are seeing the same thing in verse 13, but with a different metaphor.

And, verse 13 tells us, their evil is great. Whose evil?

Again, we are talking about nations here. God has gathered nations to face judgment in this valley. We are not seeing individual judgments here like we will see at the end of time, but instead we are seeing the judgment of nations like we see in Daniel 2. This evil is *national* evil.

And elsewhere in the Bible we find evil described in national terms.

**Proverbs 14:34** - Righteousness  
exalts a nation, but sin is a  
reproach to any people.

The nations of this world are **all** opposed to God. And, yes, I mean **all**.

That opposition to God is easy to see with some nations such as North Korea, where being found with a Bible means that you and three generations of your family will be sent a prison camp.

But is that opposition to God also true of our own nation? Is the United States included on the list of nations opposed to God?

If so, how could that be? After all, God has used the United States to accomplish great things for the

church. Most of us are Christians today because of the religious freedom in this nation that allowed many to freely restore the New Testament church according to the pattern given to us in the Bible.

And that is all true, but that fact that a nation is used by God to further the purposes of God does not mean that nation is on God's side. It does not mean that nation is not opposed to God.

Babylon and Assyria were both used by God to fulfill his purposes, but we know that both Babylon and Assyria were opposed to God. Rome, likewise, was used by God to further the proclamation of the gospel, but we know that Rome was opposed to God.

The fact is that, yes, the United States is opposed to God. There is but one eternal kingdom, and the United States is not it. Every nation of this world will crumble to dust before God's eternal kingdom, and that includes the United States.

And, yes, we should be thankful that we live in this great nation, and we should pray for the welfare of this nation as God told the people to pray for the welfare of Babylon in Jeremiah 29:7, and we should use the freedoms and blessings that we enjoy in this nation to spread the gospel all around the world. God has opened a great door for us with this nation, and we need to use that great door as long as it remains open.

But we should not wrap ourselves in the flag. We should not act as if this nation is a "Christian nation," whatever that means. We must stand beneath the cross of Christ, not beneath the flag of some earthly nation. And we need to always remember that our Savior sits, not behind the Resolute Desk, but at the right hand of God!

If we want to know the relation between the church and the nations of this world, then we should look at one of the great prophecies about the church:

**Psalms 2 - Why do the nations  
rage** and the peoples plot in  
vain? **The kings of the earth** set  
themselves, and **the rulers** take  
counsel together, against the LORD  
and against his Anointed, saying,  
"Let us burst their bonds apart and  
cast away their cords from us." He

who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and **I will make the nations your heritage**, and the ends of the earth your possession. **You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.**" Now therefore, **O kings**, be wise; be warned, **O rulers** of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. **Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**

The nations are raging and plotting at the beginning of Psalm 2, and the nations are being broken in pieces in the middle of Psalm 2. Does any of that sound familiar? Don't we see it in Joel 3? And what do we see at the end of Psalm 2 - "Blessed are all who take refuge **in him.**"

And what will see later when we get to verse 16 of Joel 3? "The LORD is a **refuge** to his people!" Can there be any doubt that we are looking at the church in Joel 3?

## Joel 3:14

**Joel 3:14** - Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

I suspect that most of us have heard a sermon or two about people in the Valley of Decision who need to decide whether or not to obey the gospel. And I won't deny that such a person could be accurately described as residing in a Valley of Decision. **But I will certainly deny that that valley is this valley!** This Valley of Decision in verse 14 has

nothing at all to do with someone deciding whether or not to obey the gospel.

First, the subjects of the judgment in Joel 3 are nations, not people. And, second, the one doing the deciding in verse 14 is God, not nations and not people. This Valley of Decision is where God decides what to do with those who were judged in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

We certainly know that fact from the context and the time frame, but we also know that fact from the Hebrew word used in verse 14 for "decision." The Hebrew word implies a negative verdict. As one commentator explains, the Hebrew word "connotes the irrevocably determined sentence of destruction."

And, also, the Hebrew word translated "multitude" means more than just a lot of people, but rather it refers to a **mob** of people.

I think a better translation of the opening phrase in verse 14 would be this: "Mobs, mobs, in the valley of sentencing!"

And, yes, I suppose we finally see some individuals here, but they are not being treated individually. They are acting like a mob, and they are being treated like a mob. They were all brought here as nations, and they are all receiving the same negative sentence together.

The imagery used here is a common way for the prophets to depict the restless nations of the world. We see it in Isaiah, for example.

**Isaiah 13:4** - The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle.

**Isaiah 17:12** - Ah, the thunder of many peoples; they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations; they roar like the roaring of mighty waters!



And isn't that the perfect illustration for the nations of the world? Just like the thundering and the roaring of the restless unsettled sea?

With the nations of this world, we both hear and see the great sound and the great fury, but all that ultimately happens is that the sea continues to beat against the seashore. I think we see those same restless unsettled nations here in verse 14.

**“For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.”**

So far we know at least two important things about the day of the Lord in the book of Joel. First, it is a theme of the book - and perhaps it is the major theme of the book. And second, we have seen at least two different days of the Lord so far in the book.

In Joel 1:15, we saw a day of the Lord that was coming and that was near in Joel's day, and in Joel 2:31 we saw a day of the Lord that occurred much later (as Peter confirmed for us in Acts 2).

What about this day of the Lord in verse 14?

The first thing we should notice in answering that question is the little word “near” that we also find in verse 14. That word “near” certainly helped us in Joel 1:15. Does it help us here?

Not as much. Why not? Because verse 14 does not just say that this day is near - it says that this day is near **in the Valley of Decision**. In other words, Joel is not telling his listeners that this day of the Lord is near to them, but rather he is writing that this day of the Lord is near to those who find themselves in this Valley of Decision.

And that time frame should not surprise us. What usually follows the decision of a sentence is the execution of that sentence - and that execution, I think, is what is being called a day of the Lord here in verse 14.

And this execution, we are told, is **near** to the day of the decision. I think that tells us that we are not seeing the final execution here. Instead, I think we are seeing the same execution here that we see in Daniel 2. I think we are seeing the shattering of the nations that occurred when they were struck by the stone in Daniel 2 that was not man-made and

that struck the statute shortly after the creation of that stone.

And, if that is true, then this day of the Lord (just like, I believe, the day of the Lord in Joel 2:31) is the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. We know that it was on that day that the great prophecy of Daniel 2:44 was fulfilled.

**Daniel 2:44** - And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

I think we are seeing that same prophecy here in Joel 3. And, again, we know that it was fulfilled early in the church's history. That is what Daniel tells us in that same chapter.

**Daniel 2:35** - ... But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

When that stone broke in pieces all the kingdoms of the world and brought them to an end, that stone was still just a stone. That stone had not yet become a mountain that filled the whole earth. I think the stone in Daniel 2 was the same stone at the same time that we find in Acts 2.

## The Day of the Lord: A Recap

Now that we have looked at verse 14, that means we have looked at all of the occurrences of the phrase “the Day of the Lord” in the book of Joel.

As we said in our introduction, most commentaries consider the Day of the Lord to be the primary theme of the book of Joel, and perhaps it is. We certainly see that phrase a lot for such a short book. In fact, we have seen that phrase five times in these three chapters.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! **For the day of the LORD is near**, and

as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

**Joel 2:1** - Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, **for the day of the LORD is coming**; it is near.

**Joel 2:11** - The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. **For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome**; who can endure it?

**Joel 2:31** - The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, **before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes**.

**Joel 3:14** - Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! **For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision**.

We have already looked at the question of how those verses **differ**, and what we have found is that they are **not** all discussing the same event.

The first three occurrences of the phrase are describing the invasion by Babylon that, in Joel's day, was coming and was near.

But not so with the final two occurrences of the same phrase. There was a big shift in our time frame and our context in Joel 2:28, and so we know that Joel 2:31 and Joel 3:14 are no longer looking at the invasion by Babylon. I think both of these final two occurrences of the Day of the Lord are describing the Day of Pentecost.

That is how the verses differ. But how are they the **same**? What do they have in common? If the Day of the Lord is the theme of Joel, then how does that one theme relate to these two different events? What do the invasion by Babylon in the 6th century BC and the Day of Pentecost in the first century AD have in common?

When we first saw "the Day of the Lord" in this book, we came up with what we called a working definition of the phrase:

"a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before."

And why did we call it a *working* definition? Because we wanted to have all the evidence on the table before we made a decision on the meaning of the Day of the Lord in this book.

Well, we now have all the evidence on the table. So the time has come for us to either stick with our working definition or change it.

And I think we should stick with it. I think our working definition holds up perfectly well for either the invasion by Babylon or the Day of Pentecost. I think both events were perfect examples of "a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before."

That is what a Day of the Lord is. It is day when God shows up to remind everyone about who is really in charge. It is a day when God shows up to remind everyone about what is really important. It is a day when mankind receives a divine attitude readjustment. No one is the same after a Day of the Lord. Their world is always completely different after that day.

Was that all true when Babylon invaded Judah? Absolutely it was true. For the Jews who experienced that event, everything changed. Nothing was the same for them after that event.

And was that also true for the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2? Absolutely it was true. For all who experienced that day, everything changed. The eternal unshakable kingdom of Christ had been established, and Jesus was ruling the entire universe at the right hand of God and from the throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords! The nations of this world, both past and future, had been judged and sentenced. They could not save.

They offered no place of refuge. They offered no stronghold. Those things were available only from Christ and only in the kingdom of Christ.

So, yes, I think we can say that our working definition is the right definition. A Day of the Lord is “a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before.”

And, yes, such days have occurred in the past. We have studied two such days in this short book of Joel, and there have been others. But not all such days are in the past. As the song says, there’s a great day coming!

**2 Peter 3:10-12** - But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

And if we want to talk about a divine attitude readjustment, that’s it! But that final Day of the Lord is very different from the prior such days. How? Unlike the earlier days of the Lord, that final day of the Lord will not come as a warning. Why not? Because it will be too late for a change of attitude to make any difference on that last great day of the Lord.

I think every Day of the Lord in the Bible is intended, in part, to be a warning for that final Day of the Lord when it will be too late for any more warnings.

And now for the million dollar question: are all of those commentaries correct? **Is the Day of the Lord really the central theme of the book of Joel?**

In my opinion, the answer is yes. The Day of the Lord is the central theme of this book of Joel. That theme is the glue that connects everything we see in this book - from locusts to the church!

- We see that theme in Joel 1 with the invasion by the locusts intended to warn the people of a second invasion that was coming and that was near. (And even though the locust invasion is not called a day of the Lord, I think it qualifies as one.)
- We see that same theme in Joel 2 with the invasion by Babylon, which we know was intended to teach the people about the importance of obedience and faithfulness to God and the law of God.
- And we see that same theme in the closing verses of Joel 2 and in Joel 3 with the establishment of the eternal kingdom of Christ and the judgment of the kingdoms of this world.

In each case, God suddenly intervened into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people, leaving them with a world that was completely changed from what they knew before.

One thing is certain about a Day of the Lord - it leaves things very different than how they were before.

How different? Keep reading.

## Joel 3:15

**Joel 3:15** - The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

**True or false?** Every time we see the sun and moon darkened and the stars not shining in the Bible, the same event is always being described, and that same event being described is always the end of the world. **False!** (And I really hope everyone got that question correct!)

We know that similar language is used in the Bible to describe various events, most of which have nothing at all to do with the end of the world.

In fact, We saw such language earlier in this book of Joel when the text was describing the great army that was coming and that was near, and which we have now identified with Babylon.

**Joel 2:10** - The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

We see such language in Ezekiel with the description of Egypt's fall.

**Ezekiel 32:7-8** - When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness on your land, declares the Lord GOD.

We see such language in Isaiah with the description of Babylon's fall.

**Isaiah 13:10** - For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

And we see such language with the description of Jerusalem's fall.

**Matthew 24:29** - Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

And, elsewhere we see a Day of the Lord described as a day of darkness, as we also see here in verse 15.

**Ezekiel 30:3** - For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will

be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.

**Amos 5:18** - Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light.

**Amos 5:20** - Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

So what can we say about such language?

First, we can say that such language is not always describing the end of the world. We just looked at numerous examples that were not at all about the end of the world.

Second, we can say that such language is often used to describe times of judgment when God comes to judge the enemies of his people.

Will that happen at the end of the world? Yes, it will. Is that the only time it will happen or has ever happened? No, it is not.

It also happened with Assyria. It also happened with Babylon. It also happened with Egypt. It also happened with Tyre. It also happened with Edom. It also happened with Jerusalem. It also happened with Rome.

And here in Joel 3:15? What are we seeing here?

We are again seeing a great judgment. And, as we have shown now in several different ways, this judgment is the judgment of the nations of this world on the day that the kingdom of Christ was established in Acts 2. It is the judgment that we read about in Daniel 2.

Is there even more evidence for that fact somewhere in these verses? Yes, there is, and we find it in the next verse.

## Joel 3:16

**Joel 3:16** - The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a



refuge to his people, a stronghold  
to the people of Israel.

“The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem.” Now where have we seen that event before?

That event is something else that happened in Acts 2, and that event is something else that was prophesied in Isaiah 2.

**Isaiah 2:2-3** - It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”  
**For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**

That is the same as what we just read in Joel 3:16 - “The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem.”

And, yes, I think we also see that event in Daniel 2 - “But the stone that struck the image **became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.**” That great increase in size and scope could not have happened had the word of the Lord never gone out from Jerusalem.

And when was that great promise fulfilled? As it does with so many prophecies, the New Testament answers that question.

**Luke 24:45-47** - Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, **beginning from Jerusalem.**

**Romans 1:16** - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first** and also to the Greek.

A part of the great prophecy of Isaiah 2 is that the gospel would be proclaimed **first** in Jerusalem, and that happened in Acts 2. And that great prophecy of Isaiah 2 is the same great prophecy that we find here in Joel 3:16. “The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem.”

Verse 16 is further evidence of our time frame for Joel 3. We know with certainty that we were looking at Acts 2 at the end of Joel 2. And now I think we also know that we are still looking at Acts 2 here in Joel 3. Neither the context nor the time frame has changed.

The next thing we see in verse 16 is that “**the heavens and the earth quake.**” And once again we see commonly used language for God coming in judgment against the enemies of his people.

We see such language with God’s destruction of the nations that came against Jerusalem.

**Isaiah 29:6** - You will be visited by the LORD of hosts with thunder and with **earthquake** and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire.

We see such language with a description of the reign of God.

**Psalms 99:1-2** - The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; **let the earth quake!** The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.

We see such language in the description of God’s judgment of Assyria.

**Nahum 1:5** - **The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him,** the world and all who dwell in it.

And, once again, we see such language earlier in this same book of Joel when the text describes the great Babylonian army that was coming and that was near.

**Joel 2:10 - The earth quakes before them;** the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

So, again, we see judgment here in verse 16. And, again, this judgment is the judgment of the nations that was prophesied in Daniel 2 and that happened in Acts 2.

**“The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake.”** I think the first half of that sentence and the second half of that sentence happened on the same day - the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Yes, many wonderful things happened in Acts 2, but so far Joel 3 has been focused almost entirely on the great judgment of the nations that happened on that day. That judgment of the nations had been prophesied in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 and Zephaniah 3 and Zechariah 12, and it happened in Acts 2.

But God was not just acting **against** the enemies of his people on that great day. God was also acting **for** his people on that great day. And that is what we see at the end of verse 16.

## Joel Lesson 35

### Joel 3:16, Continued

**Joel 3:16** - The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

When we ended last week, we were about to discuss the second half of verse 16. **“But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.”**

That little word **“but”** confirms what we said about the first half of verse 16. In the first half, we saw two events from Acts 2 - the gospel going out first from Jerusalem as prophesied in Isaiah 2, and the judgment of the nations as prophesied in Daniel 2.

But! But things are different for the people of God. They have escaped, as we saw in Joel 2:32. They have escaped the judgment of God, as suggested by Romans 2:3. God is their refuge. Not the nations of this world, which have crumbled to dust, but God. God is their stronghold.

How can we avoid being caught up in the judgment of the nations of this world? There is only one way - Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. He is our refuge. He is our stronghold. He is our refuge.

We are seeing the same things here in Joel 3 that we saw in Psalm 2 - the kingdom of Christ on Zion, God’s holy hill; dashing the nations of the earth in pieces like a potter’s vessel; and, finding our refuge in Christ.

If we want to avoid suffering the fate of the kingdoms of this world, we must make sure that we are citizens of a different kingdom - the kingdom of Christ. We must be in Christ, in the kingdom of Christ, in the body of Christ, in the church of Christ. Those are all the same thing, and they all happen when we obey the gospel of Christ.

And what happens when we are in God’s stronghold? What happens is that no other stronghold can ever stand against us.

**2 Corinthians 10:3-4** - For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have **divine power to destroy strongholds**.

There is only one eternal kingdom. There is only one eternal stronghold. All other kingdoms and all other strongholds will be destroyed.

And there is no way for them to change that fact. There is no great battle coming where the kingdoms of this world might have a chance to reverse their fate. They have already been judged and sentenced, and that happened in Acts 2 as foretold in Daniel 2 and Psalm 2.

### Joel 3:17

**Joel 3:17** - “So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.

When the book of Joel opened, Judah was in very bad shape after a terrible locust invasion.

But when the book of Joel ends, Judah is in great shape! We see nothing but blessings for Judah in these closing verses. As the section heading says in the ESV, these final verses are all about the glorious future of Judah.

**But what is Judah?** What is Jerusalem? What is Zion? What is God’s holy mountain? Are we still talking about a **physical** city with a **physical** mountain in a **physical** nation? No, we are not.

And we know we are not. How do we know that? We know that because Peter told us that in Acts 2 and because the other prophets and the other New Testament writers told us that as well.

And I think we could figure that out all by ourselves just by reading verse 17, which is filled with references to the church. In fact, I count at least **seven** references to the church in this one short verse!

- (#1) “So you shall **know** that I am the LORD your God”

**Jeremiah 31:33-34** - For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ **for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest**, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

- (#2) “who **dwells** in Zion”

**Ephesians 2:22** - In him you also are being built together into a **dwelling place for God** by the Spirit.

- (#3) “who dwells in **Zion**”

**Hebrews 12:22-23** - But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.

- (#4) “my holy **mountain**”

**Isaiah 2:2** - It shall come to pass in the latter days that **the mountain of the house of the LORD** shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.

- (#5) “And **Jerusalem** shall be holy”

**Revelation 21:2** - And I saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

- (#6) “And Jerusalem shall be **holy**”

**Ephesians 5:25-27** - Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, **that she might be holy and without blemish**.

- (#7) “and **strangers** shall never again pass through it”

**Ephesians 2:19** - So then you are **no longer strangers** and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Can there be any doubt that we are reading about the church in verse 17? We see the church seven times in that one verse! The book of Joel is ending with a beautiful description of the church and the wonderful blessings that we enjoy in the church.

But let’s ask this question - **why**? Why is the book of Joel telling these people of Joel’s day about the church?

I think we can answer that question with a single word: **faithfulness**.

Although Joel does not get specific about the sins of his listeners, Joel does tell them that they need to repent in Joel 2:12, so we know that Joel had some specific sins in mind.

And if we are correct that this book was written shortly before the Babylonian exile, then we know what those sins were. We know that the people had become faithless. Jeremiah tells us that they had a stubborn and rebellious heart (Jeremiah 5:20-25).



And we know that the locusts in Joel 1 were sent by God as a warning to these faithless people (Joel 1:15, 2:25). They needed to change their ways. They needed to repent. They needed to be faithful to God.

But why? Why did they need to do those things? Joel gives two answers - a **negative** answer and a **positive** answer.

The **negative** answer is **Babylon**. The people needed to repent because otherwise Babylon would invade, would destroy their city, and would carry them away in exile.

And the **positive** answer? The positive answer is the **church**. The people needed to repent because God was planning to use them to bless the entire world through the Messiah and the eternal kingdom of the Messiah. That is why Joel ends with this wonderful description of the church. The coming kingdom of Christ was an encouragement for the people to be faithful to God.

## Joel 3:18

**Joel 3:18** - "And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim.

The beautiful descriptions of the church continue in verse 18, but we also see something else in verse 18 - another reminder of our time frame!

**"And in that day."** What day? We have seen the word "day" or "days" four times in this closing section of Joel (2:29, 2:31, 3:1, 3:14). And now, in Joel 3:18, we find a fifth and final occurrence: **"in that day."**

In my opinion, all five of those phrases are looking at the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. I think they are all looking at the establishment of the church in the first century.

And, no, I don't think we need to split hairs between "in that **day**" and "in those **days**." I think they are both included in the phrase **"at that time"** that we also find in Joel 3:1. We are not looking here at a

24 hour period of time. We are looking instead at a time when the wonderful promises of God about the eternal kingdom of Christ were fulfilled - and we can read all about that wonderful time in the book of Acts.

We find something very similar in the book of Zechariah, which, like verse 18, also mentions a fountain.

**Zechariah 13:1** - **On that day** there shall be a **fountain** opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

I think both Joel 3 and Zechariah 13 are describing the church, which is the body of the saved - those saved by the blood of Christ in the watery grave of baptism.

And so, we now have our time frame for the blessings in verse 18. But what are those **blessings**?

**"The mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water."**

If you wanted to promise great blessings to the people of Joel's day, it would have been hard to come up with a better promise than that one.

The people of Judah were used to streams that would flow with water during the rainy season but those streams would then dry up for the remainder of the year. But that is not what we see here. The promise here is that **all** the streambeds shall flow with water. The promise is that everyone will have an unending supply of fresh water. And so the plants and the cattle will produce wine and milk.

And, of course, there is no way to think about that great promise apart from the promised Messiah and the promised pouring out of God's Spirit that we studied earlier in Joel 2. And we also think about what Jesus proclaimed in John 7.

**John 7:37-39** - On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and

drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

When we read Joel 3:18, we need to remember where this book started! When the book of Joel opened, the people had just suffered a terrible locust invasion.

**Joel 1:10, 12** - The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes. ... The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man.

Now, three chapters later, what do we find? A complete reversal!

Earlier, in Joel 3:10, we saw a complete reversal of fortunes for the people of this world, and now, in Joel 3:18, we see a complete reversal for the people of God. God is turning the tables!

When we studied the book of Esther, we found that reversal was the central theme of that book. I think reversal is also a major theme of the book of Joel.

The blessings continue in the final phrase of verse 18.

**"And a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim."**

This image is remarkable! If the people wondered about the source of this promised unending supply of water, this phrase answers their question - the water would come from the house of God! The temple was the source of this water!

But, while remarkable, the imagery here is not unique to Joel. We also find it in Ezekiel and Zechariah.

**Ezekiel 47:1** - Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, **water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east** (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

**Zechariah 13:1** - On that day there shall be **a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem**, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

Both of those prophecies are telling us about the church. And I think we could also add Psalm 46 to that list.

**Psalm 46:4-6** - There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

A river from the city of God? God dwelling in the midst of his holy habitation? The nations raging? The kingdoms tottering? God uttering his voice? The earth melting? Now where have we seen all of those same things? Right here in Joel 3.

We really lose a lot when we fail to study the Bible as a unified whole! Every verse in the Bible is connected to every other verse in the Bible.

The great blessings in verse 18 are the great blessings of Christ. They are the great blessings that were promised to Abraham in Genesis 22:18. They are the great blessings provided by the gospel of Christ. They are the great blessings enjoyed by everyone who has been added to the kingdom of Christ by God.

But we are not yet through with verse 18. We still need to talk about one more puzzling valley. "And

a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD **and water the Valley of Shittim.**”

What does that mean? What and where is the Valley of Shittim? What does it mean that this water from the temple would water the Valley of Shittim?

I think Ezekiel provides some help for us in answering those questions. A moment ago we read Ezekiel 47:1 where, as here, we find a stream of water coming out of the temple. Let's now skip down a few verses in Ezekiel 47.

**Ezekiel 47:8-9** - And he said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters **the sea**; when the water flows into **the sea**, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of **the sea** may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.

That “**sea**” in Ezekiel 47:8 is the Dead Sea. And so the beautiful picture in Ezekiel 47 is that this water flowing from the temple would turn the Dead Sea into the Living Sea!

I think the Dead Sea in Ezekiel 47 corresponds to the Valley of Shittim in Joel 3. I think both images are showing us the same thing - that this water from the temple would cleanse and restore and make alive that which was previously dead. And, once again, we are reminded of the verse from Zechariah that we read a moment ago.

**Zechariah 13:1** - On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

In Ezekiel 47 we find **cleansing life-giving water**. In Zechariah 13 we find **cleansing life-giving water**. And here in Joel 3 we find **cleansing life-giving water**.

Now, where else do we find **cleansing life-giving water**?

**Ephesians 5:25-27** - Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, **having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word**, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

**1 Peter 3:21** - **Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I think we are on to something here! But why does Joel 3 use the Valley of Shittim in place of the Dead Sea? What happened in that valley? How is that valley associated with death?

The answer is that the Valley of Shittim was the location of a great moral collapse of God's people.

**Numbers 25:1-3** - While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

Phinehas then takes a spear and kills a man and a woman who were flaunting their sin in front of the whole congregation. And what does God then promise to Phinehas?

**Numbers 25:11-13** - Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel,

in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him **my covenant of peace**, and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him **the covenant of a perpetual priesthood**, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.'

And so what can we say about the Valley of Shittim? It was a place of sin and death that was cleansed and that from that day on was associated, not with sin and death, but with a covenant of peace and perpetual priesthood.

And then, later, when the people are just about to cross over the Jordan River into the promised land, from where did they set out?

**Joshua 3:1** - Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over.

The Valley of Shittim is a place where the people pass from death to life. The Valley of Shittim is a place where the people leave the fleeting pleasures of sin behind to instead enjoy the permanent promises of God.

And what was it that stood between the Valley of Shittim and the land of promise in Joshua 3? **Water.** The Jordan River.

Can anyone possibly be surprised when God also placed water between the lost and the saved in the New Testament?

**Romans 6:3-4** - Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the

dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

What are we seeing here in the closing verses of Joel 3? I think we can answer that question with a single word - gospel! We are seeing the gospel of Christ!

We are seeing the gospel that is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). We are seeing the gospel by which we are buried as a dead person and raised as a living person in the waters of baptism (Romans 6).

## Joel 3:19

**Joel 3:19** - "Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the people of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

One of the great blessings that we enjoy in the kingdom of Christ is victory over our enemies. We have seen that blessing described in many ways in Joel 3, and, in fact, that particular blessing is the focus of Joel 3 - God's judgment of the kingdoms of this world.

Here in verse 19 we find another description of that great blessing. Earlier in Joel 3 we saw God's judgment against Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia. Here in verse 19 we see God's judgment against two more enemies of his people: Egypt and Edom. Egypt and Edom were both longstanding, prominent enemies of Israel.

It has been said that, other than Israel, Egypt receives more coverage in the Old Testament than any other nation. We find lengthy oracles against Egypt in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

As for Edom, it has been said that no other nation receives more vitriolic condemnation in the Bible. We find oracles against Edom in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, and Malachi. While related to the Jews through their father Isaac, the Edomites rarely passed up an opportunity to cause trouble for their cousins.

But why are Egypt and Edom being judged here? Verse 19 answers that question, and it is the same answer we saw earlier for Philistia and Phoenicia



- Egypt and Edom had caused great harm to the people of God. They had committed violence, and they had shed innocent blood.

same Jerusalem in verse 20 that will be inhabited to all generations.

## Joel 3:20

**Joel 3:20** - But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations.

Why did God circle back to Egypt and Edom in verse 19? I think it was so he could make the contrast that we see here in verse 20.

Verse 19 told us that Egypt would become a desolation and Edom would become a desolate wilderness. But not so with Judah. Verse 20 tells us that Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations.

The message of verse 20 is the same message that we find earlier in Joel 3 and that we find in Daniel 2 - there is only one eternal kingdom!

The message here is not that only Edom and Egypt will be desolate. Instead, the message here is that every earthly kingdom will be desolate. Every earthly kingdom will be a desolate wilderness. They will all crumble to dust before the kingdom of Christ!

Judah and Jerusalem in verse 20 are spiritual Judah and spiritual Jerusalem. God's message is not that some earthly kingdom will outlast all of the other earthly kingdoms. Instead, God's message is that the spiritual kingdom of Christ will outlast every earthly kingdom.

In John 18:36, Jesus said "my kingdom is not from the world." Rome was a kingdom from the world. Egypt was a kingdom from the world. Edom was a kingdom from the world. And they were all destined for the dust bin, along with every other kingdom from the world.

But the kingdom of Christ is not from the world. The kingdom of Christ is not a product of man. The kingdom of Christ is not man-made. And the kingdom of Christ will never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44).

That eternal kingdom is the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). And that new Jerusalem is the

**Ephesians 3:20-21** - Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus **throughout all generations**, forever and ever. Amen.

## Joel 3:21

**Joel 3:21** - I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged, for the LORD dwells in Zion."

Yes, after 35 lessons you might have started to wonder, but the book of Joel does in fact have a final verse - and we have finally arrived there!

**"I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged."**

What blood is being avenged here? The immediate answer is that it is the blood that was shed by Egypt and Edom in verse 19, but I think the blood here in verse 21 includes more than just that blood. I think it includes the blood shed by all the nations gathered in verse 2 for judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

I think the message here is simple - **God knows!** God knows what has been done to his people, and God knows who has done it. And while God may not yet have avenged all of that bloodshed (as he says here in verse 21), that does not mean that God will never avenge that bloodshed. In fact, the promise here is that God will avenge it - "I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged."

I think we would all likely agree that over the years the people of God have been a pretty easy target for the people of the world. I think that is what Peter tells us.

**1 Peter 4:3-5** - For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness,

orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. **With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;** but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

“But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” That is the same promise that we find in the final verse of Joel: “I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged.”

And, yes, I think that promise includes more than literal bloodshed. I think it includes all of the persecution faced by the people of God. God knows about all of it, and one day the tables will be turned.

**Hebrews 10:31** - It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And what do we find at the end of Joel? What is the very last thing we read in this book? **“The LORD dwells in Zion!”**

We know that Zion is referring to the church here. We know that from the context and from the time frame.

- We know that Joel 2:28-32 is about the church, and verse 32 referred to the church as Mount Zion.
- We know that Joel 3:16 is a prophecy about the church, and that verse referred to the church as Zion.
- We know that Joel 3:17 is a prophecy about the church, and that verse referred to the church as Zion, the holy mountain of God.

And now, at the end of Joel, we read that God dwells in Zion.

And, yes, we know that God dwells in heaven, but we also know that God dwells in the church. In fact, the church is God’s household.

**Ephesians 2:19-22** - So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with

the saints and members of **the household of God**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into **a dwelling place for God** by the Spirit.

Yes, we are built together into a dwelling place for God! God dwells in Zion!

In Exodus 25:8, God said “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” In many ways the rest of the Bible is simply a variation on that theme. God wanted to dwell among his people, and yet his people were sinners. What was the solution? John tells us the solution.

**John 1:14** - And the Word became flesh and **dwelt among us**, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Christ came to this world so that God could dwell with his people forever. And not just starting in heaven when we all get there. God is dwelling with us now in the church.

“The LORD dwells in Zion!” What a beautiful way to end this book!

When the book opened, the people were reeling from a terrible locust invasion. And I suspect they thought God had abandoned them. Why would God or anyone else want to live in such a desolated city?

And then Joel told us about a coming invasion by Babylon that would leave even greater destruction and desolation. And again, I suspect that the people thought God had abandoned them. Why would God or anyone else want to live in such a desolated city?

But Joel does not end with a city desolated by locusts. And Joel does not end with a city desolated by Babylonians. Instead, Joel ends with a beautiful coming city where God would dwell with his people.

That city would not be desolate. That city would not flourish for a while and then pass away. Instead, that city would be eternal. That city would be inhabited forever. That city would be available to all generations.

**From locusts to Pentecost.** That is the pathway in Joel, and isn't that the pathway for each of us in the church? Haven't we all gone from locusts to Pentecost?

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11** - Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

From locusts to Pentecost! That in a nutshell is the gospel of Christ, and it is also the message of Joel!

It has been my great privilege and honor to study the books of Hosea and Joel with you, and my prayer is that we will all continue to study these wonderful books! Yes, I think we have learned a lot, but there is always a lot more to learn. No matter how deeply we dig, we will never exhaust all of the treasures in the word of God!

Eric Hall

Sunday, April 27, 2025