

## The Book Of Joel (Part Three)

**Joel 3:1-21**

**Martin G. Collins**

**Given 28-Jan-17; Sermon #1361**

The apostle Peter lived many centuries after the prophet Joel. Peter had become familiar with Joel's writings, and he was inspired to elaborate on Joel's prophecy about judgment. We will read verse 17 of I Peter 4 which says:

**I Peter 4:17** For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Joel's prophecy answers that question. His book has been a warning to God's people of such judgment. But the fact that there will be a judgment of God on His people does not mean that God is forgetting about the sins of the ungodly or that He will neglect to bring judgment on them.

On the contrary, like waters collecting behind a great dam, God's well-ordered wrath has been gathering and increasing as it awaits the day when it will be released in fury against wicked individuals and nations.

**Acts 17:30-31** "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Christ] whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

Now this is what Joel speaks of as he closes his prophecy. He has warned Israel of God's judgment, now he reminds even pagans that they will be called to account for their offenses and sins.

God's judgment *must* be carried out. Why? Because people have broken God's laws and have sinned against Him in thought, word, and deed, and the Judge of all the earth must do right! If we will not repent of sin and return to God in the way He has provided, through Christ, that judgment is even now waiting at the door. That is Joel's point in chapter 3.

No prophet of the Old Testament has a more important revelation of the end times than what we find in the third chapter of Joel. God is so very gracious that He lets us know the exact time of these happenings and why they must happen.

They will take place when Jesus Christ Himself overturns the captivity of Judah and Israel. The return of Israel to the land will never be fully accomplished until Jesus Christ does it by His omnipotent power. Jeremiah 23 describes God accomplishing this through Christ and there He says:

**Jeremiah 23:3** "But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.

**Jeremiah 23:5-6** "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell

safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

At the time of God's regathering of Israel to the land, He will gather all nations into the Valley of Jehoshaphat to judgment. Joel seems to have in mind the historical narrative in II Chronicles 20, and that the site indicated is near Jerusalem.

The method of God's gathering of the nations to the judgment is set forth in Joel 3:9-12 which we will get to a little later. One of the most important features of the judgment is the basis of it: The nations will be judged for God's people and for His heritage, Israel.

Joel shows that one of the reasons the day of reckoning comes is because Israel was scattered among the nations; their land was divided; they were sold to indulge the Gentile nations' revolting desires, riotous behavior, and debauchery.

For example, Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us in, *The Wars of the Jews* (Book VI) and in his *Antiquities* (Book XII) that in the Roman wars the enemy chose out of the Jews, "the tallest and most beautiful, and reserved them for the triumph; and as for the rest of the multitude that were above 17 years old, he put them into bonds; and sent them to the Egyptian mines. . . . those that were under 17 years of age were sold for slaves."

So down through the history of Israel, the Gentile nations have, time and time again, done these horrible things to Israel and Judah and God says that He is taking that into account and that will be part of His judgment against others. And that same judgment comes upon anyone who persecutes the church. God remembers it and adds that is to the judgment on those people.

Little do the nations of the world realize that they incur the wrath of God when they lay violent hands upon His heritage, Israel. He will not tolerate it indefinitely. Then, God will bring a charge against the nations.

The first six verses of Joel 3 give God's charge against the heathen nations, and the point of concern is that they have attacked God's people and divided His land. The most prominent feature is God's repeated emphasis upon "My people" and "My land."

**Joel 3:1-6** "For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land. They have cast lots for My people, have given a boy as payment for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink. Indeed, what have you to do with Me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia? Will you retaliate against Me? But if you retaliate against Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your retaliation upon your own head; because you have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried into your temples My prized possessions. Also the people of Judah and the people of Jerusalem You have sold to the Greeks, that you may remove them far from their borders."

This is a pretty pointed accusation that God sends at those people who have damaged His people. The people of God are His by two acts: creation and redemption. They are His because He made them. This applies to all, but there is a special application to Israel, in the Old Testament period, and to God's church in the New Testament period.

God brought each into being. He created Israel by calling Abraham and giving him descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. Of the New Testament community Jesus said, "I will build My church." All credit goes to God and to Jesus Christ. The credit of the construction, the creation, and the building of both Israel physically, and Israel the church, belong to God and Christ.

Second, the people of God are His by redemption. That is, they are purchased with the blood of Christ. The word "redemption" is a Latin derivative based on the words: *re*, which means "again," and *emo* or *emere*, which means "to acquire." So redemption means "to acquire again" or "to buy again."

In its full biblical usage redemption means deliverance from the bondage of sin by Christ at the cost of His life, because He loved us.

The idea of deliverance is easy to understand, especially deliverance from slavery, which is similar to the kind of deliverance that is meant in the book and movie *Ben Hur*. In the story, after a privileged upbringing in Jerusalem, the hero of the book, Judah Ben Hur, falls afoul of the Roman authorities. He is arrested, condemned, and finally sentenced to serve out his life on one of the Roman slave ships.

There is a great scene in which Judah, having fallen from his position of privilege, is now in the bowels of the Roman ship rowing his life away with other condemned and equally hopeless men. They are hanging on by sheer determination. Some are beginning to despair or have been despairing for years.

At this point the Roman admiral explains the reason for their existence, saying, "We keep you alive to serve this ship." It is hard to think of any better words to epitomize the hopelessness of such slavery.

Then the story unfolds, and there comes a moment when there is a battle and some of the slaves on this particular ship are set free. Ben Hur rescues the admiral and later, as the result of his devotion to the admiral and the admiral's love for him, Judah is set completely free and is adopted as his son. He thus rises to a position of privilege and authority again.

This story generally symbolizes what redemption means. It is to be delivered from slavery. In spiritual terms we are slaves to sin, but Jesus breaks the power of sin and sets us free. Another element in redemption is the most important part, because it tells us that redemption is not merely deliverance from sin, but deliverance from sin by Christ at the cost of His life.

It was by dying for us that Christ set us free. Christ died in order to accomplish that spiritual deliverance. This is the way redemption is referred to throughout the New Testament. In Matthew 20 Jesus says:

**Matthew 20:28** “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

This is redemption from sin at the cost of His life. Titus 2:14 speaks of Jesus as One who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness.

**Titus 2:14** who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

As God’s people that should be a banner around our necks, eager to do what is good. The idea of Christ’s life being the cost of our redemption is inescapable.

**I Peter 1:18-19** knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Besides all this, it was because of His great love that Christ redeemed us. Now it is true that from the point of history in which Joel stood, this redemptive work of Christ was still future. The Old Testament saints looked forward to it, just as we look back and forward to it at the same time. But it is nevertheless on this basis, future or past, that the people of God are God’s and He has delivered us from the bondage of sin by Christ at the cost of His life because He loves us.

The Eternal through His prophet Joel addresses Tyre and Sidon as representative of all the land of Phoenicia. The Phoenicians think they can fare differently from all the rest of the nations. They do not realize that they injure God in their injury of His people.

Criticisms and assaults against God’s people, He considers as done to Himself. If people think they can assault God, He will show them that His divine retribution will not be delayed any longer and will overtake them. God will not keep His silence forever.

Joel recalls the plundering of Judah and Jerusalem by the Philistines and the Arabians in the time of Jehoram recorded in II Chronicles 21:16-17. The very ones sold afar off, God will use to bring about His judgment upon His and Judah’s enemies.

Instead of the children of Judah being sold for sport or profit, the sons and daughters of their enemies will be sold into the hand of the people of Israel who in turn will sell the enemy into the hand of a nation afar off. And the fate which they planned for Israel will rebound upon the head of Israel’s godless adversaries. Now with this background, let us pick up the story here in Joel 3.

**Joel 3:4-8** “Indeed, what have you to do with Me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia? Will you retaliate against Me? But if you retaliate against Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your retaliation upon your own head; because you have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried into your temples My prized possessions. Also the people of Judah and the people of Jerusalem you have sold to the Greeks [actually the Ionians], that you may remove them far from their borders. Behold, I will raise them out

of the place to which you have sold them, and will return your retaliation upon 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 people far off; for the Lord has spoken.”

It is worth noting again that God refers to the Jews as “My people” and their wealth as “My silver” and “My gold.” He calls it His because it *is* His and He has only given it to us on loan, so to speak. Even though the Jews have not obeyed the covenant or sought to please the Lord, He has not abandoned them. Even when they rejected their Messiah, God was merciful to them. He has preserved them as a nation and will one day come to their aid and defeat their enemies.

The next section of Joel’s chapter is a challenge, and an ironic one at that. In Joel 3:9-13, God challenges the nations that have made war on His people to turn their plows into swords and their pruning hooks into spears and marshal their forces to do battle against Him in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat means “the Lord judges” which seems appropriate. Now continuing the story in verses 9-13.

**Joel 3:9-13** Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, “I am strong.” Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O Lord. [Now the whole theme is summarized for us here in verse 12.] “Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, The vats overflow—for their wickedness is great.”

So God challenges the nations that have made war on His people and there are two great ironies in this challenge. First, the challenge to “beat plows into swords and pruning hooks into spears” is a reversal of the promises God makes elsewhere concerning the Millennium.

In Isaiah 24 God speaks of a day when many will go to the mountain of the Lord to learn His ways and walk in His paths. In that day, says God, this will happen:

**Isaiah 2:4** He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; 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.

In Micah 4 the same words of Isaiah’s prophecy reappear with a concluding promise.

**Micah 4:3-4** He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; 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. [then the concluding promise] But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

This describes the Millennium, in which the God of peace has abolished war, and the instruments of war have been made into agricultural instruments. But people today do the opposite. They turn tools into weapons, and it will get increasingly worse toward the end of the age.

So before the Millennium we will have to go through a time that is directly opposite of the peace, safety, and joy that God has planned. It will be a time of great turmoil.

The second irony is the obvious one: mere men marshaling forces to do battle with God. God calls upon the nations to prepare for war in Joel 3:9; this is the method whereby He brings the nations to their deserved judgment. The word prepare is literally “sanctify,” that is, set this apart, make this your own ultimate goal, because this is to be war to the finish.

The Lord is telling them to prepare to the utmost and do their best to do their wickedness against Him. To that end let the nations muster and mobilize their manpower to the very hilt. Let them come fully equipped, so that no man lacks proper weapons. Let every tool used for peaceful pursuits, the plowshares and the pruning-hooks, be beaten into swords and spears.

So great will be the desire to destroy God’s people that even the weak will fancy himself to be strong. What an assemblage that will be! The nations will be banded together and confederate as never before. The second psalm tells us explicitly that God laughs at such presumption. Psalm 2:1 says:

**Psalm 2:1-3** Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, “Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.” [That is the attitude of the world today, that is the banner that they wave.]

In these verses God is describing the cosmic rebellion of the human race, which, in this particular expression, involves the kings of the earth and the nations. They regard God as their enemy and His rightful rule over them as oppressive.

They want to cast off His rule. They gladly accept the bondage of sin and the influence of Satan. They want to be answerable to no one, which is ironic because they are answering to Satan, but ultimately to God because even Satan answers to God. So they make their tools into weapons, gather their arms and warriors, and march defiantly out to do battle against God.

What is God’s reaction to this act of treason? Does He cower in fear? Does He retreat to His heavenly barricades? Does He capitulate? We know He does not, but rather God laughs.

**Psalm 2:4-6** He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.”

The Eternal’s reaction is absolute disdain, because nothing is so preposterous as puny mortals marching out to do battle with the Omnipotent Creator and Sustainer!

This is God’s picture of His judgment: Men and women marching out to battle and God laughing at their insanity as justice is administered and judgment falls on the ungodly. He is not laughing at them as far as the finding joy in the wrath that He is bringing upon them. He is laughing because of the idiocy of it all, how ridiculous these human beings are in their thoughts.

But here is also a third irony conveyed in the image God uses to describe His judgment. It is the image of God trampling out the grapes of His wrath. Joel 3:13 once again says:

**Joel 3:13** “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great.”

Why is this image ironic? It is ironic because in the normal life of an agricultural people the time of harvest was the most joyous occasion of the year.

At harvest time the grain was gathered in and the grapes were thrown into the wine vats to be trampled into wine. At that time the hard work of the long hot summer was done and the fruits of labor provide sustenance through the winter. At harvest time laughter would be heard; harvest festivals would be common. It was a time of joy and celebration.

But there will be no joy when Jesus Christ comes to inflict God’s wrath. The scene of harvest rejoicing is changed to one of sorrow. This scene is described in Revelation 14. Verses 14-16 talk about the reaping of the earth's harvest; and verses 17-20 talk about reaping the grapes of wrath.

**Revelation 14:14-16** Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

**Revelation 14:17-20** Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.” So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

Some commentators speculate that is about 180-200 miles and about 4 feet deep, but it seems quite impossible. Other commentators speculate that blood would be just splashing to the horses' bridles. In either case, this shows that it is a lot of people that will receive God’s wrath at that time.

So we see here, Jesus Christ on a white cloud. We have the image of the harvest, both of the grain in verses 14-16, and of the grape in verses 17-20. This anticipates the final judgment of the world.

While God calling people out of the world to Christ is sometimes pictured as a harvest, this image is also used of God's judgment. God permits the seeds of sin to grow until they are ripe, and then He judges.

The grape harvest is often a picture of judgment. Joel 3:13 anticipates the Day of the Lord. In actuality, Scripture portrays three different “vines.” Israel was God's vine, planted in the land to bear fruit for God's glory, but the nation failed God and had to be cut down.

Today, Christ is the Vine and believers are branches in Him. But the world system is also a vine, “the vine of the earth,” in contrast to Christ the heavenly Vine, and it is ripening for judgment. The wicked system, Babylon, that intoxicates people and controls them, will one day be cut down and destroyed in “the winepress of the wrath of God.”

Today, God is speaking to His church in grace, and the world will not listen. One day soon, He must speak in wrath. The harvest of sin reaped, and the vine of the earth cut down and cast into the winepress.

What nation has ever been as richly blessed in material and even spiritual things as our own? We have been blessed beyond measure, and blessing such as this is the gift of God. Has such goodness led our nation to God? It has not! On the contrary, it has made us indifferent to Him as a nation.

Are we to think that such ingratitude and irresponsibility will go unnoticed or be unpunished by God? Do we think that the challenge of God to the nations is for others only and not also for ourselves?

All of the nations will be involved and affected because of great global sin, including the modern Israelite nations. The time of Jacob’s trouble, the time of the modern Israelite nation’s chastisement, will coincide with the great tribulation and the Day of the Lord. Nevertheless, the Eternal will save a remnant of the descendants of the Israelite's out of it.

**Jeremiah 30:7-8** Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. ‘For it shall come to pass in that day,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘That I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them.’

In the midst of the scene which passes before Joel’s vision he prays that God’s mighty ones of Joel 3: 11 may come down, in contra-distinction to the supposed “mighty men” of verse 9.

**Joel 3:9-13** Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, ‘I am strong.’” Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause your mighty ones to go down there, O Lord. “Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the wine-press is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great.”

The nations are seen as bestirring themselves to the white heat of wrath against Israel at that time.

Their objective is the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and there the nations will meet the great King of Israel, their protector through all ages, and their Champion in their darkest and blackest hour, the Eternal Jesus Christ, who will sit ready to judge once and for all the accumulated sins of the nations against Israel. What a fearful day that will be! The nations will have an easier time causing the sun to cease shining, than to escape it.

Now the judgment is described under the double figure of harvest and the vintage. The harvest is ripe, and the winepress and the vats are full to overflowing. What this means is stated in literal language in verse 13: “For their wickedness is great.”

When God’s mighty ones meet the mighty men of the nations in mortal and final combat the impact will be tremendous. The lifeblood of the nations will drench the soil of the earth. It is tragically sad that the nations will not learn the lesson regarding God’s people before it is too late.

Remember that this is not just a knee-jerk reaction with God, because the wickedness of the nations has been insufferably great for a long time. But the story is so weighty that it must be told out further. Joel sees the nations assembled in innumerable quantities of people in the valley where God, not man, will make His decision. Continuing on in verse 14.

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

The repetition of the word “multitudes” is meant to show how innumerable they are. As far as the eye can possibly see; the uncountable peoples of the earth are drawn up in array—a great sea of surging humanity.

The valley of decision defines more clearly the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There the words of decision: “Come, you blessed of My Father” and “Depart, you cursed” will be spoken with the voice of the mighty Son of God, the voice as the sound of many waters.

Heaven and earth will feel the force of this judgment, and the Eternal Himself will be roused as a lion. Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, will utter His voice from Zion and Jerusalem. Creation will resound at the voice of Him who in that hour will be the refuge of His people and a stronghold to the children of Israel.

**Joel 3:15-16** The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel.

So the Eternal will dwell in Zion and all will be holiness for God’s people. Psalm 132 says:

**Psalm 132:13-14** For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: “This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.”

No strangers will pass through her anymore to plunder, to destroy, or to pollute. When they do come, it will be to worship the Lord of Hosts.

The ‘decision of multitudes in the valley of decision’ in Joel 3:14-15, is the decision of the court, it is a legal decision. Laws have been broken., and the one making the decision is not the one who has rejected Christ but is the Christ he or she has rejected. This is God’s decision, a decision that will determine people’s destinies.

When we think of a division between persons, we are drawn to remember Christ's Sermon on the Mount of Olives before His arrest and crucifixion. In that sermon, in Matthew 24:29, Jesus borrowed language from Joel 3:15, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;" and He elaborated on the judgment, warning His hearers to get ready for it.

He is telling us also to get ready for what is coming. The way we "get ready" is to make sure our relationship with God is solid, and make sure that we are moldable and able to be taught by God.

He told three parables as I mentioned before: of the Ten Virgins; of the Talents; and of the Sheep and the Goats. These vary in details, but the points of each are similar.

In each there is a sudden appearance of the master that catches the people involved by surprise. In each there is a separation: the five wise from the five foolish virgins; the ones who used their master's talents wisely from the one who did not; and the sheep from the goats.

Finally, in each there is utter surprise on the part of those who receive punishment. The foolish virgins are astounded that the Master will not admit them to the wedding banquet. The wicked steward is amazed that the master is not satisfied with his lack of performance. And notice what the goats ask Jesus in verse 44.

**Matthew 25:44** "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'"

As we read those parables we think of many people today. They have despised the grace of God while in Romans 2 it says:

**Romans 2:5** But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

But they are unaware of what they are doing and will be surprised when God's decision is made. They will have despised the very thing that was given to lead them to repentance.

**Romans 2:4** Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

So their rejection of the rich blessings God gives blinds them because of their hatred and their enmity against Him.

Now I will shift gears here and look at the timeline of events for the Day of the Lord. It is important to understand that the Great Tribulation is *not* the Day of the Lord.

There are three successive world-shaking events to come. First, and now next to occur, is the Great Tribulation. Second, immediately after the Tribulation, the heavenly signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And third, following the supernatural signs in the heavens, the terrible Day of the Lord.

**Joel 2:31** The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before [“before” tells us exactly when those things happen.] the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.

As we have seen that great and terrible Day of the Lord is mentioned five times in the book of Joel: Joel 1:15; Joel 2:1; Joel 2:11; Joel 2:31; and in Joel 3:14. Notice how Joel was inspired to describe it in Joel 1:15.

**Joel 1:15** Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty.

Now notice how God inspired the prophet Zephaniah to describe it in Zephaniah.

**Zephaniah 1:14-17** “The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. [Remember Joel 3:9 which talks about those same “mighty men.”] That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. “I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse.”

This is the time of God’s wrath. This is the time of God’s plagues sent upon the sinners of this world. God says He will bring this distress upon defiant and sinful men who hate truth and peace, and love evil.

Now this is not the Great Tribulation. This day of the Eternal’s plagues will not come until after the heavenly signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And those startling supernatural heavenly signs will not come until immediately after the Great Tribulation.

It is important to understand the distinction between the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. People have heard of the Great Tribulation, but less have heard of and understand the Day of the Lord. What is surprising is that the Day of the Lord is described in more than thirty different prophecies scattered through both the Old and New Testaments. But the Great Tribulation is spoken of, by this term, only in Matthew 24:21, 29.

Why is this? Because people have been misled and mistaken that the Great Tribulation is God’s wrath; that it is God’s plagues upon the sinners of the world. The Great Tribulation is not the wrath of God, rather it is just the opposite. This is the wrath of Satan the Devil. He knows he has a short time and he is going to make “the best of it.”

When God intervenes, when God’s plagues fall, when Christ returns to this earth as the King of kings and Lord of lords, to rule the earth, Satan knows full well his rule is over and he will be imprisoned. The Great Tribulation is Satan’s last persecution and martyrdom against the true sons of God whom he had deceived, as he had deceived the whole world. He not only carries it out on the sons of God, but he also carries it out on the world. So the world reaps what it has sown for so many years and it reaps it from its own god, Satan.

Those of the former great martyrdom of saints are told that the judgments of God, the plagues which lead up to, and occur at the time of Christ's return to earth, cannot come until their fellow servants and their brethren had been slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held.

The Great Tribulation is another coming martyrdom of God's people. And what follows? The sixth seal will mark the beginning of the intervention of God in world affairs. The terrifying signs in the heavens, and then people will cry out, "The terrible day of God's wrath has come!"

**Revelation 6:12-17** I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. [this is the 6<sup>th</sup> seal, the 5<sup>th</sup> seal is the Tribulation.] And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

This is the Day of the Lord, bringing us, at last, the return of Christ to earth in all power and glory, to rule the peoples of the earth, and to bring us peace. We do not have to be afraid or worry over the things coming on the earth in the meantime.

In this same prophecy of Jesus, as recorded by Luke, regarding the world disturbances now ahead, regarding the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, Jesus ended His Olivet prophecy with these assuring words in Luke 21.

**Luke 21:36** "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

So God will obviously protect us and give us the strength to bear up under anything that comes our way.

We must be asking God to help us to have the right balance in studying the prophecies and carefully watching what we do in our own lives and keeping our ears to the ground regarding world events as they fulfill prophecy, and most importantly praying that you and your brethren may be counted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before Christ at His coming. We are part of the Family of God so we are as close as people should be. We should be praying for one another, not just ourselves, that God will count us worthy.

Now why does God bring plagues upon the earth? For about 6,000 years God has sent His loving messages to mankind. In love, God revealed His law and His way of life that would lead to everything good and desirable, to our first parents, Adam and Eve. God has sent all His prophets with His message of peace, revealing to mankind the way to peace and happiness, but people have rejected the message, and killed the prophets.

They put to death God's Son who brought the good news of the Kingdom of God. They martyred Jesus' apostles who went out into the world with the message of God's way of life, and God's rule over our lives.

All these men of God have pleaded with this rebellious world in love. They have brought a message of peace, of love, of mercy, and compassion. Through them, God has pleaded with this stiff-necked and self-willed world. God has warned the world of where its own ways and devices will finally lead, to the total annihilation of human life from this planet.

In love and tender mercy, God has given this stubborn, misguided human race every chance during the long history of mankind, to save itself from a self-imposed destruction. But people have not heeded in the past and will not heed today. Unless God calls them and gives them His Holy Spirit they cannot understand and overcome Satan, sin, and the world.

They continue, even now, to devise forces of destruction that will result in the self-destruction of the human race, unless God intervenes. But God is about to step in and speak to this rebellious and hellbent world in the only language the world will heed. God will soon punish this world for its evil.

As any loving parent punishes his child who will not listen to kind and loving admonition, so now God is going to punish this world with just judgments; with plagues so terrible that the world will at last be forced to turn from its wicked ways and to seek God and His ways that lead to peace and everything good.

God will prevent the self-destruction of humanity. He will save this world from itself and that is the period coming, described in more than thirty different prophecies scattered through both the Old and New Testaments. That period of God's wrath is the Day of the Lord, which will lead directly into the second coming of Christ, to bring us, at last, true world peace and joy.

But, as we begin Revelation 7, we find that the Day of the Lord, the time of these terrible plagues God will send, is to be held up temporarily, until a certain other event of God's doing takes place. Now notice the introduction of this great prophecy here in verses 1-4. This is talking about the seal of God.

**Revelation 7:1-4** After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed.

Now consider carefully a few important points. First, the preceding words show that the judgments of the Day of the Lord have come at this exact juncture. But God holds it back.

Notice that just as the Day of the Lord is about to strike, John sees in his vision four angels, holding back the four winds which are about to blow on the earth. These winds blow the seven trumpets which are to follow. These, of course, are symbols, but they represent things this world will find are very real. But they are restrained until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads.

First to be sealed are the 144,000. And what is sealed in the foreheads? They are sealed by the Holy Spirit, in their foreheads. Revelation 14:1 tells us it is the Father's name that is written there. Jesus' very last prayer for His church was that they would be kept in the Father's name.

**Joel 3:16** The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel.

The very manifestation of His coming, so fearful for the unbelieving nations, gives assurance of protection and strength for God's own.

**Isaiah 26:20-21** Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the Lord comes out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will also disclose her blood, and will no more cover her slain.

So everything will change when the King of kings comes back and begins His reign. God promises through His prophet Joel: a holy city, a restored land, a cleansed people, and a glorious King. Continuing on in Joel 3,

**Joel 3:17** "So you shall know that I am the Lord your God [this statement here is the whole theme of the book of Ezekiel], dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again."

After this awesome display of divine power, Israel will recognize and believe that the Eternal truly dwells among them.

As Israel had learned of God's sovereign concern for His people through judgment, now as His restored wife she would know of His eternal compassion through her deliverance and His abiding presence with her.

In contrast to the nations that would learn who God really is, Israel would know the redeeming power and the continuous enjoyment of His glorious presence with her forever. Because the Eternal Himself is there, Jerusalem will be everlastingly holy. No one but His own will again set foot in it.

The judgment on the nations, however, is never meant to be an end in itself. Through it God means to bring blessing to His people Israel. Joel concludes with words of promise for God's downtrodden ones. Even the mountains and hills, ordinarily the least productive of all soil, will flourish abundantly. Water will be present in great supply; a perennial fountain will furnish all the water needed. The Valley of Acacias, on the border between Moab and Israel beyond Jordan, known for its dryness, will be well watered.

Egypt and Edom are representative of all Israel's enemies. This can be readily seen from "all" stated in Joel 3:2, 11-12. They will be made a desolation, but Judah and Jerusalem will abide eternally.

God's people will remain, and by judging the nations the Eternal will wipe away the blood-guiltiness of the nations in their persecution of God's people.

**Joel 3:18-21** And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Acacias. "Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of violence against the people of Judah, for they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah

shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had not acquitted; for the Lord dwells in Zion.”

How is that possible? It is not that the sins of the descendants of the Israelite's are necessarily any less than those of the surrounding nations. Joel's prophecy was occasioned by a locust plague in Israel that was a warning by God of an even greater judgment to come, precisely on Israel. Israel was not innocent, nor are all members of the church.

Even though our sins are forgiven and we genuinely repent, we are all still guilty of sinning. The difference between the godly and the ungodly, is that the ungodly live their lives sinfully, but God's people are not that way. True members of God's church do not sin as a way of life, but do fall short of the grace of God by sinning out of weakness.

**Hebrews 12:14-17** Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it [that is the blessing] diligently with tears.

The author of Hebrews is not saying that Esau longed to repent, which is why God refused to forgive him. We know that from Peter's denials and subsequent forgiveness that those who genuinely repent are always forgiven. So obviously Esau was not repentant.

As we pursue peace and holiness, Christians should watch out for each other in order that no one falls short of the gift of eternal salvation, that is fails to obtain the grace of God. The author of Hebrews warns against "bitterness" by alluding to Deuteronomy 29:18, which describes one who turns away from God and pursues other gods.

Esau is deemed unholy, likely due to his treating his birthright as profane. Sexually immoral applies to him because although there is no direct Old Testament evidence of this, he did nevertheless, marry multiple wives and chose them against his father Isaac's instruction.

It is obvious that God's instruction in Hebrews calls for His people to be holy and sexually responsible. After Esau's rebellion against God and his father Isaac, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected.

Esau's failure to gain back the inheritance he had rejected also serves to caution us against rejecting the inheritance offered to us. It is a very serious thing, and we always need to be thankful for what God has given us, especially the abundant spiritual blessings.

**Hebrews 6:4-6** For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

“Fall away” involves a sustained, committed rejection of Christ and a departure from God’s way of life. To renew them again to repentance means to bring them once again to repent of their sins. This wording alone does not specify whether the earlier calling and repentance was merely outward, or whether it was a genuine, heartfelt repentance and overcoming that accompanied true saving faith.

**Hebrews 10:26-27** For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

So this is a warning to professing members of God’s church who have heard the truth. The fact that they go on sinning deliberately, even after receiving knowledge of the truth, indicates that the people in view are not, and probably never were, genuine believers.

In other words, these are people who have never genuinely embraced God’s truth in a way that has resulted in a life of faith, obedience, and the bearing of good fruit. There is no place for them to turn for forgiveness outside of Christ’s sacrifice, which they have rejected.

Now these verses in Hebrews are used by God to call genuine Christians to faith, obedience, and perseverance. And, if there is no evidence of good fruit in one’s life, these verses are used to challenge such people to give fearful consideration as to whether they are really genuine members of God’s church.

To conclude here, let me quickly sum up the prophecy of Joel. The message of Joel was not limited to national affairs but covered the entire international scene from Joel’s own time to the culmination of the Day of the Lord.

Despite tremendous blessings and success in the Jewish nation, faith had degenerated into an empty traditionalism and their lives into moral decadence. You can even say that they became humanistic.

Under divine inspiration Joel told the people that the locust plague was a warning of a greater judgment that was imminent unless they repented and returned to full fellowship with God. If they did, God would abundantly pardon them, restore the health of the land, and give them again the elements needed to offer the sacrifices so that they might restart their relationship with God. But by their flagrant sin they had forfeited any right to worship God. What was needed was a repentant heart. The thought of further judgment led Joel also to reveal God’s intentions for the Day of the Lord.

Essential to Joel’s whole prophecy is his teaching about the Day of the Lord. By the skillful use of this term, which gives cohesion to his entire message, Joel demonstrated that God is sovereignly active in all that comes to pass, directing all things to their appointed end.

The Day of the Lord is a time greatly anticipated by the people of Judah because they believed that God would then judge the nations and restore Israel to her former glory. Yet, according to Joel, God would punish not only the nations but unfaithful Israel as well. He urged everyone to repent, and told of a day when God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh.

Joel had insightful faith in God, and he taught, in every section of the book, that we must have faithful reliance on the sufficiency of God. Joel focused on the basic principle that God is sovereignly guiding the affairs of earth's history toward His preconceived final goal.

He reminds us that God is the God of grace and mercy, of loving kindness and patience, and of justice and righteousness. God calls for true and vital worship on behalf of His followers who have trusted Him for salvation by grace through faith.

Joel's central concern is God's role to His people Israel, and in spiritual principle to His church.

While God may allow and use other nations to chastise Israel for her sins, He has reserved a remnant to Himself. On them He will pour out His Spirit, to them He will manifest Himself with marvelous signs, and He will regather them and bring them to the Promised Land.

He will gather for judgment those nations that have dealt severely with His people and bring them to a great and final battle near Jerusalem. On that awesome day, He Himself will lead His people in triumph, thereby ushering in an era of unparalleled peace and prosperity—the Millennium.

The moral of this story is that everything God does and allows is for our ultimate good!