

Joel 2:1-24

Review

Last time we began looking at the prophecy of Joel. We learned that Joel itself contains no clues regarding when and where Joel prophesied, and that the Bible contains no other references to Joel son of Pethuel. Having no geographical or historical context makes it hard to accurately interpret Joel's prophecy. Before we began looking at Joel's prophecy, we discussed the fact that interpreting Biblical prophecy always hinges on the interpreter's own beliefs and presuppositions. Therefore, all interpretations of prophecy must be considered carefully with a strong focus on the text of the prophecy itself rather than the opinions of the interpreter. This isn't to say a given interpretation is necessarily incorrect – simply that all interpretations must be considered carefully and critically.

Such is the case with our interpretation of Joel as an “end-times” prophecy, although – unlike Daniel – Joel never says this per se. It is certainly possible that Joel foretold catastrophic events that have since come about. But most likely Joel's prophecy is of the end-times – the final, devastating judgment of God known throughout God's Word as The Day of the Lord. In examining Joel's prophecy, we saw how it interlocks with some of the other end-times prophecies found in Daniel 9-12, Matthew 24, Revelation 18, and 2 Peter 3. Although these prophecies are disconcerting due to the harshness of God's coming judgment against sin, we remembered that all of us may be rescued out of God's wrath through faith in Jesus' Gospel.

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Let's continue now with our study of Joel's prophecy.

Part of God's coming judgment upon Israel and all mankind on the Day of the Lord will be carried out by a great multitude that will beset Zion (Jerusalem). Joel says here that the armies gathered against Zion will be greater and more powerful than any ever seen in history or ever to be seen again.

*¹Blow 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,
²a 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.
³Fire 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.
⁴Their appearance is like the appearance of horses,
and like war horses they run.
⁵As with the rumbling of chariots,
they leap on the tops of the mountains,*

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*like the crackling of a flame of fire
devouring the stubble,
like a powerful army
drawn up for battle.*

*⁶Before them peoples are in anguish;
all faces grow pale.*

*⁷Like warriors they charge;
like soldiers they scale the wall.
They march each on his way;
they do not swerve from their paths.*

*⁸They do not jostle one another;
each marches in his path;
they burst through the weapons
and are not halted.*

*⁹They leap upon the city,
they run upon the walls,
they climb up into the houses,
they enter through the windows like a thief.*

*¹⁰The earth quakes before them;
the heavens tremble.*

*The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.* Joel 2:1-10 (ESV)

Joel's description of the coming assault upon Zion is quite graphic and clear. We won't dwell too long upon it. Indeed, as Joel asked at the beginning of his prophecy, the world has never yet seen such a thing throughout history – even at the very height of the terror and destruction of mankind's worst wars.

Joel says here that this Day of the LORD is “near.” Yet we see throughout God's Word that the exact time of this coming catastrophe is and will remain a mystery. Therefore, we must continually be ready to stand up proclaiming the Gospel of our LORD until His Day finally arrives. That was the lesson of Jesus' Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

Some have proposed that Joel's descriptions of this assault in Joel 2:5 – *As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains* – and in Joel 2:3 – *Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns.* – are references to present day helicopters or other V/STOL aircraft and modern nuclear weapons respectively. Maybe so. But that's just speculation, and in my (always) humble opinion a somewhat egocentric and arrogant attempt to mold the prophecy into our own times – thereby invoking fear in the interest of fame and profit. This proposal has a flimsy Biblical basis, and I wouldn't personally lend it much credence. What is certain from the words of the prophecy itself is that the destruction brought upon God's Land in His coming Day will be complete and without historical precedent or future equal. The prophecy also foretells as we shall soon see that following this devastation God will retain a remnant of His people, and that He will renew His creation. Therefore, the prophecy should invoke hope and joyful anticipation rather than fear in the hearts of God's people. Only those whose names remain unwritten in the Lamb's Book of Life need fear the fulfillment of God's judgment that Joel foretells.

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NOTE – Some have said that the USA is not mentioned in Biblical prophecy. However, we see clearly from Zechariah 14:2 that **all** nations will gather to battle against Jerusalem. On the Day of the Lord, the remnant of Israel will stand alone with only God to defend her. His might will be sufficient, not only to break the attack against Zion by every nation, but to restore all things to their initial perfection on the sixth day of creation. (Genesis 1:31)

***11The 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 2:11 (ESV)***

Yet immense and unprecedented as this final onslaught upon Zion will be, the power of God and His army is infinitely greater. We see this time and again in God's Word. When David took on the mighty Philistine champion Goliath, he knew that man-made weaponry and armor would be ineffective against him. But David placed his entire trust in God to not only deliver him, but to prevail over Israel's enemies, saying to Goliath...

***45b...“You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin,
but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies
of Israel, whom you have defied. 1 Samuel 17:45b (ESV)***

Joel asks who can endure the Day of the LORD. Only those who stand with God will endure. Knowing this, we all must make the same choice Joshua set before the Israelites which God Himself lays before us all even now.

***15And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you
will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the
River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me
and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:15 (ESV)***

Zechariah associates the onslaught of this great multitude upon Zion with the return of the LORD to Jerusalem.

***1Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will
be divided in your midst. 2For I will gather all the nations against
Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered
and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of
the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3Then the LORD will go out
and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. 4On
that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before
Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from
east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move
northward, and the other half southward. Zechariah 14:1-4 (ESV)***

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John also speaks of this Day. The Prince of Peace who came to offer up His own life to put an end to the reign of sin in the hearts of mankind will return as the Lion of Judah, leading His armies to thwart the great onslaught upon Zion foretold by Joel and establish His own reign over the Earth.

¹¹Then 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. ¹²His 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. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From 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. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV)

The devastation Joel foretells in the beginning of his prophecy is just the initial phase of the coming Day of the Lord. God must utterly destroy His present creation before He can truly make **all** things new and free from the ravages caused by mankind's sinful rebellion against God.

My wife and I learned an important lesson in this regard when we had an addition built onto our house a few years ago. The original house was in very poor condition, needing a complete rebuild. We foolishly decided to retain and add onto the original dwelling. Our intent was to keep living in the old part of the house while the new addition was being built. As it turned out though, we had to move out into temporary accommodation for much longer than we anticipated, requiring us to spend more money on the project than we had hoped. We also had to make some compromises in the design of the new portion of the house to accommodate the continued presence of the old. In retrospect, it would have been more cost-effective to simply tear down and replace the old dwelling. Furthermore, the result would have been more to our liking, and we would not now have to cope with the compromises we made in the design.

So it is with the renewed creation God will bring about on the Day of the Lord. To make all things new and perfect (Revelation 21:5), God first needs to completely destroy the old creation sullied by mankind's sin. However, God will retain a remnant of His children whom He will rescue out of the coming destruction. Paul wrote a wonderful encouragement about this to the church at Thessalonica.

¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then 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. 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 (ESV)

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How can we ensure that we are part of this remnant whom the Lord will spare? Joel tells us here in Joel 2:12-14.

***¹²“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³and 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.
¹⁴Who 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 2:12-14 (ESV)***

We must humble ourselves before the awesome power of God who will rain down the destruction Joel foretells on the coming Day of the Lord. Our hearts must be broken over our sins which led Jesus to the cross. Yet, we must not be dismayed. God’s rescue of repentant sinners out of destruction and His restoration of all things are the very reason that Jesus came and offered His own life on the cross in our place. King David wrote of this in his beautiful prayer of repentance for his adultery with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder by proxy of her husband Uriah.

***¹⁴Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.
¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
¹⁶For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Psalm 51:14-17 (ESV)***

***¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion;
consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
¹⁶gather 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. Joel 2:15-16 (ESV)***

God offers to spare everyone from the coming destruction of the old creation. But our devotion to His Gospel and our reliance upon His mercy must be total. We must not look back or allow anything at all in the present, dying creation to distract us from our devotion to God. Jesus spoke of this.

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62b ... “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:62b (ESV)

37Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

39Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 10:37-39 (ESV)

17Between 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?’” Joel 2:17 (ESV)

Joel’s talk of the priests here immediately begs some questions. If the utter destruction Joel foretells at the beginning of his prophecy will take place at the end of days after the animal sacrifices of Joel’s own day have been put to an end in favor of the much better sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for permanent salvation out of sin, what does that have to do with the priests Joel mentions here in Joel 2:17? Won’t they be out of a job on the Day of the Lord? The short answer is, “I don’t know.” Perhaps Joel was speaking of future priests and ministers of the LORD – in our present day or in the future. These important questions must unfortunately remain unanswered.

But the question Joel says these priests (whoever they are) must ask of God is reminiscent of what Moses asked God when He threatened to destroy Israel for their idolatrous worship of the golden calf.

11But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. 13Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel [Jacob], your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’” 14And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. Exodus 32:11-14 (ESV)

ASIDE – Before we move on, we need to remind ourselves about the omniscient and eternally unchangeable character of the LORD our God. Despite what Moses wrote about this incident, God didn’t “relent” from any disaster He had actually planned for His people. God knew about the golden calf before Jesus even uttered the words “Let there be light.” He knew that Adam and Eve would rebel against His single commandment in the Garden of Eden, too. In fact, God had determined His plan to rescue His children out of the death and destruction brought on by our sins even before He created any of us. Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and the destruction and restoral Joel foretells for the Day of the

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Lord are not components of God's "plan B" just in case His creatures sullied His perfect creation. They were in God's perfect plan of creation from the very beginning.

Furthermore, God will not and cannot "relent" of anything whatsoever. God is unchanging from everlasting to everlasting. He cannot learn because He already knows everything. He cannot change His mind about anything simply because He remains eternally as He always has been. The sayings we find in His Word like Moses writing in Exodus 32:14 "*...the LORD relented...*" or in Genesis 6:6 that "*...the LORD regretted that he had made man...*" or Joel asking in Joel 2:14 if God might "*turn and relent*" are for God's readers' benefit. They don't do justice to God's true being. They seek to make the infinite love and mercy of God and His own omniscient, unchanging nature comprehensible to our limited minds.

The technical term for this is anthropopathism – imputing human thoughts and emotions to non-humans – inanimate objects, animals, or even God Himself. Anthropopathism is a human coping mechanism trying to explain behavior that human beings cannot truly comprehend – much less communicate properly.

18Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.

19The 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.

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. Joel 2:18-20 (ESV)

I have stated in our discussion of Joel 1 that Joel's prophecy of the Day of the Lord is clearly an end-times prophecy that dovetails neatly with similar prophecies in Daniel, Revelation, Zecharian, 2 Peter, and with Jesus' own teaching in the so-called "Olivet Discourse" of Matthew 24. I continue to hold that view. Furthermore, it seems apparent from Joel's own words that the destruction brought about on that Day will be virtually complete with only a remnant of God's people remaining.

Recall also, I mentioned the possibility in our [discussion of Ezekiel 38-39](#) that the invasion by Gog of Magog might not foretell an intermediate event, but the final defeat of Babylon and the destruction of the old creation foretold in Revelation. With all that said though, it seems from Joel 2:18-20 that God will drive the invaders Joel spoke of earlier into the Dead Sea and the desert land surrounding it before restoring the prosperity of His land and people. Thus, part of Joel's prophecy may be about an intermediate event also foretold in Ezekiel 38-39. The statement in Joel 2:20 about the stench from the defeated armies is reminiscent of Ezekiel's statements about the burial of Gog's armies.

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Clearly though, Joel's prophecy also pertains to a final event in which God will utterly destroy the old creation and replace it with a new creation. This is a conundrum! So as the college textbook writers who don't know the answer to a problem themselves often write, "The solution to this problem is left as an exercise for the student."

*²¹"Fear not, O land;
be glad and rejoice,
for the LORD has done great things!*

*²²Fear 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.*

*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.*

*²⁴"The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.* Joel 2:21-24 (ESV)

This restoration seems to be speaking of a renewal and replenishment of the current creation rather than an entirely new creation. Perhaps, Jesus will restore the land during His thousand-year reign while Satan is bound, before his final defeat and God's final judgment of mankind at the Great White Throne. If we consider Joel's prophecy in this light, it fits well with the other end-times prophecies we have mentioned. We find several relevant events described in Revelation 16-22 that are without doubt related to Joel's, Zechariah's, and Ezekiel's prophecies; However, it is very difficult to establish a logical timeline for these events that fully explains how these prophecies fit in together. Revelation is not a strictly chronological account – far from it. John's vision is best understood as a collection of related impressions rather than a strict sequence of future events.

Looking Ahead

As we shall soon see at the end of his prophecy, Joel also seems to either backtrack or to foretell another catastrophic event separate from the one Joel likened to a swarm of locusts in Joel 1. First though, we will look at the wonderful promises for the future found at the end of Joel 2.