

Joel:



Warning!
The Day of the Lord is
coming!
TURN BACK!

consider

comprehend

connect

A 3 C's contemplative Bible study

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All Scriptures quoted, partially quoted, or adapted from the New American Standard Version of the Holy Bible with 1995 Update.

Introduction to the Book of Joel

Author: Very little data exists to identify Joel any further than his own comments in 1:1. Some of the modern work attempting to establish the identity of the author has distracted some scholars from the message and focus of the book, so it will suffice for this study to simply state the book as written by “Joel, the son of Pethuel”. Joel’s name means “Yahweh is God”.

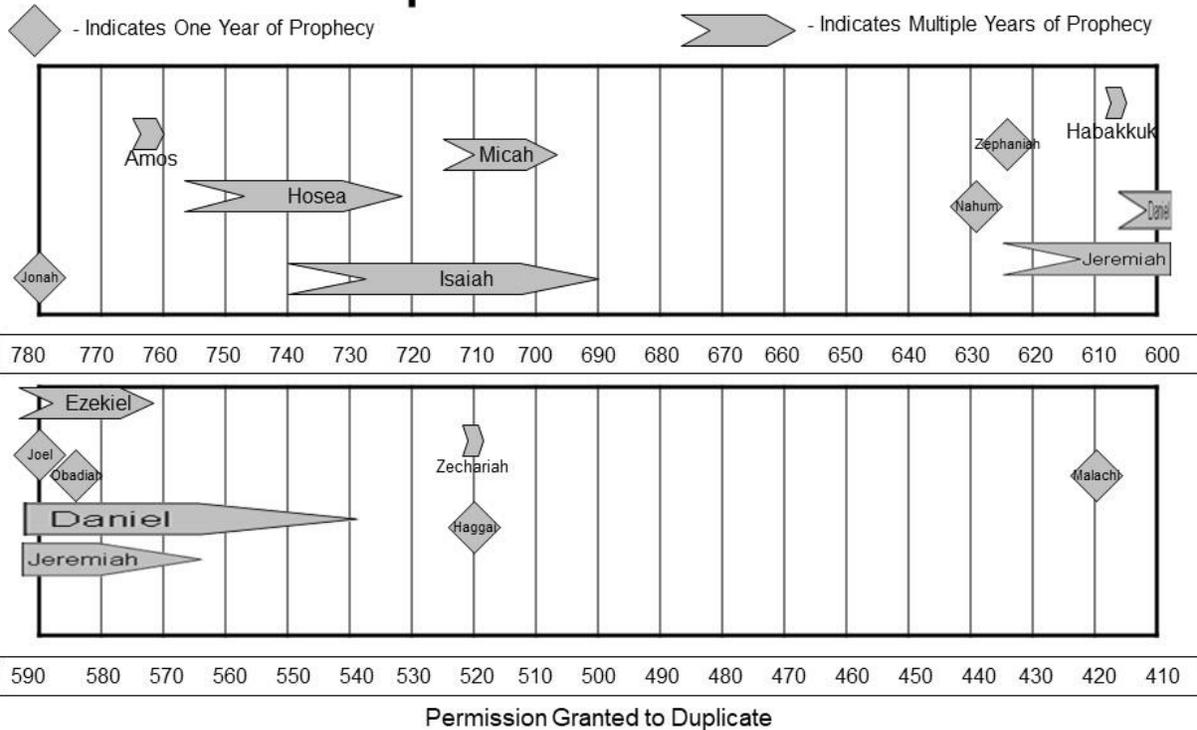
Date: Scholars have debated the date of writing for the book of Joel for some time. There are very few indicators within the text to help with the date of its writing. There are no kings mentioned and only a couple of other references to assist in this area. There is no reference to Joel in any other book of the Bible to correlate the day in which he lived. The book mentions a great locust plague and offering sacrifices at the temple. Even the mention of the invading armies does not help as this was a rather regular feature of life in Judah.

While there is no way to definitively establish a date for the writing of the book, there are a few features that can help us to estimate one. First, the mention of the temple would seem to indicate the temple had not been destroyed, so it would make sense to place the writing prior to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Second, as the book does not mention Israel or Samaria at all, it would make sense that this is due to the book being written after the destruction and deportation of Israel in 722 BC. Third, the tone of the call to repentance and the description of the surrounding and invading army would seem to indicate the prophecy comes rather closely to the destruction in 586 BC, which is just around the corner. For these reasons, a good date would be around 590 BC for the writing of the book.

Contemporary Prophets: Assuming the comments above are accurate for dating the writing of the book, Joel served as a prophet in conjunction with Jeremiah (627 BC - ~580 BC). Joel is not mentioned in the book of Jeremiah, but this is not a reason to question the dating. Joel would have also been a contemporary of Ezekiel as Ezekiel began his ministry in about 623 BC and continued to 571 BC. Ezekiel was the voice of God to those already in captivity and mentions some of the same apocalyptic hope to those already in captivity. Daniel is another contemporary of Joel’s as Daniel was taken into captivity in 605 BC and serves until about 530 BC. Daniel was God’s voice in the palace of the conquerors. To summarize, Joel spoke to the people of Judah and Jerusalem while Jeremiah was speaking to mainly the rulers of Judah and Jerusalem. Ezekiel was speaking to the people in exile while Daniel was speaking to their captors. In all four books, the message is the same: Yahweh is God, so you had better decide to serve Him and Him alone. Because there are different audiences, there are different means of communicating this truth, but it is the same message.

See the Prophetic Timeline on the next page for information dates of the prophets.

Prophetic Timeline



Historical Situation: Taken from the book itself, there has been a great locust invasion that has destroyed the grain, vineyards, and fruit. The nation of Judah is surrounded by an invading army and the situation is becoming desperate. The people are wanting to lean on their status as God’s people as a means of avoiding the devastation, but they have neglected the temple worship that is meant to define their relationship with their God.

Main Focus of the Book: The main focus of the book of Joel is simply, “The Day of the Lord is near! Turn back to blessing or continue on to judgment!”

Outline of Joel:

- I. Prophet Presented (1:1)
- II. The Day of the Lord is Near (1:2-20)
 - a. God has been trying to get your attention (1:2-12)
 - i. By locusts (1:2-4)
 - ii. By invasion reports (1:5-7)
 - iii. By disruption of worship (1:8-9)
 - iv. By famine (1:10-12)
 - b. God has been calling out to everyone (1:13-14b)
 - i. The religious leaders (1:13)
 - ii. The elders (1:14a)
 - iii. Everyone (1:14b)
 - c. God has been warning about the Day of the Lord Being Near! (1:15-20)
 - i. It will be a day of judgment (1:15)
 - ii. It will be a day of sorrow (1:16)
 - iii. It will be a day of desolation (1:17-18)
 - iv. It will be a day with no relief (1:19-20)
- III. Turn Back to God (2:1-27)
 - a. Why? Because you will be destroyed if you do not (2:1-11)
 - b. How? (2:12-17)
 - i. With brokenness (2:12)
 - ii. With genuineness (2:13a)
 - iii. With faith in God (2:13b-14)
 - iv. With urgency (2:15-17)
 - c. But how will God respond? (2:18-27)
 - i. He will have pity on you (2:18)
 - ii. He will prepare you with promises (2:19)
 - iii. He will protect you (2:20)
 - iv. He will provide for you (2:21-26)
 - 1. He will provide perspective on Who He is (2:21-22)
 - 2. He will provide prevention from returning to sin (2:23)
 - 3. He will provide permanence to remain in the land (2:24)
 - 4. He will provide reasons for you to praise Him (2:25-26)
 - 5. He will provide a position in His family (2:27)
- IV. How Will We Recognize the Day of the Lord? (2:28-3:21)
 - a. What will happen after the Day of the Lord (2:28-29)
 - b. What will happen before the Day of the Lord (2:30-32)
 - c. What will happen in the Day of the Lord (3:1-21)

Personal Word: Just as in Joel's day, people in our day have a tendency to blame God for things in their lives that do not go according to their plans. Rather than look and listen for what God is telling them through the circumstances of their lives, they listen to popular opinion that tells them that either God is a capricious and uncaring Being, or He does not exist at all. The people of Joel's day had to see through the famine, locust infestations and invading armies to hear that God was calling them back to their relationship with Him.

If God is allowing circumstances to arise in your life that are not to your liking, why not take the time to set yourself aside and seek Him for what He is up to or wants to develop in your life? It will require faith, brokenness, genuineness, urgency and maybe even a little perseverance before you can see Him for Who He is. Once you do that, you will learn to trust Him even though you don't understand your circumstances.

One final note: some of the prophecies of Joel's day have application for us right now and some are a warning of what is to come; however, don't put off connecting to God through a personal relationship just because you think the Day of the Lord is far into the future. Joel's message still applies, "The day of the Lord is near!" My prayer is that this lesson will help you to connect with Him and to persevere.

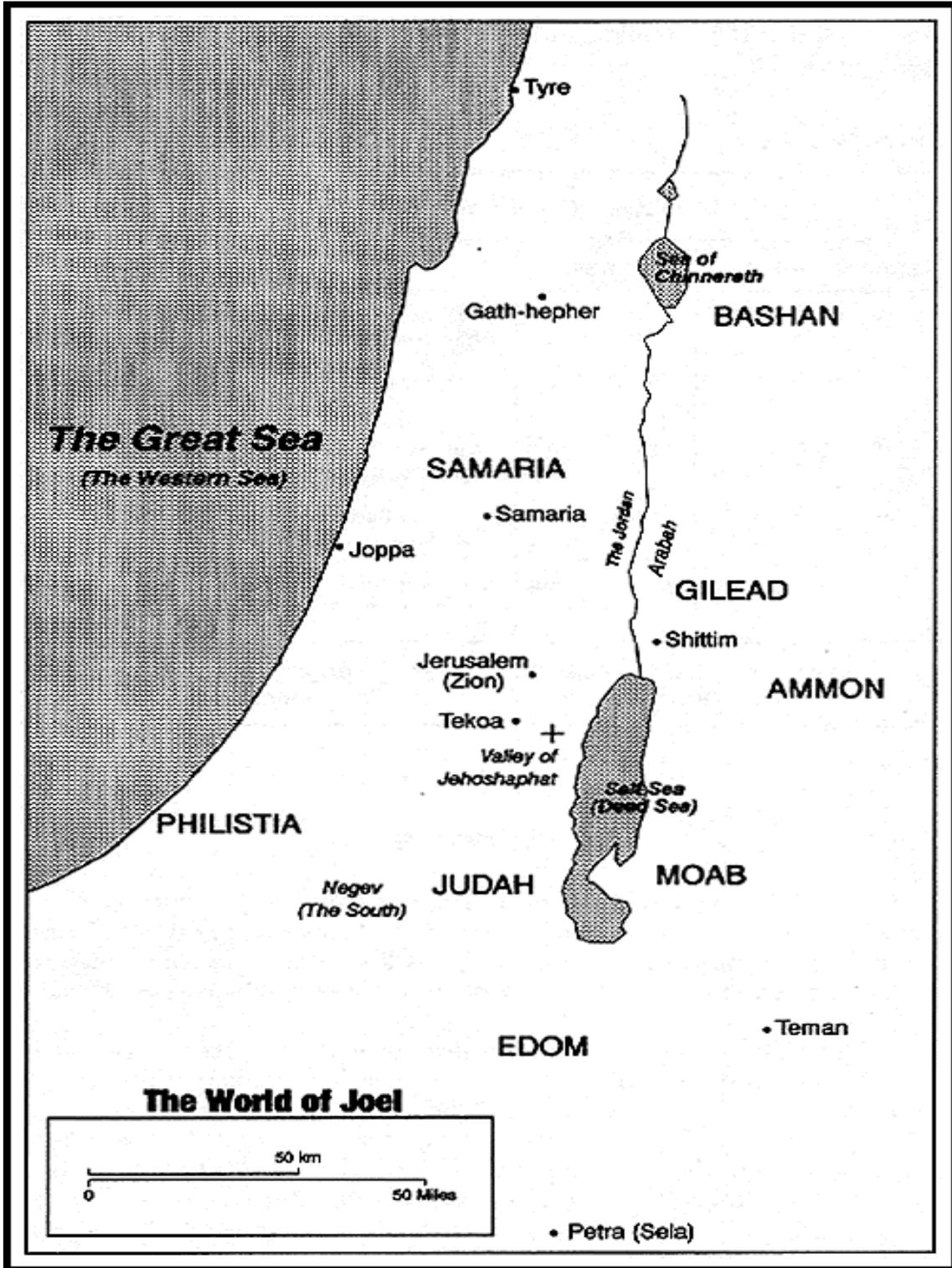
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Reading Record for Book of Joel:

- Chapter 1
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3

Record Observations you gain from first reading these chapters:

Map of Geography of Joel



¹ Smith, James E., *Old Testament Survey Series: The Minor Prophets*, College Press Publishing Company, Joplin, MO, 1994.



Lesson One: Hello! Is Anyone Home? (Joel 1:1-20)

I have a confession to make. I hate it when I call someone, with whom I need to urgently communicate, and they don't answer. I hate it even more when they either have not set up their voicemail or their box is full and cannot take any more messages. This is probably a character flaw of mine, but it is true. The ironic thing is that I can sometimes be a little slow or even irresponsible in returning others' messages to me. While most of the time this is merely inconvenient, at times it can be dangerous. For instance, I was told this story by my grandmother when she was well-advanced in age, so it may not be totally accurate, but you will get the gist of it...

Once, when I was younger, my uncle called my father to tell him that he was in town and was coming over to visit as he needed a place to stay for the night. He left the message on our answering machine, but either my father did not hear it or did not check the machine. Somehow, the message was not received. At about 1:00 AM, my uncle showed up at our door. It was December in south Texas and remarkably cold that night. My uncle had on a long coat with the collar pulled up around his face and he was wearing a stocking cap.

My father, roused from a deep sleep by the pounding on the front door, retrieved his gun from his nightstand and proceeded to the front door. He looked out the peephole to see a man dressed in a dark coat and stocking cap dancing back and forth and jumping up and down and pounding on the door. My father eased open the door, stuck the gun barrel out the crack and told this "stranger" to leave his family alone or he would be shot.

My father and uncle were on great terms with one another. What would cause my father to threaten to shoot and kill my uncle? Missed communication. Not miscommunication, but missed communication.

In this first lesson on the book of Joel, we begin by listening to God describe just how He had attempted to get the attention of the people of Judah. Far from being cruel, He had actually been trying to get their attention in order that they might avoid the destruction that was coming their way. As you study this lesson, ask yourself, "How has God tried to get my attention in the past?" Is He trying now?

Describe a humorous story in your own life of when a lack of communication caused an embarrassing situation:

Consider It

1. Who was Joel addressing? (1:1-3)
2. What was Joel's goal in giving the people this prophecy? (1:1-3)
3. What natural phenomenon was Joel describing? (1:4-7)
4. Who was the first group affected by this phenomenon? (1:4-7)
5. What other man-made event was happening? (1:4-7)
6. What was the result of both events? (1:4-7)
7. What groups were affected next? (1:8-12)
8. What crops had been affected by these events? (1:8-12)
9. What effect did this have on the people? (1:8-12)
10. How did God want the people to respond to this tragedy? (1:13-14)

11. What group of people was this to affect? (1:13-14)

12. How did Joel describe the Day of the Lord? (1:15-20)

13. Who was to be judged in the Day of the Lord? (1:15-20)

14. How did this judgment affect the rest of creation? (1:15-20)

Comprehend It

1. What was the purpose of this book from your reading of these first passages?

2. How was the plague of locusts similar to the invading army?

3. What did God's addressing the drunkards first indicate about His people?

4. What three areas had been disrupted through the locusts and invading army?

5. What response was God looking for from the following groups:
 - a. The religious leaders?

 - b. The elders?

c. The people?

6. From the following verses, describe fasting:

a. Nehemiah 1:4

b. Nehemiah 9:1

c. Esther 4:3

d. Esther 9:31

e. Psalm 35:13

f. Psalm 69:10

g. Daniel 6:18

h. Daniel 9:3

i. Joel 2:12

j. Matthew 6:16

k. Matthew 6:18

l. Matthew 17:21

m. Mark 2:18

n. Acts 13:2

o. Acts 14:23

7. Why would God call for this?

8. From Jeremiah 7:4, Jeremiah 8:8, Jeremiah 9:23, what were some of the objections the people raised about this destruction?

9. Why would the people make these objections?

10. Would the people have seen the Day of the Lord as a day of deliverance or a day of judgment? Why?

11. Does their view agree with what God was communicating through Joel? Why or why not?

12. Understanding that Baal is not mentioned in this passage, but was being worshiped as a god of fertility, how does this knowledge help you understand what God was up to in these verses?

13. Describe the day of the Lord from this passage.

Connect It

1. The purpose of Joel's prophecy was for the people to not only hear from God, but to pass it along to others. When was the last time you shared the gospel with someone?

2. God tried to get the attention of the people through some drastic measures because they had not listened to more subtle means. How has God gotten your attention in the past?

3. From the circumstances of your life, what might God be wanting to communicate to you today?

4. What is the purpose of fasting?

5. God called the people to set themselves aside with prayer and fasting. When was the last time you were drawn to fast and pray? Describe it below.

6. If you have never fasted, why not?

7. What other ways have you used to focus on hearing or responding to God?

8. What are you struggling with right now and how can this be helpful?

9. What will you do as a result of studying these verses?



Lesson Two: The “How To” Book of Turning Back to God (Joel 2:1-27)

I don't know about you, but I am not the best handyman. Sometimes I can fix things or build things, but only if I have a “How To” book. I must say that a “How To” book does not guarantee success for me but it sure helps me to even know where to start! Whether it is a cook book, repair manual or schematic, “How

To” books can be very helpful for even the most experienced tech, let alone us amateurs.

Perhaps a story will illustrate this truth...

When I was in the Navy, I served on a small ship and had the opportunity to work with all of the different rates or jobs. One of my closest friends was a Machinery Repairman. After spending time with him, I began to fancy myself capable of simple repairs to cars and other types of machinery. When my wife's Ford Escort had its water pump go bad, I decided I would change it myself. Not sure of how to proceed, I asked my friend and he told me where to go to get the part and how to replace it. Being a bit prideful, I acted as if I understood and went home to go to work. After a couple of hours, and a few busted knuckles, I knew I was in over my head.

Knowing I could not admit defeat without an ample amount of harassment, I went to the parts store from which I had purchased the water pump. I purchased a repair manual for her model and year of Escort. I went home, followed the directions and changed the water pump and it worked! We never had to replace that water pump again.

What was the difference? The “How To” book for repairing the car. In this section of Joel, God provides the people with a “How To” book for repenting of their sins and turning to Him for forgiveness. He tells them why and how to repent and what to expect from Him when they do.

Describe a time when instructions helped you complete a task you might not have been able to do otherwise. Include a description of how you felt after completing the task.

Consider It

1. How did God want the people of Judah to respond to the coming “Day of the Lord”? (2:1-11)
2. What was happening in the land to cause them to see a need to repent? (2:1-11)
3. How had this happened? (2:1-11)
4. What were these invaders leaving in their path? (2:1-11)
5. How did God want the people of Judah to respond to this threat? (2:12-17)
6. What was the right response? (2:12-17)
7. What was the wrong response? (2:12-17)
8. How did Joel describe God’s character? (2:12-17)
9. What hope did Joel offer the people if they repented? (2:12-17)
10. What groups of people were addressed in this call to repentance? (2:12-17)

11. What cry did God desire the people to make? (2:12-17)

12. What reason did the people give for asking for God's forgiveness? (2:12-17)

13. How did God promise to respond in the following verses:

a. 2:18

b. 2:19

c. 2:20

d. 2:21-26

e. 2:27

14. What promise did God repeat in this section? (2:18-27)

Comprehend It

1. How was the approaching army similar to the locust invasion?

2. Assuming God continues to speak to the people because of their inability to listen or their resistance to listening, what objections might the people have been raising about the invading army?

3. What made this army different than other armies that had invaded the land in the past?
4. How would the people have responded to the question in 2:11?
5. How does this question help you to understand the point God was trying make?
6. Understanding the rending of garments as a sign of mourning, why did God tell the people to rend their hearts and not their garments?
7. Why did God remind the people of His character when calling the people to repent?
8. Why does He mention His character before His possible actions?
9. In 2:16, what significance does the statement, “Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber” have for this situation in terms of timing?
10. What promises did God make for the people if they repented?
11. When would these promises come to pass?
12. How did God promise to restore what has been lost to the locusts?

13. In 2:23, there is a little bit of confusion as to what actual words were being used when the verse says, “He (God) has given you...” One option is that the Hebrew words are haloreh litzdakah or “autumn rains for your vindication”. The other option is that the Hebrew words are hamoreh litzdakah or “teacher for righteousness”. What does each of these provisions mean in light of Judah’s situation?

14. How does God’s promise in 2:27 match Romans 8:1?

Connect It

1. Thinking back to the last lesson, what has God used to get your attention in the past?
2. How did you know you had a need?
3. How did this act to drive you to God?
4. Have you ever been afraid to return to God after a time of wandering? Why or why not?
5. Describe a time when you responded to God in brokenness.
6. Describe a time when you realized you were not being genuine with God.
7. Describe a time when the hope of God’s promises drew you back to Him.

8. Describe a time when God drew you back to Him and you knew you had to be urgent in your response.

9. Is it a good thing or bad thing for others to have pity on you? How about for you to have pity on others?

10. What promises has God used to encourage you lately?

11. Describe a time when God protected you from a situation.

12. Thinking back over all these times, what needs to change today as a result of those remembrances?



Lesson Three:

The Low Down on the End Times

Joel 2:28 through 3:21

Some of the most misunderstood, misquoted, misrepresented, and often ignored parts of the Bible are those dealing with eschatology or the “End Times”. While there are many schools of thought on the “End Times”, and it will not be the focus of this study to analyze them, one truth comes shining through. There will come a day when this world will come to an end and God will judge the living and the dead. Some will enter the eternal reward of Heaven while others will enter the eternal punishment of Hell. What does this have to do with the people of Joel’s day? It is actually quite simple. Their decision to return to God had more implications than just some ruined crops or even than an invading army. Where they stood with God would affect their eternity. It is the same for you and me.

Some people have a problem with understanding a God Who would send people to Hell. They are offended by the fact that He is just as well as loving. They are offended because this means that how they live matters and whether they humble themselves to God matters. Some people try to explain this away by denying the existence of God. Others react by redefining God to be just love instead of love and just. Others try to make God just one of many choices. Joel did not face these obstacles because the people of Judah knew God.

We must understand that our decisions to walk with God can have these same ramifications. If you are a believer in Jesus, you have committed your life to walking with Him. One of the ways that you show this decision to be genuine is that you persevere in your decision. Though you may stumble and fall at times, you are drawn to God and repent and get back to the close fellowship you had once enjoyed. The people of Joel’s day did not enjoy this permanent status with God because Jesus had not yet died on the cross for them, fulfilling the law and providing a sacrifice for all sin. As you study this lesson, try to understand your position in Christ and what that position means in terms of what will happen in the Day of the Lord.

What things have you found to be confusing about “End Times”? List them below and then review your list at the end of this lesson.

Consider It

1. Do verses 28 and 29 describe what will happen before, after, or during the day of the Lord? (2:28-29)
2. What event will change the way God's people deal with Him? (2:28-29)
3. How will people respond to this change? (2:28-29)
4. Do verses 30-32 describe what will happen before, after, or during the day of the Lord? (2:30-32)
5. What would happen to change the world in which Joel's audience lived? (2:30-32)
6. From verse 32, why was God doing the terrible things listed in 30 and 31? (2:30-32)
7. What will happen to those that repent of their sins and call on the Name of the Lord? (2:30-32)
8. Does chapter three describe what will happen before, after or during the day of the Lord? (3:1-21)
9. Who will God judge at the day of the Lord? (3:1-21)
10. Where will He judge them? (3:1-21)

11. What specific nations did God mention? (3:1-21)
12. How did God say the nations would try to respond to His judgment? (3:1-21)
13. For what sins was God going to punish those nations? (3:1-21)
14. Why did God call the nations to assemble for battle? (3:1-21)
15. How would God have been seen by His people? (3:1-21)
16. How would God have been seen by His enemies? (3:1-21)

Comprehend It

1. Underline the following phrases (or their equivalents in your translation):
 - a. “It will come about after this” (2:28)
 - b. “Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes” (2:31)
 - c. “For behold, in those days” (3:1)
2. How do these words affect the meaning of the associated passages?
 - a. 2:28-29

b. 2:30-32

c. 3:1-21

3. Has God poured His Spirit on all mankind today? Explain.
4. What does it mean that sons and daughters will prophesy?
5. Which of the seven seals of Revelation 6 matches Joel 2:30-32?
6. Why is this important?
7. Why does God mention separately those who call on the name of the Lord and those who survive destruction of the end times in verse 32?
8. What is God's goal in the destruction? Explain.
9. How does Joel's message in chapter three match Daniel's messages to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 7-12?
10. How would the people of Judah have responded to hearing that the nations would be judged?

11. How would they have responded if they were included in that judgment?

12. How does Revelation 14:14-19 correspond to Joel 3:13?

13. What does this tell us about God's character?

14. What two things does 3:17 tell us about God's purposes for hard times?

15. How long will Judah's new standing with God last?

Connect It

1. Why did God give this prophecy to the people of Judah?
2. Why did God give the Apostle John the Revelation?
3. How does this help us to understand the various arguments going on about minor details of the end times?
4. What does God want His people to do in response to this teaching about what will happen at the end?
5. God shows in this passage that He is in control of all nations. What are you struggling with right now that you need to be reminded of what will happen in the end?

6. God also shows that He is in control of time and He alone knows when the end is coming. What are you struggling with right now that you need to be reminded that God's timing is perfect?

7. God wanted His people to know there were eternal ramifications for the decisions they make in their lives. How does this apply to your life right now?

8. God used these drastic measures for the purpose of reminding the people He is in charge, to make them holy again and for the purpose of drawing others to Him. Which of these purposes means the most to you and why?

9. What needs to change in your life as a result of studying this lesson?

10. What needs to change in your life as a result of completing this study on the book of Joel?

11. List any changes you have actually taken:

12. Review the list you made at the end of the introduction to this lesson. What questions were answered?

13. From that same list, what things still need to be answered?

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