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Joel (Full Book)



Joel - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg provides an in-depth analysis of the book of Joel in the Bible. He explores the meaning behind the day of the Lord and the various interpretations of the locust plague, as well as its significance in relation to God's judgment. Gregg also delves into the themes of sacrifice, restoration, and the role of the Holy Spirit in Joel, emphasizing the importance of seeking fulfillment in God rather than material possessions. Overall, his insights offer a thought-provoking and informative perspective on this often-overlooked book.

Transcript

Let's turn now to the book of Joel. It's a short book, shorter than most of the books we've studied so far, although we have covered a few short books like Jonah and Obadiah. Apart from that, it's the shortest list of prophets we've covered so far.

We have a few more that are about the same length ahead of us. Joel has sometimes been called the prophet of Pentecost because on the day of Pentecost, his prophecies were fulfilled, at least some of them. And he was quoted by the Apostle Peter on that occasion for that effect.

But Joel, really, most of his prophecy didn't have to do with Pentecost. He was a prophet of doom. He was a prophet declaring the day of the Lord at hand.

Now, the day of the Lord is an expression that usually means judgment from the Lord, the day of God's reckoning, the day of God holding someone accountable. Usually it's a national thing. The day of the Lord on this or that nation is usually the context.

There are cases in the New Testament where the day of the Lord seems to mean the second coming of Christ, and therefore that would be the day of the Lord on the whole earth, the time of judgment for the whole world. But in the Old Testament, we seldom see the day of the Lord in those terms. The day of the Lord in the Old Testament usually means God's judgment on some country.

So in this case, Joel's prophecies are against Jerusalem. He's a prophet of the southern

kingdom, it is assumed. We really don't know anything about him, except that his father's name was Petuel.

So we don't know what occupation he was in, whether he was a full-time prophet. If he was a full-time prophet all his life, then he sure didn't leave a very large part of his sayings in writing, because we only have three chapters from him. It seems like he had one message only, and he may well have given it all on one occasion.

We also don't know what time period he belongs to. As a matter of fact, various scholars have thought he's the earliest of the prophets to have written, and others have thought he's the latest. In other words, some of them would place his prophecy in Judea prior to that of Isaiah and Micah and those early prophets in the southern kingdom.

Others have felt like there's evidence within the book that it happened after Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi, the later post-exilic prophets. Some people think that the date of this book should be something like 400 B.C. Others would put it somewhere like 900 B.C. There's obviously half a millennium difference between those dates, so we're really not able to be sure. But we do know that whatever the year, and wherever the book stood chronologically with respect to other books of the Old Testament, we do know what was going on.

There was a locust plague. The locust plague is the subject of the first half of the book. Locust plagues are very terrifying things.

I suppose it would be terrifying even to us, although we live in the city and we don't have crops and so forth. Still, just to see the sky darkened by clouds of literally billions of locusts, they literally darken the sky like a cloud. And they come on like an army.

And when they come to any area, they just begin eating. And they start moving forward. And they eat everything organic.

Well, they don't eat animals, but they eat plants. They will even chew through leather bags and things like that. Locusts have very sharp teeth.

They're compared in this cross. You can see the lion. Locusts actually have sharp teeth.

They unfortunately don't eat people or eat animals, but they do chew through just about everything. Tree bark, so stripped trees, bark, which leads them to die. They'll eat every little twig and leaf and flower and fruit on anything that's growing.

And when a locust plague comes, if it's a severe one, it's just disaster to any society that depends heavily on agriculture. And really, of course, all societies do to a degree, although in those days, even to a greater degree. In an agrarian society where the prosperity of a nation was measured in terms of its vintage that year, of wine, or its crops, the coming of a locust plague was about the worst thing that could happen,

because it was like a collapse on Wall Street.

It's like a collapse of the economic system for a nation like that. And there are several times when ancient nations were hit by these kinds of plagues. We know that one of the ten plagues that God sent against Egypt in the days when Moses was challenging Pharaoh to let people go was a locust plague.

We find on this occasion there was also a locust plague. We also find in the book of Amos, in the end of his book, right around, what was it, chapter six or seven? It was chapter seven, that he saw several visions which were averted through his intercession, and one of the visions was a locust coming and eating everything. But he prayed and asked God not to send it, and God said, well, this won't happen.

Locust plagues were kind of, well, just sort of a normal kind of a judgment that God would send in several different instances, so that in the book of Revelation, where various plagues are described symbolically coming on the earth, there is a plague of locusts that come out of the bottomless pit in Revelation chapter nine. It's described first as a locust plague, but they also are said to have tails like scorpions and a number of other characteristics that are not very locust-like. But their first description is that of a locust plague, because there are horrendous judgments coming against the people that are marked for judgment.

In fact, the book of Revelation uses some of the language from Joel when it talks about these locusts. In Revelation nine, it often uses figures, at least twice, if not more, figures from the locust plague that Joel speaks of. Now, Joel speaks figuratively about these locusts.

He talks about them like they're an army. He describes them as a nation, or as an army, God's great army coming against Jerusalem. He compares them to soldiers marching, or horses coming in great hordes of horsemen coming against the nation.

And we should not let this imagery throw us off, because it does throw some people off. What he's doing is simply describing a locust plague. But because some are perhaps not careful enough in the way that they read the scriptures, there are many who have mistaken this description for a description of war, either an old testament war or maybe something yet future.

There are some who think that the locust plague is a type or a picture or a vision of the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, that Joel in chapter one is describing an actual local plague of the grasshoppers, but that in chapter two, although he seems to still be talking about them, he's actually shifted gears and he's now looking beyond this to an invading army, perhaps the Babylonians, invading, of which locusts were sort of a foreshadowing or a type. There are those who think that the locust plague, or the army that's described here, is a description of a company of saints that will arise in the last days. Recently I've

been hearing preachers again talking about this.

I heard about it years ago, and then I've heard some people again recently reviving this notion of what they call Joel's army. And they call it that because they take scriptures from the book of Joel and say, here's the description of the church in the last days, marching straight forward, destroying everything in their path. And they have this overcomer's idea that in the last days, the overcoming community of Christians is going to be like a mighty army, and is going to be a terror to the world.

And that what Joel sees here is a description of it. You're probably familiar with the song that goes, they rush on the city, they run on the wall, great is the army, that carries out his word. The Lord utters his voice before his army.

And this is sung, and it was put to music by those who are applying it to the church. The church's mighty army. Well, the scripture is taken right from the book of Joel.

It's talking about locusts climbing on the walls, climbing through the windows, eating everything in sight. And while I couldn't swear by my conviction that it's only talking about locusts, it would certainly be very difficult to prove that these locusts are a type of the church in the last days. However, when you do come to about the middle of the book, at about, or just a little bit past the middle, at chapter 2, verse 28, there is a shift.

And it looks now forward to the day of Pentecost. The prediction of the Holy Spirit being poured out on all flesh, which Peter said was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Just like the other prophets we've been considering, they preach judgment, but they always also have a vision of ultimate fulfillment and restoration through the Messiah, or the Messianic age, which is the church age.

Joel is no exception. The first part of the book, chapters 1 and 2, up through chapter 2, verse 27, are talking about this plague and this judgment from God. It could have happened at any time.

So whether it's a book early or late, as far as the time of writing, it makes no difference. Locust plagues could happen at any time. There's no political situation alluded to at all in the book.

So we don't know when it was written, but it's clear that the judgment of God is seen in this locust plague. And then at verse 28 of the book, the Messianic age is spoken of. So almost half the book is devoted to that, and it follows, therefore, the scheme of things that most of the minor prophets we've studied do, giving alternately descriptions of judgment and Messianic blessing.

And just about every one of them that we've seen, whether it be Hosea or Amos or Micah, all of the prophets that we've covered, I think, end with a statement about the Messianic age. Even Obadiah did, which was just one chapter long and had prophecy

mainly about the fall of Edom. Yet at the end, it says, in the kingdom shall be the Lord.

And it describes the ultimate victory of God. And so that is simply the way the prophets are. Joel is the same way.

The first part of the book, you can divide it right into two parts easily. The first part is about the locust plague. The second part is about the Messianic age.

Obviously there will be more for us to say about the Messianic age in the second part than about the first part. Although it's interesting, as we read Joel chapters 1 and 2, the imagery he uses. God might as well have sent an army on Jerusalem.

It couldn't have been any worse than it was with this locust plague. And it's a terrible thing. The noise of locusts flying in, in plague proportions, is thunderous.

It's a loud thundering noise, like the sound of horses coming to battle. So those are the images that we get here. The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pestuel.

Here's this, you elders, and give ear all you inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it. Let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.

In other words, this plague is so unusual that neither they nor their fathers, their ancestors, can remember such a thing. Furthermore, several generations to come will never see anything like it. So you should tell them about it.

Your children and your children's children. The suggestion is, well, it's not entirely unique, at least an extremely unusual plague such as would not be recurring and had not happened for many generations. What the queuing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten.

What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten. What the crawling locust has left, the consuming locust has eaten, verse 4 says. Now, scholars cannot agree as to whether this is talking about four different species of locusts.

The queuing locust, the swarming locust, the crawling locust, and the consuming locust. There may be four different species of locusts, so that there was actually four waves of this plague. One kind of locust came in, stripped and placed bare, and then just when things may have begun to grow back again, another wave of another kind of locust came, did the same thing, and it's like these people have been hit again, and again, and again.

Other people feel like these four references, the queuing locust, the swarming locust, the crawling locust, and the consuming locust, are all different references to stages in the development of the locust from the larval stage up through the adult stage. It hardly

matters. The point is that these people have been hit by wave after wave.

Just when it seemed like relief was coming, and one group of locusts had left, then the next group come in, and these people are getting hit so hard that Joel says, don't you see what's happening? Here's issue of it. Can't you tell what's going on? It's God talking to you. Verse 5, he says, "...awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth." What he means there, of course, is there's no more grapes.

Imagine at a time like this, people who are addicted to alcohol, and there's just no grapes, there's no wine. They can weep, okay, they'll be going through their DTs and agony and cravings, but they'll have no satisfaction, and that's what he's saying. Of course, one of the problems in Jerusalem that was complained about by the prophets was drunkenness.

And now he says, this is a fitting judgment on your drunkenness. You've brought upon yourself this dependency by your own debauchery and your own self-indulgence, and now all God has to do is take away this substance that you're abusing, and now suffering comes upon yourself. You'll eat the fruit of your own work.

God doesn't even have to bring a judgment on you. Your habit will judge you. It goes on in verse 6, "...for a nation has come up against my land." Again, a nation is referring to an army or a nation of locusts.

If there's any question about that, you can look over at chapter 2 and 25. At 225 it says, "...I will restore to you the years as the swarming locusts have eaten, the crawling locusts, the consuming locusts, and the chewing locusts, my great army, which I sent among you." God refers to these locusts as his army. So this is what God has sent, the nation.

"...for a nation has come up against my land, strong and without number. His teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has fangs of a fierce lion." This is part of the description of the locusts in Revelation chapter 9 and verse 8. It speaks of the locusts there, "...have teeth like lions." Revelation 9 verse 8. Verse 7, "...he has laid waste my vine, and ruined my fig tree. He has stripped it bare and thrown it away.

Its branches are made white." This could have a double meaning. Of course the locusts came and ate the vines and the fig trees and all the other agricultural products. But vines and fig trees are also figures that are sometimes used of Israel, the nation itself.

And it could refer simply to the nation that's been stripped bare. The nation has been robbed clean. On the other hand, vines and fig trees mentioned together often are simply a reference to prosperity.

You remember in Micah 4, it talks about the Messianic age of prosperity. It says,

"...everyone will sit under his vine and under his fig tree." The same expression is used in a few other places. It speaks of basically security, comfort, prosperity.

Everyone has his own vine to produce wine. Everyone has his own fig tree to produce fruit. He sits there and it says, "...none shall make him afraid." The picture of prosperity is, to the Jew, every man sitting under his vine and his fig tree.

However, the vine and the fig trees have been ruined. The locusts have eaten both, and therefore the prosperity and security of the nation have been differently attacked. Verse 8, "...lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.

The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn who minister to the Lord. The field is wasted, the land mourns, the grain is ruined, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails.

Be ashamed, you farmers! Wail, you vine dressers! For the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is perished, the vine is dried up, the fig tree is withered, the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree. All the trees of the field are withered. Surely joy has withered away from the sons of men.

Along with their product has gone their joy." Now, it's interesting that that's only true of people who are ungodly. Of course, it's a trial to anybody to experience poverty. For anyone to lose their harvest would be a trial.

But it can't be said of Christians or people who are delighting in the Lord that when their crops fail, that their joy vanishes also. This is only true of people who put their delight in their crops. When we study the book of Habakkuk, we will see.

Well, let's not wait until then. Let's take a look at Habakkuk 3. I'll show you how he reacts to the exact same conditions. Habakkuk 3, verse 17 and 18.

He says, "...though the fig tree may not blossom, nor the fruit beyond the vine, though the labor of the olives may fail, and the fields yield no food, though the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls." In other words, even if there's no harvest, even if we suffer an agricultural disaster, verse 18, "...yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Unlike the inhabitants of Jerusalem in Joel's day, Habakkuk was in a position to say he would rejoice even if the crops all failed, because his joy was not in his possessions, his joy was not in his comforts, his joy was in God. I will rejoice, and I will joy in God, he says, in the God of my salvation. He has the joy of salvation.

Therefore, although, of course, the loss of everything is a trial, it's not the end of his joy. The same is true of Christians, of course, it needs to be. And it says that we should delight ourselves in the Lord, and he'll give us the desires of our heart.

Delighting in the Lord means that you don't put your delight in something else but in him. And if your delight is really in him, then there's no way that your joy can be interrupted, because you'll always have it, and he'll never leave it, nor forsake it. But these people in Joel's day, they didn't have a relationship with God.

That's why this locust plague came, the judgment against them. And therefore, when the trees withered, so did their joy wither. Verse 13, good yourselves and lament, you priests.

Wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God. For the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.

Now, that was also mentioned back in verse 9, that the grain offerings and the drink offerings have been cut off at the temple. Now, this is a tragedy for more than one reason. One, God simply isn't being honored with such sacrifices at this time.

There aren't any to bring. So the sacrifices that reflect the worship of God are being neglected. They've actually been cut off.

There's no food to offer. The locusts have eaten it all. But the reason the priests are called to mourn is not only for that disaster from God's point of view, but from the point of view of the priest himself.

The priests were supported by those very things. When the grain offerings and the meal offerings, or they were the same thing, really, but grain offerings and the fruit offerings were brought, that's what they lived on. And the animal sacrifices, too.

But that was the priest's sustenance. That was their bread and butter. And so the priests are called to wail and mourn and lament, because those people aren't bringing grain to them anymore.

There isn't any to bring. The locusts have got it all. Verse 14, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.

Alas for the day, for the day of the Lord is at hand. It shall come as destruction from the Almighty. Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed grain shrivels under the clods.

Storehouses are in shambles, barns are broken down, for the grain has withered. How the beasts groan, the herds of cattle are restless because they have no pasture. Even the flocks of sheep suffer your punishment." Now, he calls the people to fast and to repent.

It's one of the things that he calls them to more than once. The only salvation from these locusts is for God to turn his hand against the locusts, and that will only happen if the people turn toward God, if the people repent, if they fast and pray and show true remorse. And so he tells the priests to consecrate such a fast and call a sacred assembly, a special alert to the elders and the leaders of the land and the others, too, and to cry out to the Lord.

Now, he says in verse 15, alas for the day, for the day of the Lord is at hand. This day of the Lord probably is the day of the locust plague. Some would see it as having a more political and distant reference to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.

Others, no doubt. I don't know of any who do, necessarily, but it seems like the kind of thing that some people I know would say it applies to the second coming of Christ, and that it's talking about that. But it seems likely that the day of the Lord here is simply a reference to the day of God's visitation of judgment on their unnamed sins.

That is, he hasn't named them here, but he does, it's very clear that the nation was ripe for judgment on many occasions, and this was just a partial judgment God sent, but it was a serious one. And it was called the day of the Lord. The livestock is suffering, too, of course, because there's no pasture for them, because the locust eats the grass as well.

So soon there will be no milk, there will be no meat, there will be no grain, there will be no fruit. What can the people do but starve to death or import food from somewhere else? Verse 19, O Lord, to you I cry out, for fire has devoured the open pastures, and a flame has burned all the trees of the field. Now, some commentators believe that there were fires that came along also.

One commentator I read indicated that as a result of the locust stripping the green things and leaving everything dried out, everything was more flammable and burned up. But I doubt if that's what it means. For one thing, if the locust has eaten all the grass and the bark and stuff, they've left only the sappy interior of the trees, which are the things least likely to catch on fire, it seems.

Actually, fire is an image for the locusts themselves, as we'll see when we get to chapter 2, if you'll notice there now, chapter 2, verse 3. Notice chapter 2, verse 3, it says, A fire devours before them, that is, before the locust, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden in front of them, and behind them a desolate wilderness. Surely nothing shall escape them.

It's just that the locusts are damaging things as badly as a fire does. It's turning what was once like the Garden of Eden into a desert wilderness. It's an interesting picture.

You'll hear from this arching army of locusts. In front of them, everything is beautiful, but if you look behind them, everything is totally like it's been a forest fire. It's not that

there's been a literal fire, but the destructiveness of the locusts is compared with fire, just like there's not a literal army, but they're compared to an army.

So, in verse 19 of chapter 1, which says, The fire has devoured the open pastures, the flame has burned all the trees of the field. It's referring, I believe, to the locusts. The beasts of the field also cry out to you, for the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the open pastures.

Why the water brooks have dried up is not entirely clear. That might simply be another phenomenon that was occurring at the same time. I don't know.

But he mentions the water brooks being dried up, too, which is an additional problem. Chapter 2, Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm in my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand.

A day of dark and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning cloud spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been, nor will there ever be such after them, even for many successive generations. Now, darkness is associated with the day of the Lord.

We remember that in Amos 5.18, Amos said, Woe unto you who desire the day of the Lord. What shall the day of the Lord be to you but darkness and not light? Darkness means calamity, light means blessing in the prophetic imagery. So when it says it's a day of darkness and gloominess and clouds and thick darkness, it means it's a day of curse and disaster and calamity.

But in this particular case, it also carries a literal fulfillment, because the locusts darken the sky. You see that in chapter 2 here in verse 10. As it's talking about the locusts, it says, The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness.

That was probably a literal statement. As the clouds of locusts blot out the view of the sun and the stars and so forth, it could be said that the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars diminish their brightness. At the same time, that this is literal with the locusts, the same expression is used figuratively.

In fact, the reference to darkness, or the sun and the moon darken, occurs three or four times in this book, and only once, I think, with reference to the locust plague, if I'm not mistaken. Maybe twice. But it also is used more figuratively, as frequently in the Prophets, the idea of the sun being dark and the moon being dark, and is used figuratively in the scripture elsewhere.

So also in the latter part of Joel, we'll find it used figuratively. But in this case, chapter 2, verse 2, where it says, We have darkness, that would be literally and figuratively true. Now, when it says in verse 2, in the middle of it, A people come, great and strong, the

like of whom has never been, nor will ever be such after them, for many successive generations.

This is one of the reasons why certain interpreters have felt that we now have turned to talk not about locusts, but an actual army, possibly the Babylonians. Or, as I said, certain persons in the Church have preferred to see it as a reference to a latter-day company of overcoming saints, of people like there never were before. The only problem with that is it's quite obvious that the people involved here are not people, but locusts.

In verse 5, with a noise like chariots, over the mountaintops they leap. And it says in verse 5, They're like strong people set in a ray. Notice, they're not really people, they're just like people.

They're not really in chariots, they're just like chariots, a noise like chariots. We're talking about something that is compared with people. They're like people leaping around, but they're not real people.

It says in verse 9, They run to and from the city, they run on the wall, they climb into the houses, they enter into the windows like a thief. Well, they're not literal thieves, they're grasshoppers, but the imagery suggests that they're like people. Also, verse 7 says, They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war.

Well, if he was talking about real mighty men and real men of war, he wouldn't say they climb like men of war, he just said they are mighty men of war. So it's clear that in calling them a people, in verse 2, he's using it figuratively. They're not real people, it's a nation of grasshoppers, it's an army, as 225 says, an army of grasshoppers.

So that's how we'd understand it, not as a reference to armies or people or the church or something else. This is just describing as near as we can tell the locusts and nothing more. I would point out that at the end of verse 2, it says, The like of these people or locusts has never been, there's never anything as bad, nor will there ever be any such after them for many successive generations.

It's interesting, this kind of expression is used in the Bible in various connections. The locust plague in Egypt, Moses threatened the locust plague would be like nothing, like no locust plague ever before or ever after. In other words, it seems like it's unique in history, nothing before or after will be like it.

And yet the same thing is said of this later locust plague, nothing before or after will be like it. The two can't both be unique in their severity. They might be the two worst ones, but you can't literally say that both of them are the worst ever, because you just can't do that.

The same is true of what is said of the kings sometimes of Judah and of Israel, of Hezekiah. It says he was the best king Judah had ever before or after him, there were

none like him. But then the same thing was said later about Josiah.

And the same thing, only the opposite was said about Omri and Ahab. So we can see that sometimes the scripture uses this kind of language in a non-literal way, but simply rather than being absolutely unique in time and history, it's so unusual that you could almost speak of it as being unique. When it is said that Solomon would be the wisest man ever who had lived or whoever would live, we know of at least one exception, Jesus Christ described himself as one greater than Solomon.

So that kind of expression that says the worst ever, the worst that ever will be, needs to be understood as an expression frequently used in the scripture, figuratively, not necessarily literally. Basically what it probably means is, as far as any of the witnesses are concerned, nothing has ever happened like it before or will after, meaning in their lifetime, or possibly in this case it says for many successive generations. And he implied that also in chapter 1, verses 2 and 3. Has anything like this happened in your days or in the days of your fathers, tell it to your children, your children's children, suggesting that when he says it's never been anything like it before or ever after, it means essentially within a certain time reference.

Now in saying that, I would turn your attention momentarily over to Matthew chapter 24. I don't want to drop a bomb and not explode it, but I won't have time to go into this in detail. But I would just like to call to your attention Matthew 24.21, because in that place it says, for then there shall be great tribulation such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, nor ever shall be.

Here we have that same kind of expression. Never has been before, never shall be like it after. And it is said of a certain tribulation period.

Well, because of the language used there, some Bible teachers have suggested this tribulation must be something worse than has ever happened before now, because as far as they're concerned, anything that's happened before can be beat in the future, and therefore they figure that this must be a tribulation yet to come. This must be a tribulation at the end of the world, and that nothing that's transpired already could possibly be referred to here. By the way, the same teachers use Joel 2.2 as the same thing.

They consider that the day of the Lord mentioned there is a reference to this tribulation period at the end of the world, because it says there's been no one like it before and nothing afterward. So anytime they find this language of unprecedented horror, they assume that this is something that has to do with the last day's tribulation. But I would say we need to be cautious about that kind of interpretation, because those statements that seem to speak of absolute uniqueness in history are sometimes figurative or relative and not necessarily used in a literal sense.

And if that bothers people, then it's going to have to bother them, because we can see it's the case in the Scripture. And that means that the tribulation spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 22 does not necessarily have to refer to something yet to happen. As a matter of fact, the context certainly suggests that he's talking about tribulation that happened back a long time ago, which we'll study some other time.

The same is true of this locust plague. Joel 2.1 and 2, the day of the Lord, is coming. Often certain teachers have used this passage to speak also of the future tribulation, and would point out that it's unprecedented horror because of what Joel 2.2 says.

However, it's just talking about a really bad locust plague, such as no one had ever seen, nor had their father, nor would their children see for many generations to come. Again, the reference to fire. Verse 3, a fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns.

The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness. Surely nothing shall escape them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses.

Another image that the book of Revelation picks up is Revelation 9.7, again describing those locust things that come out of the smoke of the bottomless pit. He describes them as being like horses, the locusts. So there's a couple of images from Joel that the book of Revelation borrows in describing this locust plague.

I might just add that I'm convinced that the locusts of Revelation 9 are not a reference to animals or insects and not helicopters or jets or anything like that. The fact that they come out of the bottomless pit suggests that they're demons. It's talking about a demonic invasion.

When we get to the book of Revelation, I'll point out all the things that are said about the locusts seem to point in that direction, but we won't worry about that now. These locusts in Joel's day were like demons attacking the nation and destroying them. Some of the images that Joel uses are used again in the book of Revelation for this other plague.

Swift like horses, swift like speed, so they run. I forget what language it is, but in one foreign language, foreign to us, the word for locust is little horses. The reason for it is if you look up real close at their heads, they have a head that's shaped sort of like the head of a horse.

So there's more than one sense in which they're like horses. Here he seems to be indicating they're coming in hordes, like hordes of horsemen coming. But they do have an appearance like horses in other respects, too.

With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, leaping grasshoppers, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, this crackling sound of their wings flapping, this thunderous noise of these billions of locusts lying together. It is a very loud

and terrifying sound. Like a strong people set in battle array, before them the people writhe in pain.

All faces are drained of color. They run like mighty men. They climb over the wall like men of war.

Everyone marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. They do not push one another. Everyone marches in his own column.

And when they lunge between weapons, they are not cut down. Now, this is apparently figurative, but the idea is that you can't really kill off locusts with a sword. They lunge between your weapons.

They're small enough that they can avoid your sword in most cases. You could never hope to kill off this army with swords. There's no defense against it except prayer and repentance.

That's the only defense they could ever hope for against the plague of locusts. When it says they march straight ahead, they don't bump or jostle each other, they don't break ranks, it presents the image of an almost mechanical, cold, lifeless, robot-like army coming forward, just coming forward like a lawnmower, destroying everything that's in its path, but having no heart, no feeling, no compassion, just marching just like machines ahead, just like disciplined men of war who never break ranks and just march shoulder to shoulder, straight ahead, almost unhuman. And certainly the locusts are unhuman.

You can't plead with them. You can't appeal to their sympathies. They're just this heartless army that comes through and destroys everything.

They rush on the city. They run on the wall. They climb into the houses.

They enter at the windows like a thief. When locust plague comes, they enter all the houses. They eat everything in the house that can be eaten by locusts, all the food, all the leather bags and leather shoes and leather wine bottles and so forth that they had back then.

And they're just like a thief coming in the house and destroying everything. The earth quakes before them. The heavens tremble.

The sun and the moon grow dark. The stars diminish their brightness. The Lord gives voice before his army, for his camp is very great.

For strong is the one who executes his word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible. Who can endure it? Now, of course, there's an appropriate call to repentance, as there was earlier.

Now, therefore, says the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping

and with mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.

He repents from doing harm. Who knows if he will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God. In other words, if we don't cry out to God, there's not going to be any blessing, any crop, any grain or drink offering to offer.

We need to cry out to him. Maybe he'll turn around, maybe for his own sake, just so that we'll be able to offer these sacrifices again. He'll leave something behind.

This will only happen in response to prayer, repentance and fasting. In verse 15, blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children in nursing bathes. Even the children need to participate in this fast and in this repentance.

Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber and the bride from her dressing room. In other words, put off the wedding. There's more important things now, like fasting and seeking God.

Let the priests who minister to the Lord weep between the porch and the altar. Let them say, spare your people, O Lord, and do not give your heritage to reproach that the nation should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? Now, this statement might incline one to think that what's coming against them is not locusts, but a nation.

That is, a political nation, people, army. In the King James, do not give your heritage reproach that the nation should rule over them. But that is not rendered quite the same in modern translation.

The idea of rule over them is totally different in the modern translation. In fact, even the marginal reading of the New King James says, rather than rule over them, it gives us an alternate reading, speak a proverb against them. That seems to agree with the latter part of the verse, why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? The NASV and the NIV both kind of render it the same way, this last phrase about the nation's rule over them.

Actually, in the NIV it says, do not make your inheritance the object of scorn, a byword among the nation. So, it's not talking about so much a nation invading them and ruling over them, so much as it's saying that the nation may scorn Israel because of the horrible plague that has come upon them as locusts. Verse 18, Then the Lord will be zealous for his land, and pity his people.

The Lord will answer and say to his people, Behold, I will send you grain, and wine, and oil, that is, if you repent. Then the Lord will be zealous, and verse 18 is, if the priests cry

out and the people fast and repent. This is what is held out as a promise to them.

And of course, this promise of blessing and restoration is followed by a glimpse of greater things in the future, namely the messianic age. But it begins by relief from the immediate situation, from the present crisis. So, the Lord will answer and say to his people, Behold, I will send you grain, and new wine, and oil.

So, oil was of course not petroleum, but oil from the olive, which was an agricultural product. So, they needed oil for cooking, they needed wine for drinking, they needed grain for a staple. And God will give them back those things.

And you will be satisfied by them. I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations, for I will remove far from you the northern army. Now again, the northern army could be misunderstood, but it makes it clear in verse 25 that it's the consuming locusts, the chewing locusts, are the great army that he's talking about.

So, he's talking about removing the locusts. I will remove far from you the northern army, probably because they came from the north. Those armies did come to Israel.

And will drive him away into a barren and desolate land. The best thing that could happen is for these locusts to be driven by a strong wind off into the desert. It says, With his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea, his stench will come up and his foul odor will rise because he has done monstrous things.

Now, the reference to his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea, the New American Standard version clarifies that a bit, and the NIV follows it pretty closely. Rather than his face toward the eastern sea, it says, It's vanguard, that is the front lines of the army, the forward edge of the army. It's vanguard into the eastern sea and it's rear guard into the western sea.

It's quite clear that the people of Israel have absolutely no defense against these locusts. Their only hope is for God to send the locusts away. And so, he's saying that if they pray, if they fast, if they repent, if they call out to God, then he will send this army of locusts and dump them in the sea, part of them in the Mediterranean, part of them in the Dead Sea.

And this is exactly what it says in the Book of Exodus that God did to the locusts that came upon Egypt. When Moses prayed, the locust plague came. When Moses prayed for them to be taken away, the Bible says the Lord sent a strong wind and blew them into the sea.

And their bodies are said to stink as they rot. You can imagine if there's billions of these corpses of locusts. And some locusts are rather large.

I mean, several inches long. And they're nice and fat from having eaten everything

around. And then they're fleshy, and their rotting carcasses could raise quite a stink.

Fear not, O land, verse 21, be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things. Now, I don't know if you're reading the New King James or the King James. In the New King James, marvelous things is used in verse 21, and the last line in verse 20 is monstrous things.

I don't know why they do this, because in both cases, the word is the same in the Greek, I mean the Hebrew. It's great things. The locusts have done great things in verse 20.

Of course, the great things they've done are monstrously great. The Lord has done great things, that is, in delivering them from the locusts. So there's a symmetry there in verses 20 and 21 that the locusts will be judged or sent away because of the great things they've done.

And the land should rejoice because of the great thing God has done in delivering it. Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field, for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit. The fig tree and the vine yield their strength.

Crops are coming back. This is the vision he sees if they repent. Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the former rain faithfully, and he will cause the rain to come down for you, the former rain and the latter rain in the third month.

Apparently, along with the locust plague had come a drought, and that may be why the brooks were dry earlier, as it said. But now he'll give the rain back that he's withheld. The threshing floor shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

So everything will be back to normal and cheery again if they will turn to God. So I will restore to the years that the swarming locusts have eaten, the crawling locusts, the consuming locusts, the chewing locusts, my great army which I sent among you. This verse has been preached upon a great deal, usually given a spiritual application.

I will restore the years that the locusts have eaten. What is often made in terms of an application of this verse in preaching is that much of our lives before we were saved, or maybe while backslidden, have been consumed. Time that can never be regained has been wasted, precious time.

And it's consumed us, and we've consumed it, and it's as if it's been eaten by locusts. But that God, who restores everything, the one who makes all things new, can restore it, can restore your youth, or can make it up to you, as it were. In this case, I don't know that there's any spiritual meaning intended.

It seems like it's an agricultural blessing he's talking about, not a spiritual blessing,

although perhaps in principle the same may be true spiritually. I see no reason to deny that. But what it actually means in this case is that they've lost significantly some of their economic standing and their financially hurting, and God can make it up to them.

He'll give them abundant crops to make up for what the locusts have eaten. He'll restore to them the years that the locusts have eaten. Notice years plural.

It may be that there's been two or three or four years where these wave after wave after wave of locusts have come. And so these people have been hit hard. It's not just the crops of one year.

The crops of several years have been destroyed. But God says he'll make it up to them if they'll turn to him. Verse 26, You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never be put to shame. Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.

Well, as is so common with the prophets, Joel moves quite naturally from the temporal blessing to the spiritual blessing in the sense that he's been talking about what he will do if they repent. He will reverse the judgment. In the other prophets, usually the judgment is seen as captivity in a foreign land, but then it goes on to talk about how he'll restore them from captivity.

But usually after he talks about that, he moves right into a description of the messianic age. Because one blessing of God simply calls to mind the greatest blessings of God. The prophets, as they begin to think of the blessings of God and the mercy of God, they cannot help themselves but to project themselves beyond the immediate relief and deliverance and help that God gives to that ultimate great thing that he does for his people, namely sending the Messiah and the kind of blessing that's associated with that.

This frequently happens in the prophets, almost universally in the prophets, that they'll move from talking about judgment to a discussion of God's mercy on them if they repent and their restorations and relief from that judgment, and then move right from there naturally into something somewhat more distant, more ultimate, namely the messianic age, which I believe is the present age. And in this case, it cannot be denied that it's the present age, because the verses that follow here are verses that Peter himself said were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. So we know it's the true day that we're looking at here in verse 28.

And it shall come to pass that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, and also on my manservants and my maidservants I will pour out my spirit in

those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, the moon into blood before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

It shall come to pass that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls." Now, these verses have many echoes in the New Testament. The most obvious probably is Peter's quotation of verse 28 through 32 on the day of Pentecost.

When the Holy Spirit fell and the apostles and the others began to speak in tongues and the crowds gathered and some began to say, what's going on here? And some said, oh, they're just drunk, never mind them, they're just full of new wine. It's kind of interesting they say that because this prophecy actually follows a promise that their vats will overflow with new wine. Verse 24, your threshing floor shall be full of wheat and your vats shall overflow with new wine.

Perhaps we're beginning to get at that verse almost a hint that they'll be drunk. They'll be drinking their hearts away. And then, of course, that's a mark of God's blessing in this particular context, and then it's followed by being drunk with the Spirit of God.

You know that in Ephesians 5.18, Paul says, do not be drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled with the Holy Ghost, as if being filled with the Holy Ghost is the other option. Being drunk with wine is one option, being filled with the Holy Ghost is the other. It's kind of hard to face reality in this world without a little help from somewhere.

And many people turn to drink or some other kind of substitute, drugs, fantasies, entertainment, whatever. They turn to something to numb them from reality, but that's because there's an emptiness that they're trying to hide from. They feel a hollowness inside.

There's unfulfillment in their life. They're not happy. Life seems meaningless.

And to cover this up, or to try to fill that void, people will use consciousness-altering substance. But being filled with the Holy Spirit is the other alternative. Instead of trying to hide or numb the emptiness inside, why not fill it with what's supposed to be there? The only thing that really can fill it is the Holy Spirit.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is sort of being drunk with wine, in a sense, because you come under the influence of something. When you're under the influence of wine, you're no longer under your own influence. Your consciousness has been altered.

The same is true, in a sense, when you're filled with the Holy Spirit. And even without making any reference to people falling over and things like that, which sometimes happens, or sagging around or laughing hysterically, or other things like that sometimes

occur, accompanying the Holy Spirit. But just strictly speaking, it's a surrender of yourself to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

It's experiencing a change in your consciousness, a change in your thinking. It's surrendering your mind to undergo renewing. And so that's basically not a bad image.

They said they were drunk with new wine. Apparently, those who were filled with the Holy Spirit were talking unintelligibly in tongues, and so people mistakenly thought they were slurring their words like drunkards. And they thought they were drunk, where in fact they were just filled with the Holy Spirit.

Well, Peter stood up to give an explanation. It would have been a bad thing and a bad testimony for people to think that these disciples of Jesus were drunkards. And so he stood up and said, You men, and brethren, these men are not drunk, as you suppose.

It's only the third hour of the day, meaning nine o'clock in the morning. The bars weren't even open. But he says, This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.

And then he quotes this entire passage up through the first line of verse 32. He leaves out the last line, but that's not significant. And the reason it's not significant is that he wasn't trying to say that the last line doesn't belong to what was happening at that time.

But he basically applies, of course, this scripture to the church age and to the very time he lived. Now, in verse 28 it says, It shall come to pass afterward. When Peter quotes this, he quotes it, It shall come to pass in the last days.

Peter understands afterward here to be in the last days. If you want to compare, it's Acts 2.17 where he begins to quote from this. And so this whole passage has to do with the age in which Peter was living, which he called the last days.

Now, I've shared with you before that the last days could possibly refer to the whole church age, which began at the day of Pentecost or even before, when Jesus appeared, because the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus has appeared in these last days. So possibly from the appearance of Christ till the presence could be called the last days. But on the other hand, I'm of the opinion that the last days means the last days of the Jewish economy, the last days of the old covenant system, the last days of the age of the old covenant, and the breaking in of the new covenant.

And one reason I say that is because he goes on to talk...well, let me not tell you my reasons for that yet. Let's talk about verse 28 first. Verse 28 and 29 speaks of a general outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh.

Now, in Joel's day, that was an unknown thing. In fact, throughout the Old Testament, that was an unknown thing. The Holy Spirit was sometimes known to come upon people, certain people, like prophets, at times.

The Holy Spirit even came on Saul. The Holy Spirit came on David. The Holy Spirit came on the prophets.

And he came on Samson and so forth. When the Holy Spirit came upon someone, that empowered them to do something, frequently to prophesy. There was a time when Moses complained.

In the book of Numbers, chapter 11, he complained to God that the burden of leadership was too great for him to bear alone. And God said, get 70 elders, bring them to the tent of meeting. I'll put some of the Spirit that's on you on them.

And so the men gathered. And God took some of the anointing from Moses and put the Spirit on these 70 elders. And they began to prophesy.

And then a young man came running up and said, Moses, Moses, two guys, Eldad and Medad, who were out in the camp prophesying. And Joshua said, Moses, forbid them. Because apparently they weren't in the right place.

They were supposed to be at the tabernacle. They prophesied out in the camp. They might draw people after themselves instead of after Moses.

Joshua was afraid that Moses' authority might be undermined by other people showing the prophetic gifts among the people. And Moses said to Joshua, are you jealous for me? Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets and that he would put his Spirit upon them. Moses longed to see a time when God would put his Spirit on all his people and that they would all prophesy.

Well, that never happened in the Old Testament. But Joel said the day is coming when that will in fact happen. Your sons and your daughters.

In other words, there's no distinction in sex. God gives his Spirit not only to men, but also to the women. Also age group, sons and daughters and old men and young men.

All ages. God will not discriminate in giving his Spirit. He won't give it to only one class or another.

The young and old. Also social classes. There will be no discrimination.

Slaves or free. Even the men's servants and the maid's servants will have the Spirit poured out upon them. And it says of them all, they will prophesy.

So this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Rich and poor, old and young, men and women, slaves and free. The Holy Spirit was poured out.

And from that time has been poured out on the entire church. And this outpouring of the Spirit has made the church into a prophetic community with a prophetic mission. When

the Holy Spirit is given to the church, it's thought that the church may prophesy.

Now there are special gifts of prophecy that the Bible speaks of. But in general, those who have been filled with the Spirit prophesy. Not necessarily in the sense that we think of telling the future.

Not necessarily even in the sense of an ecstatic utterance, necessarily. As a matter of fact, the utterance that was heard on the day of Pentecost was not said to have been prophecy, but it was actually speaking in tongues, a different gift altogether. But it was spoken of as prophecy in the broader sense of the word prophecy, which just means to speak God's words, to speak from God.

And so the church is God's and we put his Spirit on us so that we may prophesy. I remember Jesus had said earlier when he told his disciples that there would be a time of persecution they could expect, and they'd be drawn before councils and so forth. In Matthew chapter 10 he said, but when they call you before the Sanhedrin and the synagogues and so forth, don't premeditate what you will say in that hour, but the Spirit of your Father which is in you will give you words to say.

They will speak inspired words. Jesus said elsewhere, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, or not upon you, but when the Comforter comes, he said to his disciples in the upper room, then he will teach you of all things. He'll bring all things to your remembrance.

And then, of course, the apostles who received this would become spokespersons for the church and would teach the ways of Jesus and teach people what Jesus had said. So those who receive the Spirit are now equipped to preach and prophesy and to speak for God. And the gift of prophecy is one of the gifts that the Spirit brings also.

And it's given out to all, just as Moses had desired. Now, verses 30 and 31 are particularly the verses that I think point to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. In Joel's day there was a day of the Lord, a great locust plague that came on Jerusalem. But now he sees, as he looks toward the Messianic Age, there will be another great and terrible day of the Lord on Jerusalem.

And that was fulfilled in 70 A.D. And it's interesting that when Peter was quoting this passage on the Day of Pentecost, he didn't simply quote 28 and 29. He could have. If he just wanted to explain the prominence of the outpouring of the Spirit, which was happening right there at that time, and said this is that, he could have quoted Joel 2, 28 and 29 and left it right there because that's the part that talks about the outpouring of the Spirit.

And he could have stopped, but he didn't. Along with those things which he said this is that, he quotes those verses about, I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth,

blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

He says that not only is the Spirit being poured out, but that this is the precursor of a judgment that's coming on Jerusalem. God is pouring out His Spirit on some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, namely the believers, but that is only because shortly they can expect a judgment on those who do not receive this. Remember John the Baptist that said that he that comes after him, Jesus, would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire? What he means is some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The others, the ones who rejected Christ, would be baptized with fire, that is, of judgment. And that happened on 70 AD. These thoughts are linked in Joel.

They are linked in the teaching of John the Baptist. They are linked in history. God poured out His Spirit on the believing remnants in Jerusalem.

Then He poured out His fire on the unbelievers that were left. He baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire. I'm talking about Matthew 3, 11, where John says that Jesus was baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

It's interesting. Some people think that the baptism with fire is a positive thing for believers also, but it isn't. In Acts 1-5, Jesus was almost quoting John.

In Acts 1-5, where Jesus said, for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence. Notice he's quoting what John said. John said, I baptize with water, but Jesus comes after me, will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

But Jesus leaves out the fire part. Speaking to his disciples, he says, you will be baptized with the Holy Ghost. He doesn't say, and with fire, which would have been a natural thing to do, since he was alluding to John's statement.

But the reason he didn't include fire is because the disciples were not going to be baptized with fire. That was for the unbelievers. And so Peter quotes this entire passage because it applies to that generation.

It was happening. What Joel had predicted was happening right there at that time. That generation was the last days of Jerusalem.

And before Jerusalem fell, God would pour out his Spirit on a believing remnant. But then would come judgment, and the great and terrible day of the Lord would come upon it. And it's described in this way in verse 30.

There will be wonders in the heavens. It's an interesting thing to read Josephus, who

was, of course, an eyewitness of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD and wrote extensively about it in great detail. And of course, he had no interest in confirming anything Jesus said or the apostles said.

But sometimes he inadvertently did so. But one of the interesting things that Josephus points out in a number of passages is that there were signs in the heavens that were seen by the wicked in Jerusalem when it was besieged by the Romans. I don't remember what they all were, but he mentioned several signs in the heavens, supernatural signs.

When we talk about the book of Revelation, I think I'll bring these up, and I'll dig them out of my Josephus works and read them. But there were some interesting signs in the heavens that occurred at the time during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Also it says, and in the earth.

Of course, there were signs and wonders in the earth. One of them was the outpouring of the Spirit and the speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost. Another was the signs and wonders at the hands of the apostles.

These were the signs on the earth. There were signs in heaven. He also mentions blood, bloodshed, fire, which is an emblem of judgment and destruction, pillars of smoke, reminds us of Sodom and Gomorrah, because after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, it says in Genesis 19 that Abram went out and looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and the smoke of that place ascended like pillars of smoke from a furnace.

It's just all that will be left is pillars of smoke ascending above the city. Not a pillar of smoke that was once the emblem of God's presence, but smoke from the fiery judgment that comes upon the city. And it says figuratively the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood.

Now, by the way, I've pointed out repeatedly that this language, the sun being turned to darkness, the moon being darkened or turned to blood, is used all the time. I mean, you could almost say all the time. It's used lots of times in the prophets as a reference to the destruction of a city or a kingdom.

However, earlier in this book, in chapter 2 and verse 10, there was a sense in which it was almost literal. The sun and the moon and the stars were darkened by the locust clouds. In this particular context, there could be a certain littleness about it, too.

He talks about pillars of smoke billowing up over the burning city. Those pillars of cloud could certainly blot out the light of the sun and the moon and make the blood. At night, when the clouds are beginning to clear, the moon could appear to be blood red through the haze.

You've certainly had occasions when you've seen the moon look blood red. I have. Of course, everyone thinks of this scripture when that happens.

But it's just the effect of certain smoke and haze, you know. So, even though this is a typical expression, an emblem for the description of the fall of a kingdom, it is also a sense, probably to some degree, literal. The sky was no doubt darkened to a certain degree by the great clouds of smoke hovering over the city, from the flames.

It went up in flames and so forth. So, it's describing the overthrow of Jerusalem here. And so, when Peter quotes this as taking place in the last days, it's quite natural that he would mean the last days of the Jewish system, the last days of the temple, the last days of the Old Covenant.

Okay. And in verse 32, there's this promise made, and it shall come to pass that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved or delivered, is another way to adequately translate it. This verse is quoted not only by Peter on the day of Pentecost, but Paul also quotes it in Romans 10, 13.

Romans 10, 13. And so, this destruction is predicted on Jerusalem, but there will be an opportunity for anyone who wants to, to be saved out of it. No one had to perish when Jerusalem fell in 7 AD.

God sent his prophet, John the Baptist, to warn them. Then he sent his son, Jesus, and he warned them about it, too. Then Peter on the day of Pentecost warns them, using the words of their own prophet, Joel, warning them that this would happen.

These people had plenty of warnings from prophets that were sent to them, and from apostles that were sent to them, that they wouldn't heed them. However, some people did heed the message. Some people did call on the name of the Lord.

Some people did receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit instead of the baptism of Zion. And those ones were saved. And it's interesting, not one of them perished in Jerusalem when it fell.

According to Eusebius, the first church historian and the earliest guy who ever wrote church history that has survived for us, Eusebius, his works are still available. He says, he wrote about the year 300, so he was pretty early on. He said that from the records he had, that apparently all the Christians fled the city of Jerusalem before it was besieged by the Romans.

There was an oracle given, apparently a prophetic word in the church, warning them of it, and they fled from the city. And according to Eusebius, not one Christian was left in the city once fell. So that those Jews who were baptized in the Holy Spirit were not baptized in fire.

Those Jews who called on the name of the Lord escaped the Holocaust that is here described, and that's what's predicted. And then it says, for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom

the Lord calls. Now clearly he's talking about the remnant here, which again points our attention to the church.

He says, deliverance shall be in Mount Zion and Jerusalem. Well, in describing the fall of Jerusalem and its destruction, it doesn't sound like he's talking about deliverance there. So he's talking about there will be a spiritual Jerusalem and a spiritual Mount Zion where the true salvation will be found.

The old one will be burned down, but there will be a Mount Zion, the spiritual Zion, which Hebrews 12, 22 speaks about, the church, which is where deliverance and salvation is found. Now chapter 3, And 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 in exchange for a harlot and sold a girl for wine that they may drink.

Indeed, what have you to do with me, O tyrant, Satan, 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. Behold, I will raise them out of their place, which you have sold them to, and I 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 shall sell them to the Sabaeans, the people of Sheba, to a people far off, for the Lord has spoken." Now, when is this fulfilled? It says in verse 1, in those days, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem. Well, we know that those days refers to the church age, because verses 28 through 36 can be no doubt about it. The way it's used in the New Testament, it has to be a reference to church age.

So chapter 3 must apply to the church age too, because it says in those days. But what does it mean when I bring back the captives? Actually, literally, bring back the captivity. It should be understood that that expression, to return the captivity or bring back the captivity, is an idiom in the Hebrew, at least the Bible, that does not necessarily refer to bringing captives back at all from any place to another place.

In fact, it just means to restore the fortunes of those who have been suffering, to turn the captivity. For instance, in Job chapter 42 and verse 10. It says, the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends.

Well, he was not taken captive anywhere. What it means is that it restored his fortunes. And modern translations often record it that way.

They understand that to return the captivity just means to restore the fortunes. As God had his curse on his people, now he turns around and blesses them. So that's what it's talking about, the blessing.

He had talked about them being cursed with his locusts. If they cursed the God, he would bless them. If they cursed the God, he'll bless them.

And among the blessings that he'll eventually send is the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit, and the Messianic Age. And at that time, when God is blessing his people like this, he will gather all nations to judgment, to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Now, there is no valley by that name, but Jehoshaphat was one of the kings of Judah, and a good one, in fact.

But the name Jehoshaphat means Jehovah judges. Jehovah judges. The same valley in verse 14, in chapter 3 verse 14, is called the valley of decision.

Now, I'm not sure exactly what this imagery means, but just to speculate a little bit, and that's all it is, is speculation. Perhaps it's this figure of speech suggests that it's a valley between two points in time, between two mountaintops in history. Perhaps between the first and the second coming of Christ, the church age.

If we would depict history as a timeline with high points and low points, the coming of Christ, when he came the first time, and his second coming, would certainly be among the highest points on that chart. And the valley in between them would be what we call the church age. And maybe that is what's referred to.

Maybe not a literal geographical valley, but more or less a period of time between the mountaintops of Jesus ascending from the Mount of Olives, and his return on the Mount of Olives. The valley, the figurative valley, which is the time of God's judgment, where God is judging nations. It's called the valley of decision, which might make a reference to God making a decision, making a judgment about people.

But it also might mean it's the time for them to make a decision. The church age is the time of opportunity. They're in the valley of decision.

They need to decide. And we're not talking about Jews here, we're talking about Gentiles. All the nations are gathered into this valley of decision.

And there's a struggle that goes on. There's a warfare. And some of them no doubt decide rightly, but others are destroyed in it.

And there's a lot of things, perhaps, that need to be commented on here, but it would be almost impossible to make specific comments. It might also be that the valley of decision, or the valley of Jehoshaphat, is the figurative valley between the two figurative mountains, that is, kingdoms. Mountains sometimes are kingdoms.

There's no mention of mountains here, but a valley usually is flanked by mountains. And the mountain of the kingdom of the Lord's house, that is, the church, on the one hand, God's kingdom, and the kingdoms of this world on the other. And there's people standing in between.

They've got to make a decision. The valley of decision. Will I go to the mountain of the Lord's house, like the people in Micah chapter 4 do, or do I go with the world? I could see either of those as a possible meaning, or maybe neither is correct.

I don't know. But I'm simply offering some possibilities. He's certainly talking about bringing judgment on the disobedient nations.

And that has gone on, I'm sure, throughout the church age. I believe that, well, even the fall of Jerusalem happened within the scope of the church age, and it was a judgment of God on that nation. But also there have been other nations that have risen and fallen.

Many wicked rulers have come and gone in that period of time, and it could well be said that God has dumped them, because in the valley of decision, they made the wrong decision. They didn't choose righteousness. They didn't choose to threaten their lot with the kingdom of God, which is going to rule the world.

But they went with the kingdom of this world, and therefore they got judged. In verse 9 it says, Proclaim among the nations, Prepare for war. Wake up the mighty men.

Let all men of war draw near. Let them come up and beat their 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 a sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go down, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for the wickedness is great.

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. Here we have that same image again.

The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem. The heavens and the earth will shake, but the Lord will be a shelter for his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain.

Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no alien shall ever pass through her again. Now, Zion, Jerusalem, very clearly in this context, is a reference to the church, as it is frequently in

these Messianic passages. And so, salvation and deliverance, and God's presence is in Mount Zion.

There's a mountain there, you see. Now, these nations in the valley of decision, the valley of judgment, notice what it says to them. Beat your, verse 10, your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears.

Just the opposite of what those people do who come to the mountain of the Lord. According to Micah, chapter 4, and verse 3, and also Isaiah, chapter 2, it says that those who come to the mountain of the house of the Lord, they beat their swords into plowshares and pierce pruning hooks. But these people, apparently, rejecting the gospel, rejecting the kingdom of God, refusing to come to the mountain of the Lord and beat their swords into plowshares, they remain in the valley of decision, the valley of judgment.

And they, therefore, are going to have to face a crisis. They might as well take their form of influence and beat them into swords, because they've got a fight, they've got a war on their hands, and their war is against God. And that is made clear in verse 12, where it says, let the nations be awakened and come up to the valley of judgment.

There will I sit to judge all the surrounding nations. God is going to judge these, they come to war against him. But notice in the previous verse, verse 11, the nations are summoned to come to battle.

Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather yourselves all around. But then notice this, cause your mighty ones to go down there, O Lord. Presumably, that means that when the nations of the world resist God, that he sends his mighty ones down, very possibly a reference to the angelic armies.

We know of cases in the Old Testament where the angels fought on behalf of God's people. They surrounded Dothan to protect Elisha and his servants. They fought for the children of Israel when Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, and the city was surrounded by the Assyrians.

Apparently, angels fought instead of the Jews in the battles in Jehoshaphat. In fact, perhaps there's even a reference to that in calling this the Valley of Jehoshaphat. A place where God gets the victory through his power against the nations that are armed.

The nations have armed themselves with swords and spears, but God causes his mighty ones to come down. His angelic power, spiritual power comes against them, and they are overthrown and judged. Now, verse 13 talks about putting in the sickle for the harvest is ripe, so just a grain harvest.

It also talks about harvesting the wine and throwing it into the wine press. This image of a grain harvest and a grape vintage are picked up, this exact statement is picked up in

Revelation 14, and there the vine of the earth is picked up and thrown into a grape vat and trampled upon. So there's the judgment of, well, some would understand it as the judgment of the nation.

Some actually understand it as the judgment of Jerusalem in 70 AD. We'll consider the various interpretations of that when we study the book of Revelation. Anyway, the reference to the sun and the moon growing dark, again, that's a fairly generic symbol of God's judgment on wicked people, and we won't take the time to discuss that again.

It talks about the heavens and the earth shaking in verse 16, which is also talked about in Haggai chapter 2, where God says, I will shake the heavens and the earth. Haggai chapter 2, verses 6 and 7, and the writer of Hebrews quotes it in chapter 12 of Hebrews, and he says that when Haggai says that, he's talking about the shaking down of everything that is made that can be shaken, but we, he says in verse 28 of Hebrews 12, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, cannot be shaken, should seek grace to serve God acceptably with godly fear. So God shakes everything up, but when he does, his people will be sheltered.

There is some reason to believe that there may be a reference to the fall of Jerusalem here also, since the same imagery is used in a number of places elsewhere for that, but it may be, it's not all that clear, and I must say that this passage in Joel is one of the more unclear things in the book. But he states in verse 17 that in Mount Zion, a god will be dwelling, and that means, of course, the spirit of Jerusalem. So his last verses, 18 through 21, it should come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk.

Anyone want to argue that this is literal? Anyone doesn't observe the symbolism in the Bible? The mountains drip with wine, the hills flow with milk, 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 Shittim. Now this valley of Shittim, we know from several passages in the scripture, is on the other side of the Jordan River. From Jerusalem.

It's amazing that many people take this literally, and they believe that in the millennium, there's water flowing from this millennial temple and going and watering this valley of Shittim, which is in Moab. There are several scriptures that mention the location of it. Numbers 33-49 is one of those places.

Joshua 3-1. Also Micah 6-5. All of those places mention the valley of Shittim being in Moab on the other side of Jordan.

Now how can a river flow, a literal river flow, from Jerusalem across the Jordan to water a place across the Jordan? Rivers don't flow across each other. You can have an intersection of two roads, but not of two rivers. You can't have them flowing across each other.

So, this obviously is figurative. And if anyone's going to argue it's literal, then they're going to have to argue that the mountains dripping with wine, and the hills flowing with milk is literal too. We've got figurative language here, but what is it figurative of? What is this river flowing from the house of the Lord? It is described in two other places in the Old Testament and one in the New.

Actually, two in the New. In the Old Testament, in Ezekiel 47-1, Ezekiel saw a river flowing from under the threshold of the house of the Lord. In Zechariah 14, which we will study next, or the following week, he speaks of living waters flowing from Jerusalem.

In Revelation 20, I guess it's 22, there's the description of the river flowing from the house of the Lord. This river flowing from Jerusalem, from the house of the Lord, is mentioned three times in the Old Testament, twice in the New Testament. Only one place does it explain what it is.

And that's in John 7, where Jesus is speaking. And he says, If any man thirsts, let him come to me and drink. And he that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.

And John says, Thus he spoke of the Holy Spirit, which was not yet given. The living water, the rivers of living water, that Zechariah speaks of, that Joel is speaking of here, is the Holy Spirit. That's John 7, verses 37-39, that Jesus said that.

So, Jesus interprets this river flowing from Jerusalem, that is an image repeated four other places in the Bible besides Jesus' statement, as the Holy Spirit flowing from the believers, watering this desert area across Jordan. The idea is that the parts areas, spiritually parched areas of the world, will be evangelized, will be watered, will become fruitful for God, because of the spiritual ministry of the church going forth from this spiritual Jerusalem. It says in verse 19, 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 blood guilt, whom I have not acquitted, for the Lord dwells in Zion. So, the Lord dwells in Zion, Judah will last forever, but these have to be understood in terms of the true Israel, the true Judah.

Remember, Judah is the word from which the word Jew comes. And Paul said, he is not a Jew who has run outwardly, he is one who has run inwardly, in Romans 2, 28 and 29. And he says, that is the person whose praise is from God, not man.

The word Judah means praise. And he says, a true Jew, or true tribal Judah member, is one who is not seeking praise from man, but from God. Romans 2, 28 and 29.

So, the true Israel, the true Judah, the true Jews, come from the true spiritual Jerusalem, the church. And it is from there that this living water flows to water the world, as a result

of the Holy Spirit being poured out on all flesh, as Joel mentioned in verse 28 of the previous chapter. So, that is the message of Joel.

A locust plague was the present crisis. A call to repentance was called for. If they repented, he told them that God would reverse the effects of the plague, but then he looked further to that, to the aid of the Spirit, to the messianic aid, and to the blessings that the church would bring to the world through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And also the judgment upon the city of Jerusalem is there mentioned. And the final judgment, besides the judgment of the locust plague, the final judgment in 70 AD is also mentioned. So, in that short book, quite a lot is covered.