

## Joel Chapter 2 – John Karmelich

1. Ever been in a situation where disaster's struck and everyone's thinking, now what? How is this going to affect our future? Whenever I deal with a tragedy, like most people I think, "What is it I can do to help?" Even after a clean up operation, the big question is what can we learn to prevent a repeat of that event? To state what I assume may be the obvious, that's the situation here in the second chapter of Joel.
  - a) To explain, first I need to recall a few things from Chapter 1, and then explain how it ties to Chapter 2. The short version is sometime in Israel's ancient history (probably occurred roughly around 800 B.C.), the nation of Israel experienced a horrid plague of locusts. That plague probably destroyed all the crops and everybody living there suffered due to a food shortage. It wasn't so horrid that it killed everyone living there. While we don't know the exact date, we know that nation survived through it. It was horrid enough to cause lots of damage to the farms and scare everyone there to ponder what will we do for food?
  - b) Chapter 2 essentially says, "Keep that disaster in mind as it will repeat". However, at the time scholars think Joel wrote this, there was no repeat or any other major disaster. This was most likely written when Israel was split into two countries. The big question of this lesson is essentially, "What's this future disaster, and why should I care?" My goal for this lesson is to answer that question and keep you interested enough to realize why the book of Joel is a part of the bible, and why his predictions affect the future of the human race.
  - c) Let me start with the comment about avoiding "extremism". What I mean by that, is some think Joel is only writing about a recent, past-tense locust plague and nothing else. Others think this book is only about "The End Times" and nothing else. I'm positive both aspects are in view here, I'm also equally as positive it is not just "that". What God wants us to get out of this book is despite whatever disasters we face in this lifetime, "that's not the end of the ballgame". Yes of course, God has plans for us for all of eternity, most of which we do not know, but we must also accept the fact He also has plans for our lives over and above whatever is the "disaster of the moment".
  - d) One of my favorite definitions of a Christian came from the late Ray Stedman, who wrote verse-by-verse bible commentaries like myself: "A definition I find most descriptive is that a Christian is completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble". It came to me because Christians aren't alone to facing troubles, but we're aware of them, if for no other reason than we know we're living in a world where Satan is trying to prevent God's plans from occurring and we live in a sin-filled world. If you consider yourself a Christian the "Constantly in trouble" aspect of life is very real. When we do face hard times, having a bible book like Joel reminds us of what is "really real" as opposed to whatever situations we face in life. It's a reminder that whether we like it or not, all of us live in a fallen world condemned by sin. We also realize our world is ruled by one who has an army of demonic forces who work against us if we're using our lives as a witness for Jesus.
2. That's good philosophy, but John, you're preaching to the choir again. So get off your high horse, and tell us what do we need to know about Joel Chapter 2. OK then, here we go:
  - a) The short answer is it's a prediction of short-term future and long term future. One idea I explained in Chapter 1 is that God likes to work in patterns. That just means there's often a short term fulfillment of a prediction as well as a long term fulfillment. Yes there is the, "God's going to wipe out this world one day and we have live "being on our toes" that life can always end that way at anytime". That was Chapter 1. Chapter 2 effectively ponders what do we do in the meantime? If all this horrid stuff described in Chapter 1 will repeat, how do we prepare for a repeat? As I jokingly said in the first lesson, it does not mean we start building bomb shelters. God wants us to be a witness to a lost and dying world, not hide ourselves from whatever danger we can face.

- b) Realize that whatever trouble is coming, Joel describes it as coming soon.
    - i) Some theorize that the Southern Kingdom repented of whatever damage would be happening soon, so God relented. For me, it's hard enough to deal with life as it is, than to think about what could have happened. Since Joel describes a big repeat of this event coming, soon, I don't buy that version, although some scholars do.
    - ii) Others think it's about the fact that the Assyrian Empire that did destroy the North Kingdom did do some damage to towns in the "South", but didn't completely wipe it out. Most scholars argue that Joel was a witness to the Southern Kingdom, which was wiped out by the Babylonian Captivity, but that event didn't occur for about two hundred years after Joel was written, so that wasn't a "coming soon".
    - iii) So the big question is "what's the rush?" The correct answer in the literal sense can be any of those answers. In the "spiritual sense" it's the reminder that He wants us to always be on our toes to use the last lessons key phrase, that just as disaster did come whenever Joel wrote this, so it can and will come again, as we accept the fact God works in patterns in our lives. It's kind of like the view that God will make us go through the same lessons over and over again until we finally get it! That's one reason why God works in "patterns" to help us learn what He wants us to get. My point is God wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him and He will often allow things to repeat in our life in order to teach us lessons about trusting Him!
    - iv) Anyway, that's the main scope of this chapter. Again if you just think of the text of this chapter as being all "past tense" or being "all end time stuff", we miss what it is God's trying to convey to us: that He works in patterns in order to teach us what it is He wants to convey. God is not "above" allowing disasters to occur to remind us that He's in charge and we're not to forget that.
  - c) Oh, if you haven't figured it out by now, my single word title of this lesson is "patterns".
    - i) With that said, time to begin my verse-by-verse commentary of Chapter 2.
3. Joel Chapter 2, Verse 1: Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand-- <sup>2</sup> a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come.
- a) The text starts here with the idea of sound the alarm! If you read about the locust plague in Chapter 1, Joel made it clear it was past tense. So if that's true, the big question of this chapter is what's this future event that Joel is talking about?
    - i) As I stated earlier, this is debated among bible scholars and there is no set answer. I just described the possibilities earlier on this page, so I won't repeat them here. I just want to state that whatever it was, scholars debate it.
    - ii) The big question of course is why should we care? If the land of Israel was struck by a disaster over 2,500 years ago, what difference does it make? If God's going to destroy the world as we know it one day in the future, why should I worry about an event that is beyond my control. In other words, I have enough on my plate to think about than to worry about past disasters or some long-term future disaster.
    - iii) Since I've got you reading this far, let me answer that! The issue isn't so much for us to be worried about past or future disasters, but to realize how God wants us to react when disasters hit. To state the obvious, our first reaction should always be to ask how can we help or what can we do? I have to admit I was impressed when I hear stories about "9-11" and all the people that offered to help during that time!
      - a) Once we get past that, the real question to ponder is, "God what is it you'd want me to learn from this lesson?" One way to not have bad things repeat is to ask God what do you want me to learn from this? That's a good thing to pray about when disaster strikes.

- b) I can't tell you how many times in my life I've had people ask, "Why is this situation happening over and over again?" What I usually ask in a gentle way is the question, what do you think God wants you to learn from this?
  - c) I know I may be stating the obvious, but it's important to make that point.
- b) Meanwhile, back in Joel's world, he's predicting some sort of horrid disaster to occur that is a lot like the locust plague he just described in Chapter 1.
  - i) Let me remind everyone of something I stated in Chapter 1: The phrase, "The day of the Lord" is not just a reference to all the "Revelation type of stuff". It can refer to any significant event in the world around us. It is describing any disaster that's on a grand scale. I believe that not every disaster is God ordained, but I do believe every one is "God allowed". The difference is the fact that our world cursed by sin, and therefore bad things occur. For the devout Christian, I'm positive that "Day of the Lord" scale of an event is a way for us to focus upon Him to ponder what does God want us to learn from this event? That is why I argue "Day of the Lord" stuff happens in patterns.
  - ii) Since the focus of this verse is on the Nation of Israel, let me ask the big question: Does it mean disaster will strike that land again before Jesus returns? No idea. All I know is for sure is that "Revelation" speaks of a world-wide disaster that'll make even the World Wars look like a "picnic" in comparison. Will that "The" Day of the Lord" affect Israel, of course it will, but I'm convinced that somehow that nation is going to survive if for no other reason that God promised Abraham's descendants will live there when the Messiah rules the world from there. No matter what will occur in the world, I'm positive God and Israel will "win" one day.
    - a) So how does "Christian future" reconcile with "Israel's future"? I've always been aware that each nation of believers, has a separate destiny just as each had a separate beginning. In effect, Israel began as a nation with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Christianity began as a nation when the church started.
    - b) The era of the church "ending" is whenever the rapture occurs. At which time the number of Christians is officially filled, and we're all in heaven.
    - c) We must remember that Christians are in effect a "subset" of those who'll be saved. I hold the view that children who die are saved. I also hold the view that many people who die with limited knowledge of God will also be saved, based on what they did know of God and how they acted based on that knowledge. My point here is once the Christian "era" ends, then an era where begin where God will once again focus on Israel as a nation as He has in the past. I need to state all of that theology here, as we're going to get into some of that later in this lesson.
  - c) If you think all this end time stuff is irrelevant to the verses, notice in Verse 2 the phrase reads, "such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come". I'd say that's a pretty good "end time" phrase. If you recall, I stated in the first lesson, the bible has more verses about the end times than it does about the time Jesus walked the earth. Again, Joel is not all "end times" or not is all "Past tense locust plague", but a lot of that is in these verses!
    - i) Anyway, the key point here is Joel is saying in effect, "make a big stink about the fact that just as the locusts struck in the past, so God is going to one day work on a large scale again and it will be soon!" That's the first two verses in one thought.
    - ii) So how can Joel say "soon" if it's been over 2,500 years? The way to view this idea is to realize how short it is. It may be a long-term scale in terms of how long life is going without the Messiah ruling over it. However, in terms of how long we'll be living, it's pretty short. It's in effect a reminder to us that life is short so let's keep the big perspective in mind of what is the eternal future for us and this world!
    - iii) A lot of history between those two dates, which is why God works in patterns!

4. Verse 3: Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste-- nothing escapes them.
- a) To understand this verse, one has to remember that Joel is being both "poetic" and "literal" at the same time. It is literal in the sense Joel is describing a literal army. He is also literal as he compares Israel to the "garden of Eden" not in terms of wild plant growth but in that both places were "cultivated" by man to grow food to be eaten. Let me explain:
    - i) I'm convinced the garden of Eden was literal. Adam didn't just sit there and watch food grow and think, "I'll eat that today". I'm convinced God put him to work as to farm crops to grow. I don't think he worked it the same way farmers work land as we think he does, but I don't think Adam could sit around and be lazy all day.
    - ii) My point is just as the Garden of Eve had to be cultivated and worked, so the land of Israel had to be worked in order to grow plants there too.
    - iii) Now that I've got the "literal" covered, let me talk about the "poetic". Joel's telling us in a colorful way that just as a fire destroys a place, so the land of Israel will be consumed from a "nice garden farm" into a waste land. One can't think of English poetry when one thinks of Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry is where two thoughts connect. It is the idea that the first thought about a fire destroying something is a way of connecting to the fact the land of Israel will be completely destroyed.
  - b) Now that I've got that speech out of my system, let's talk about the "literalness" again:
    - i) Some see this verse as describing one of the great empires that destroyed the land of Israel in the 7th and 6th century BC. The short version is a large empire called the Assyrians conquered and destroyed the Northern Kingdom. They also did a lot of damage to the South, but didn't destroy it. Roughly a century later another empire called the Babylonians overthrew the Assyrians, started their own empire and also destroyed what was left of the nation of Israel. My point is that some see Joel predicting some aspect of those wars in these verses.
    - ii) Others argue it's just all "end times" type of stuff. Others argue that at the time it was written the Southern Nation repented of their sin, and God relented. What I am positive of, is that God works in patterns in our lives to keep our focus upon Him as well as teach us lessons the hard way about keeping our "eye on the ball" of remembering what is real in life and what is temporary.
    - iii) Let me put all of this another way: Am I positive Joel had "The" end times in view when He wrote this? Yes. I'm also equally convinced he had shorter view in mind as well. What Joel wanted was for the Israelites to focus upon God and make Him the center of their lives. That's Joel's message to us Christians as well.
5. Verse 4: They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry.
- a) If you think this is going to get any easier, you've obviously never read Joel before!
  - b) If you've ever looked at a locust or a grasshopper up close, you'd notice their heads look a lot like horse's heads. That's why many think Joel is only writing about locusts here. I do hold the view that Joel's scope is much wider than that, but he's still using a recent locust plague as an example of what damage will occur in the future.
    - i) Do I think Joel is describing a literal locust plague? Yes I do.
    - ii) Do I think Joel is using locusts as an example of an invading army? Yes!
  - c) Anyway, this verse simply says that whatever "they" area, they attack like the cavalry!
6. Verse 5: With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle.
- a) It'd help to keep in mind that Joel is using the literal aspects of a locust plague to describe some future "Day of the Lord" as if to say there are a lot of similarities of how one army is working to how a future army will work. Joel's saying a locust plague is a lot like a well-organized army that keeps in line and every soldier does their job. It's amazing to realize locusts work this way all by instinct without any "general" telling them what to do!

- b) Speaking of locusts, many of you may realize that Revelation Chapter 9 speaks of an army of locusts doing damage to the earth in end times. Is the Revelation locusts literal? I don't know for sure. They are some sort of creature that does locust-plague-like damage to the world and I'm convinced that when John wrote Revelation, it's as if he had Joel in mind as he wrote about this section. If you don't know, the book of Revelation has many hundreds of references to Old Testament writings and I'm convinced that locusts is just one of many of those examples. My point is simply that if you want proof that Joel is God ordained, we have to realize that all the bible books "intertwine" as in effect God was behind all of those writings as they all tie together to form a single story.
  - c) Anyway, Joel is describing a literal locust attack with hints that it also applies to other big "Day of the Lord" type events.
7. Verse 6: At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale.
- a) If you think this "future locust plague" is just an "Israel thing", notice Verse 6: It reads that "nations are in anguish" because of it. Just the site of millions of locusts coming right at us is enough to make "every face turns pale".
  - b) The point of course is that it is "literal" past tense of a real locust plague and it's literal in a future tense of something bigger in scale that effects the whole world.
  - c) Earlier I asked the question, "We as Christians accept the fact that the world as we know it will have this horrible ending one day. Why should we focus on God's timing when all of this will take place when we each have lives to live in the meantime?" So glad you asked!
    - i) The key point is perspective. If our world is going to end badly one day, then why are we (as humans) spending so much time say trying to get rich or famous? What we've been called to do as Christians is tell people, "Here's how the world will end one day, so why are we wasting our time doing things that won't matter for all of eternity?" My point is the reason the bible spends so much time talking about how the world will end, isn't for us to know the details. It's so we keep our focus upon what is important: To lead as many people as we can to Jesus so we'll live through and past all of this and realize there is more to life than just accumulating stuff.
    - ii) OK enough end-time theology for this verse. Let's get back to Joel's locust plague!
8. Verse 7: They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course. <sup>8</sup> They do not jostle each other; each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. <sup>9</sup> They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves they enter through the windows. <sup>10</sup> Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.
- a) If you've ever seen a movie about a locust plague, you'd get a pretty good idea of what is being portrayed here. There numbers can be so overwhelming, it can appear like the sky has gone dark as all one can see is the locusts. Despite the fact they don't have any leaders telling them how to attack, (see Proverbs 30:27) they just know how to attack. In case you want to know a little more about locusts, they can have hundreds or thousands of babies in one batch. My point is they can increase in numbers quickly to a point where they will cover miles in size and march like an army in ranks and destroy all plant life in it's path.
  - b) OK John, this reads like something out of a horror movie. Why is Joel trying to scare us in these verses? It's not just to realize the horror of a locust plague. It's to realize that just as God's worked that way in the past, He'll allow something as horrid to occur in the future as in effect that type of horror will be how the world ends.
  - c) Remember my title of this lesson is "patterns". This chapter started with Joel telling us to go "sound the alarm" that this is coming again. The point isn't that such an event repeated in Israel's history, it's that God wants us as Christians to warn people that the world that we live in will also end in "horror" and the only chance of escape, is to be trusting in Jesus as God and as being in charge of our lives. That's the Christian message in one thought.
  - d) In the meantime, Joel is still giving his "horror" show that wraps up in the next verse!

9. Verse 11: The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?
- a) The reason Joel's trying his best to scare us, is so we realize that eternity will be equally as dreadful for those people who refuse to turn to Him. This verse is Joel's way of telling us that hell is real, and the day that eternal judgment occurs will be horrid for most people.
  - b) Notice that this is the LORD's army. (That word all in titles is the most holy name for God for the sake of my newcomers.) So who is the Lord's army? While earlier verses could be interpreted as an army of locusts, it's hard to think of locusts as God's personal army. All I'm saying is I'm pretty positive Joel's officially "jumped the shark" (love that reference) to discussing eternal judgment and this is not just about a locust plague anymore.
  - c) One thing that popped in my head is in the famous Armageddon battle, in Revelation 16. In that battle, God Himself wipes out an army gathered against Him. We don't get any of the details of how they are defeated, but we know Jesus does this alone or leads a victory.
    - i) My big question here is, is Joel describing the same thing? Don't know. All I know is Joel is describing some great war and God himself is destroying His opponents.
    - ii) Let me try top explain this another way: Did God personally lead the Assyrian and Babylonian attacks against Israel? No in a literal sense, but yes, I'm sure it was His idea to destroy the Israelites in the first place. Is that what Joel is describing in this verse? Don't know. I just know that whatever Joel is describing is something to be feared, which is "The Day of the Lord".
    - iii) Let me put it this way. A lot of people wrongly think, they have got nothing to fear when it comes to God's judgment. They wrongly think that their good deeds are greater than their bad deeds, so God has to let them into heaven. Worse, they think they claim that Jesus is God, but never put their hearts into that belief, as they will suffer for that idea. As the old expression goes, "many people will mess heaven by 18 inches". That means they have the head knowledge that Jesus is God, but at the same time don't seek Him or believe in their hearts that Jesus is in charge of their life. All I'm saying is for most people, "The" Day of the Lord is a thing to fear, not a thing for most people to look forward to.
    - iv) So how do we know Joel's not just being "colorful" here and continuing to describe an army of locusts as a thing to fear? Simply because I doubt Joel would use God's most holy name to lead an army of locusts.
    - v) OK, enough scary stuff, let's turn to something more positive.
10. Verse 12: "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." <sup>13</sup> Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. <sup>14</sup> Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing-- grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God.
- a) As I've stated several times so far in this lesson, some scholars argue that God held off on His judgment of the Southern Kingdom because they followed Joel's advice here and as a nation did turn back to God. Don't know if that's true, I just know that Joel explains to us how one does that.
  - b) Remember my opening question of this lesson was "now what?" Here Joel himself tells us the "now what" as to how to avoid this disaster from repeating. Let me answer what may be the most important point of this lesson: If we're scared we might be missing heaven by "18 inches" as you call it, how do we repent? If we've turned from God, how do we show that we're sorry and want to repent? These verses give us the answer.
  - c) Let me be careful what I say here. I never think of our faith as requiring an effort to prove we love God. The correct way to view this is, if we claim we love God and trust Him with our lives, it would naturally follow that our works would follow that faith.

- i) I believe it was Billy Graham who explained it well: He said that "faith and works" are like breathing. If we naturally take in a "big breath of faith", we'd naturally let out a "big breath of works". The point is they work hand in hand together.
    - ii) Now that I've made that point, let me get back to these verses.
  - d) One of the odd pieces of bible trivia that fascinates me is the fact that one can find a whole bunch of times in the bible when a bible character is upset, they rip their clothing as a way of expressing that anger. You can find such references throughout the bible. My point is we never find a bible command in that orders us to rip our clothes to show remorse over a time of real trouble. It's just a habit that people followed and it became accepted as a way of showing remorse. In Verse 13 Joel specifically states that we are to "Rend our heart and not our garments". Since I'm positive Joel is God inspired, if I want to show sorrow over a sin I've committed, I go to my knees and pray, and not ruin anything I am wearing.
  - e) The point of this verse is not the specific way we pray, but about the effort we do make to turn to God. It's about telling God that we are truly sorry about the sins we've committed and we sincerely desire to turn from Him. One of the most powerful and commonly used words in the New Testament is the word "repent". Both John the Baptist and Jesus used it as they started their ministries. Even after the church started, Peter used "repent" as a key word for people to turn to God and believe the Gospel message.
    - i) What I'm getting at, is the concept of "repenting" is a key term in both the Old and the New Testament. It's the idea of "changing our ways". It's not saying we have to be perfect, but it's saying because we are grateful for the eternal life He's given us, we desire to live as He desires and turn from our old lifestyle.
    - ii) As I like to joke, as a Christian I'm free to sin all I want. The question is how much do I want to? Is that pleasing to God when I turn from Him? That's the issue here.
  - f) Let me cover two more issues here: "Fasting" and "Blessing". Fasting first.
    - i) I discussed it in the last lesson, but I want to cover a related topic. In the last lesson I discussed the fact that fasting is a way of showing God we are serious about Him helping us. It doesn't mean God has to help us because we're fasting, it's a method like "tearing our garments" or spending time in prayer to show we're serious. The reason I wanted to bring it up here, is that God "recognizes" fasting as a method of showing we're really serious about changing our lifestyle due to a sin issue. If you are familiar with army commands, you know the command "about face" is a good simple way of describing what true repentance is as one turns from sin!
    - ii) OK, from fasting and repentance, I want to discuss, what is a blessing? If we all of a sudden got rich and famous, does that mean God is blessing us? Hardly. When I think of God blessing us, I think of Him providing for us and leading us down a path He wants us to go. One thing I've learned from living the Christian life is He will never do for us what we can do for ourselves. What He does is, lead us where He wants us to go. Sometimes it's trial and error, and at times He somehow makes it obvious to us what He wants us to do. My point here is simply that blessing can be some sort of financial reward or success, but often it's just His way of saying He has lead us down the path He wants us to go in life.
    - iii) Meanwhile, enough happiness, time to get back to Joel and "repenting":
11. Verse 15: Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly.
- a) Remember I asked at the beginning of the lesson, "What do we do know?" Verses 15-18 give examples of how to react when disaster occurs. Let me put it this way: Can we say for sure a disaster is God ordained? Of course not. However, seeking Him when life gets hard is a sure recipe for getting our perspective right about what to do next.
  - b) I get the impression there is nothing God enjoys more than His people gathering together in order to seek Him. Obviously it doesn't always have to be about repentance. When we know we've messed up, seeking Him individually or collectively is a good thing to do.

- c) Obviously, for Israelites at that time, declaring a fast and asking Israelites to come to one meeting place is a way for them to collectively seek Him. For us Christians, an example might be a drought or some sort of "natural disaster". Again, we have no idea if such an event is "God ordained", but to state the obvious, gathering together as a community to pray about an event and repent of sins is a good place as anywhere to start in a crisis.
- d) In the meantime, Joel's got more to say about gathering together:
12. Verse 16: Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. <sup>17</sup> Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, `Where is their God?' "
- a) Keep in mind what's going on here. Joel wants a national effort to repent of sin. Among the people he's calling is elders, children, women nursing babies, honeymooners, priests and essentially all the Israelites to collectively seek God together.
- b) OK John, we can't get the whole country to come to my home, let alone get them to pray along with me, what gives here? Think of it on a "church level". If our church is guilty of say, allowing a significant but known sin to exist in our church, there is nothing better to do then collectively pray, say we as a church messed up and ask for His forgiveness.
- c) Let's say your community was struck by it's own disaster. You'd be surprised how easy it is to ask that people gather to seek God in such times. Yes, it may be more "generic" than we may like, but at least we are collectively seeking Him together. I was amazed at all of the efforts made to collectively seek God after say a "9-11" or even after a local disaster. I am trying to get the point across that when disaster strikes, people are willing to pray! I have seen it occur when all the Christians at a high school seek Him together or all of the Christians in a community pray together. I'm not saying God is bound to work in a great way when this occurs, but I have seen mighty works of God occur when this effort goes!
- d) I heard a great definition of a priest that I think fits well with Verse 17. John MacArthur once said, "The role of the priest is to stand between his congregation and Satan to say to him that, "These are God's people. They're not perfect, but they're forgiven." I thought of that, because Verse 17 is a similar type of response. It's saying in effect, "Dear God forgive Your people because they're making an effort to turn from their sins and they've called to be a witness for You". That's why I think of John MacArthur's analogy here as he and the priests are asking God, "If You will let Your people be Your people, then they will still be a living witness for You". That's the idea behind this prayer and these verses.
13. Verse 18: Then the LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people.
- a) These verses are not saying "We can put God in a box and make Him forgive us if we do exactly this method." What they are saying is God can't resist a sincere effort on our part to sincerely turn to Him. He loves us in our imperfect state, but He also demands that we be His witnesses to the world. When we fail to do, that's when the "locusts" come. When we turn back to Him or continue to use our lives as a witness for Him, that's when we will get blessed by Him. Speaking of blessings, notice the next verse:
14. Verse 19: The LORD will reply to them: "I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.
- a) There are a number of ways to discuss this verse. We can talk about it on a personal level of how God blesses us, and we can discuss it in terms of Israel's actual history. I'll discuss both here: The general idea of grain (think food), new wine (fresh grape juice or wine that hasn't aged much) and oil are the basic staples of Israel's economy. That's what they grew and used to trade to gather other products. Even if you are not a big fan of wheat, wine or olive oil, the point is a "blessing" is when God provides our needs for us so we can survive and thrive within our local community.



- b) My point is to think of God's blessing as taking care of us. I admit that whenever I start to feel down, I like to think of what I'm grateful for. If one's dealing with a disaster, it's good to start making a grateful list to appreciate what you have instead of complaining over the lost things. What I'm saying is "mood" affects our behavior, and being grateful for stuff is better than complaining about what is lost. I'm not saying there aren't times of grieving in life. If we lose someone close to us, God's not "anti-grieving". My point is about having a good perspective about life and realizing how blessed we are instead of complaining over what we don't have. All I'm saying is despite whatever we're dealing with, we can always be grateful for something. Remember Ray Steadman's quote that Christians are constantly cheerful as well as constantly in trouble. All I'm saying is a great way to go through life is to be cheerful over whatever we're dealing with and that's how God blesses us.
  - c) Now that I've got us in a good mood about how God does bless us, let me discuss the fact that this verse says that Israel as a nation will never again be an "object of scorn" to other nations around the world. To state the obvious, that hasn't happened in history, nor has it occurred in modern times. That is an unfulfilled promise. My point is God's blessing isn't just about Israel's long term survival, but because God made an unconditional promise to bless that nation, a time will come where Jesus will rule the world from Israel and when it does occur, Israel will be blessed as a nation.
  - d) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me quickly discuss the idea of the "millennium". This is an idea accepted by bible scholars that when Jesus returns and after all the "bad stuff" told in Revelation, there will be a 1,000-year period where Satan is bound and Jesus rules over the world from Israel at that time. One purpose of this "millennium" is to show the world how sinful we can be even without Satan's influence. Then we can't blame anyone else for their sins. Having Jesus literally rule over this world for a 1,000 years with "entities" to go enforce that rule (which is what I suspect we do), is to show the world how it can function with God ruling over it. After that period is over, Satan is destroyed and then another era begins with God drawing close to those of us who choose to be with Him forever. That is a short description of the last few chapters of Revelation in one paragraph!
  - e) The point as it ties to this verse is that the nation of Israel will be collectively blessed in the future and that's a future promise for then to look forward to. In the meantime, Joel is not done describing how God will bless Israel:
15. Verse 20: "I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise."
- a) While we're dealing with "end time" stuff, Joel's also telling us what will happen to those nations that attack Israel. From Israel's location the "Eastern Sea" is the Sea of Galilee. The "Western Sea" would be the Mediterranean. The point here is that whenever all of this is going to occur, attacks to overthrow the Messiah's rule from Israel, will be a wipe out to a point where the sea's will stink of rotting corpses. Yes, it's a horrid thing to picture. What God's trying to get across is that Israel's long term future will be blessed, despite all of the horror's they've had to deal with over the millenniums.
  - b) If you ever wonder why Christians are so "pro-Israel", it is because the God we worship is very pro-Israel. Of course I believe salvation today is only through one's trust that Jesus is both God and in charge of our lives, but I'm equally as convinced a day will occur where God will once again primarily work through the Nation of Israel. That's what these verses are trying to convey about Israel being blessed. Speaking of which:
16. Verse 20 (cont.): Surely he has done great things. <sup>21</sup> Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice. Surely the LORD has done great things. <sup>22</sup> Be not afraid, O wild animals, for the open pastures are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches.
- a) From the last part of Verse 20 through Verse 26 is a poetic set of blessings. It's God's way of saying how Israel will be blessed over it's long term future.

- b) Notice the have two repeating phrases in these verses. One is "Surely he (God) has done great things" and the other is "Be not afraid". I just gave a little lecture about a page back on the issue of having a positive attitude even when tragedy strikes. That in effect is what Joel's telling us here. The idea is despite whatever tragedy we are facing, we should never have to be afraid about our future. No it doesn't mean we just sit here and our needs will magically drop in our laps. Of course, we still have to work to supply our needs. My point here is that God's saying through Joel that He's got wonderful plans for our future and we don't have to fear what will happen to us.
    - i) Remember we're talking about a nation that was kicked out of that land twice with a lot of people dying each time. This is a nation that's been persecuted basically as long as it has existed and hasn't let up today. How can God say, "Be not afraid" in spite of all of that? The short version is God promises to make it up to them over the long-term future in ways we can barely imagine. I'm not saying we Christians have to be Jewish. I'm saying that just as God has wonderful eternal plans for us as Christians so God made unconditional promises to bless that nation as well.
    - c) Of all things, we then get a strange turn, where God tells the "wild animals" also to not be afraid. Obviously, wild animals can't read God's word. The idea here is the animals that normally benefit from "green pastures" will also benefit as God promises to bless that land even to a point where wild animals will live and survive through it. That's it.
    - d) The big picture idea is despite the damage done to the land by locusts or pick our favorite tragedy of the moment, God promises wonderful blessings to those of us who trust Him. We'll get into more of that coming up, speaking of which:
17. Verse 23: Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. <sup>24</sup> The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.
- a) One has to admit for a book as pessimistic and tragic as Joel, the last bunch of verses and these as well, paint a much rosier outlook on the Jewish people than the actual history of that nation over the last few millenniums. When most of us think of the nation of Israel, we think of it's tragic history as a nation that's been conquered a lot and lost lots of people over that time. I remember reading a story of the Israel president having dinner with one of the top Chinese leaders. They were comparing the size of their countries. The point of the story is Jewish leader said, "We've had to pay the price for being God's chosen people, but in spite of losing lots of people, God plans to bless us far greater one day, and nations that bless God's chosen people will also be blessed."
  - b) In these verses we get some specific's about those blessings. The verse mentions rain that occurs in the fall and the spring. There were no sprinklers back then, and the crop growth depended upon rain. The point here is God promises to provide the rain needed so what grows, will be more than enough grow for Israel's collective needs. Recall that the locust plague that started this book, ruined all the crops. God's saying despite all of that, I (God) will make it possible for you to "survive and thrive" based on trusting Him. It's His way of saying God will bless us if we do the footwork and trust Him to provide what we can't do for ourselves, such as the rain coming down on the farm lands.
  - c) Speaking of the past locust plague, it's time for the encore mention of that fact:
18. Verse 25: "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten-- the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm-- my great army that I sent among you.
- a) I'm not going to repeat my "locust lecture" of the last lesson. The short version is there was a large locust plague ruined the land of Israel some time back in its ancient history. Now we read of Gods saying through Joel that He will make up for all those lost years as He'll bless that nation in ways far greater than how they've had to suffer in the past. We've got to admit, it's hard for us to picture God blessing them more than they've suffered.

- b) Again we're back to the idea that those who trust in God are constantly cheerful as well as constantly in trouble. I'm realizing that should have been my alternate title of this lesson! If you ever wonder why God wants us to be in a good mood despite all the tragedies that this life can bring us, it is because we trust in a wonderful future of His blessing in spite of any and all things we have to go through in this life. That's why blessing verses like these are here in the bible, to remind us in tragic times that "This is not it".
  - c) Let me explain all of this another way: Did God ordain that locust plague? Yes, in fact He says He did in Verse 25. Is God ordaining all the horrid "Revelation stuff"? Of course. He also ordains whatever horrid things we must face in-between those times. In spite of that, He desires we be cheerful as we realize He has wonderful plans for our lives.
  - d) For what it's worth, I've seen some Christians take this promise too much to an extreme. I have seen churches beg, "Give us a big check as God promises to make up to you however you may suffer by giving your money to us!" I'm a big believer that we should give based on how God's blessed us, but not becoming poor in order to give. My point is we're never called to induce tragedy upon ourselves in order for God to bless us! For example, we can not write a big check for church that will bankrupt us in hopes that God now owes us for that act! God doesn't work that way. He wants us to be generous givers to support "front line" Christians, but not to a point where we think, "God owes me as I've given away all I have." Yes, Jesus promised that we'll have more friends and family when we trust in Him than we'll ever lose by that trust. At the same time, God never says to us, "Make yourself poor to a point where you have nothing to live on". My point is there needs to be balance in our giving, as with most aspects of life.
  - e) In the meantime, God promises that in spite of whatever suffering we face in this lifetime, He will more than make it up to us as He promises great things for those who trust Him.
  - f) Meanwhile there is one more blessing verse to cover here.
19. Verse 26: You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.
- a) One of the strange things I've always been fascinated by is the idea of eternity and eating. We are told in the book of Revelation that the eternal marriage between Jesus and those of us who consider ourselves Christians begins with a big meal. It makes me wonder do we eat in heaven? How does digestion work? Is there a sewer system in heaven? Don't know the answer, which is why I have that strange fascination with eternal blessings and eating.
  - b) In the meantime, Joel is telling us that we will praise God because He's blessed us with all the food we could ever want. The reason I think of the "eternal" is the second part of this verse mentions, "never again will my people be ashamed". Israel today is mostly secular. I suspect it's been that way through most of history. The idea isn't just the "religious" will be blessed with good food during Israel's history. The idea is that those of us who trust in Him will be eternally blessed and will be eternally grateful for that blessing. That's why I see this verse as something "eternal" or at the least something "millennial" whenever that whole era starts. Maybe this whole food blessing is something Israelites get to experience when that era begins. Again, I can't explain all the details. I just know that God promises to bless the descendants of those of us who trust in Him. He will bless Israel as a nation, because He promises He will and we as Christians have to accept that fact as much as we accept the Gospel message itself!
20. Verse 27: Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed.
- a) First question I pondered here is how can a God that's everywhere and know all things be "just" in Israel. Then I correctly figured, "God is everywhere," but He wants to emphasize the fact that He is a God of the Jewish people. As I say every now and then, a mistake that Christians make is we fail to see that God is a Jewish God, just as easily as Jewish people fail to see that Jesus is the Son of God and all that entails!

- b) The next, hopefully obvious thing to grasp here, is that whatever Joel is talking about here has to be some sort of future event. The reason I say that is, I can't think of anytime in the history of civilization where all Israelites worshipped God as God, and they'll never grasp any sense of shame in worshipping Him. Most Israelites today are secular including those living in Israel. Most acknowledge they're Jewish, but only a small percentage of them go to synagogue each week or simply pray to God as God. Further, only a small percentage of the Jewish population in Israel today are "Messianic Jews", which describes synagogues where Jesus is worshipped as the Messiah. A figure I was recently told is there is 150,000 "Jewish Christians" living there at that time.
    - i) My point is simply those Israelites that pray to God, or those who believe in Jesus are a small percentage of Israel's population, let alone the Jewish population over the entire world. Yet, Joel is very much predicting a day where the Israelites won't be ashamed of their religion any more.
  - c) Let me pause really quick to ask, "Why should we Christians care about all of this?" If the Jewish people accept Jesus, good for them, but how does that affect my life?" The point is just like the day when they don't have to be afraid of describing their relationship to God, so we will also have a future day when Jesus rules where we too, won't have to fear or be ashamed that we trust in His laws to guide our lives. That's why!
  - d) OK then, five more verses, and these are the fun ones. Thanks for reading this far!
21. Verse 28: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. <sup>29</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. <sup>30</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. <sup>31</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. <sup>32</sup> And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved;
- a) I wanted to put all those verses together for a reason: Peter quotes these verses in the book of Acts (Chapter 2, Verses 17-21). I admit, I'm fascinated that Peter, a fisherman and not a bible scholar, could quote this verse from memory or at the least, had access to the book of Joel, that Peter could read it on the day of Pentecost. At the least it shows the disciples did consider Joel to be "God inspired" and quote from it.
  - b) Since I'm in the neighborhood, let me explain why Peter quotes it: The key event in Acts Chapter 2 is the birth of the Christian church. It occurred on a Jewish holiday that we call "Pentecost" (based on the Greek translation of that holiday). At that event, a whole bunch of people who believed in Jesus all at once started speaking in different languages, which I believe they were simply praising God in languages they didn't speak. So was Chapter 2 of Acts the "afterwards" that Joel says to start this verse? Again, it's yes and no, as we are watching God work in patterns. It's yes in the sense that people who're not trained bible scholars could praise God in ways Old Testament saints couldn't fathom.
  - c) Let me explain it another way: In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit can come and go on a person. A famous prayer by King David is he asks God not to remove His Spirit from His influence over David's life. (Based on Psalm 51:11b.) That's a prayer Christians can't ever be praying because God promises the Holy Spirit will always be a part of our lives. That's what the Day of Pentecost was effectively all about, the Holy Spirit entering the life of all believers. There's obviously a lot more to learn about the Holy Spirit than that, but that's a good start to understand how Joel's prophecy was partially fulfilled in these verses.
  - d) Now let me return to my theme of "patterns". I'm also convinced the day of "Pentecost" is not the complete fulfillment of these verses. Let's put it this way: On the day of Pentecost was the sun turned to darkness and the moon to blood? (Verse 32) No. Did Jesus return right after that event? No. All I'm saying is "Christians speaking in tongues" was not any sort of complete fulfillment of these verses. It was just a "pattern" that Peter noticed to say how God is working in the lives of believers.

- i) The way we know if and when Joel's predictions here will be completely fulfilled, is there will be a "show" that has never occurred before right before Jesus returns!
  - ii) That "show" includes the sun going dark, the moon turning red and all things that cannot be explained by science or nature. Personally, I'd like to see this show from "Heaven's balcony" than to have to live here whenever this occurs.
  - iii) Speaking of heaven, I should explain that term here: In Jewish thought, there are 3 different "heavens". The first heaven is the sky above us. The second heaven is all of outer space. The third heaven is where God dwells. I wanted to explain it here as when Joel says "Signs in the heavens" He's referring to the first and second level of heaven.
  - iv) Let me put it this way: I'm not positive what all the details mean of this "end time" big show, but I get the impression that whatever happens, it'll be an event that will somehow be world wide and people will see it all over the world. For millenniums scholars have wondered how the whole world can see this show. Now that we are living in an era with smart phones and satellite television, it is not an issue!
  - v) In summary, Joel is making a prediction of how we can tell when Jesus is going to return as a big "show" will come right before it. Peter understood it and quoted it as to say "Pentecost" was a partial pattern of what's to come!
- e) Yes I know I'm running long. I have a half verse left to cover:
22. Verse 32b: for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.
- a) I separated this half a verse because it was not part of Peter's quote. The short versions is to realize that Jesus will return to the same place where He last left off. I can't say for sure how much Joel understood of the "end times". I just know for sure he was called to preach about the events of Jesus return and the "show", as I like to call it, that comes with that key event in human history.
  - b) Finally a quick word on "survivors". No it doesn't mean only those who survive through the "Great Tribulation" will be saved. Think of the "survivors" as the one's Jesus has called to be His witnesses at that time! God's calling people throughout human history to be His witnesses to the world. So how do we know if God's called us? Simple. If we believe the Gospel message, we are among His believers and have been called.
  - c) On that happy note, it's time to wrap up this lesson in prayer.
23. Let's pray: Father, first of all, we thank You that You have called us. While we don't know what the future holds, we accept the fact You know all things and You work in "patterns" in this world as to guide Your people to be better witnesses for You in the world around us. Help us as we see these patterns to know what is Your will for our life. Help us to do what is Your will for our lives and we ask that You do what we can't. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.