

Joel Chapter 3 – John Karmelich

1. It's time to finish this little three chapter book. So how does it end? That question, as short as it is, is my lesson title. One of the things I've been pointing out a lot over the last several lessons, is the fact the bible as a whole has more text about how our world ends then it does about all the events when Jesus was on earth. I believe God considers that "how does it end" topic to be so important, He wants us to be able to recognize it when it starts. That's Joel's key message in a few thoughts. Let me explain:
 - a) Chapter 1 discussed a horrid plague of locusts that hit the land of Israel shortly before Joel wrote this book. Chapter 2 essentially said that horrible plague represents a pattern that'll repeat in Israel's history. It's the idea that a horrid catastrophe was a part of Israel's past as well as a pattern to be observed to mark the world's end as we know it.
 - b) Ok, so what's the good news? That's Chapter 3. The key point of this chapter is to realize that those who trust in God will win in the end. Yes this chapter is about "the" end times, which I'm very aware scares a lot of people away from reading any further.
 - c) For those of you who can't stand all that "Revelation stuff", keep in mind, if you believe in Jesus as both God and in charge of your life, then this is your future as well. What if we're going to say, "I'll just live my life as I desire and I'll worry about all this "bad ending " stuff if I see it?" A reason for all this "end time" stuff isn't just to know about our eternal future, it's written as a motivation for us to use our lives as a witness for Jesus now.
 - d) Let me put it this way: Whether we like to admit it not, we are living in a world that will be destroyed one day, and badly! God never tell us when that day comes, as He wants us to be motivated to use our life as a witness for Him. Given the fact none of us know of the day we will die, or when this "big bad show" will start, that fact it will happen is meant as a motivation tool to not waste our lives, but use it as a witness for Him.
 - e) How we use our lives is an individual thing. As I like to say a lot, if there's something we love to do, find a way to use that love for God's glory. Yes of course, working with others is part of it. Doing jobs we may not be crazy about doing is part of it too! Even with all of that stated, as I love to ask tell people work toward a goal of doing what one enjoys and it will make your life much happier if we just use it to gain fame or fortune.
2. OK John, once again you're preaching to the choir. Time to stop it, and tell us what the third and final chapter of Joel is all about. Sorry about that. It's necessary to explain why so bible text tells us about the end times before we get into the specific's of Chapter 3. So here we go:
 - a) The first thing we get is confirmation that we're dealing with "the" end times. Here's why:
 - i) Verse 1 promises us God will restore what was lost to Israel.
 - ii) Despite the fact Israel was conquered by major empires, despite the fact they have been out of that land for millenniums, despite the Holocaust, Joel tells us here that God will restore the fortunes that Israel has lost and He'll judge all the nations that robbed "His People".
 - iii) If there is one thing I've learned from studying my bible is "Don't mess with Israel" as a nation. A popular t-shirt I saw in Israel, listed all the nations and empires that have fought Israel over the millenniums. All those groups had lines through them as to remind us they are no more and Israel is still standing. On the bottom of that shirt, it listed Iran as to imply, "You have no idea who you're messing with!"
 - iv) That shirt idea leads me right back to Joel Chapter 3. The short version is God will personally judge those nations for what they've done. To state the obvious, He has never personally judged them in a way others can watch so obviously, this is "end time" stuff.
 - v) Much of this chapter reads like a dare. It's God daring nonbelievers to gear up for war, and take Him on as if He can be defeated. It's strange, but that's what's here.

- vi) A difficult concept taught in "end time" lectures, is that fact that most people don't want to live under God's rules. It's the idea of people saying, "I want to live just as I am and I don't want God or anyone else to tell me otherwise." The reason there's so much hatred of the nation of Israel as a concept is because its existence reminds us that God exists and He wants to be in charge of our lives. Therefore, a rebellion in an "end time" big battle represents how many people want to live! That's why a good part of this chapter is a "dare" for those who oppose the God of Israel, to take Him on once and for all to see who's way will rule over the world.
- b) I can just hear many Christians ask, "Well then, good for the Israelites, glad they'll win in the end. What does any of that have to do with us Christians?" Again, thanks for asking!
 - i) I know it seems strange to us Christians that the world will end one day with a big battle. Why can't it go on forever with some people accepting Jesus and some not accepting His rule over our lives? The answer is to realize there is a limit to God's patience with our world. The only reason He's waited as long as He has is because He's not through collecting "x" number of people to be a part of His kingdom that desire to live under His rule and draw close to Him forever.
 - ii) Let me make it simple. Do you believe heaven will have a finite number of people there? Of course. Therefore, there has to be a final Christian. The point is we will know the "show" is about to begin because that number is reached, or close to it!
 - iii) Therefore, the purpose of Christians to know all this "end time" stuff is to keep us motivated to use our lives as a witness for Jesus because we never know when it'll all begin!
- 3. The good news is that's not all of this chapter. There's more than just the bad news of how those who don't want God to rule over their lives will suffer. A lot of this chapter discussed the fact of God getting revenge on those who harm His chosen people. It reminds us that Israel as a nation will win in the end and what will be the eternal benefit of that victory!
 - a) Do I believe all Jewish people go to heaven? To make it simple, I'm convinced God judges individual people fairly based on what information they knew about Him or could know about Him and how they reacted to that information. Of course, I believe that since Jesus came, salvation only depends upon our trust that He is God, He did die for sins and if we trust He's in charge of our lives and live to make a difference for Him, we will be saved.
 - b) Even with that stated, it's important to realize that God still "owes" Israel. No it's not just making up for the Holocaust or other horrid events in their history. It's the fact that God made an unconditional promise to the nation of Israel that He would give that land to the descendants of Abraham who trusted in God. I'm saying a "future post-Christian church" era will occur where God will once again focus on Israel as a nation because He made an unconditional promise to Abraham to bless that nation. Does that mean a day is coming when all Jewish people will be saved? Today, no. One day in the "end times" yes. I'll use Romans 11.26 as my proof text. How will that work? Don't know, but I suspect we'll see the Holy Spirit be busy and work in a different way in that post-church "time era".
 - c) Bottom line, this final chapter is full of good news for those who trust in God as Savior of us believers and it's really bad news for those who refuse to trust in Him. The rest of Joel Chapter 3 is the details, speaking of which, let's get started on them:
- 4. Chapter 3, Verse 1: "In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ² I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.
 - a) Whenever one starts a new chapter, it's always important to back track. As I tell any new reader the chapter numbers were not added until millenniums after this was written. In the end of the "last chapter" we had several verses that were quoted by Peter roughly 800 years later that essentially say, God's got "end time" plans for the nation of Israel. Part of those plans were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost where Christians there started speaking in other languages praising God. Peter's quote was only a partial fulfillment of Joel.

- b) The point being that the last few verses of the Chapter 2, Joel was giving us some clues as how to tell when "the end times" were beginning. Now as we get into Chapter 3, Joel tells us more about whenever "those days and times begin".
 - c) Before I get into specific's I want to take a quick detour to make a related point:
 - i) If you have faith that Jesus is who He claims He is, shouldn't we trust our bible as it tells us how the world will end? A generation or so back, a worldwide fear was a nuclear bomb would wipe us all out. Today there's a similar type of fear around the world is global changes to the weather will kill us. Yes, of course I believe that we should do all we should do to make our world a better place to live. My point is the world is going to end when God says it is and not a moment sooner. That is why I don't fret us ruining the whole planet by nuclear bombs or a man made type of environmental disaster. Again the bible has more text dedicated to explaining to us how the world as we know it ends, then it does about when Jesus was around.
 - ii) If we keep that in mind, we can focus better on what we believe God has called us to do now and not fret over the latest "planet killing" threat of the moment.
 - d) Now that I've beaten to death what's not going to happen, let's talk about what will occur: Joel says that "at that time" God's going to restore the fortunes of Judah (When Joel wrote his letter, Israel was divided into two kingdoms. The southern one was called Judah) and he says God will restore Jerusalem as a central city where He will rule from one day.
 - i) A good clue that we're definitely talking end times, is we don't see God primarily working through the nation of Israel at the moment. We're still living in a time era where people from around the world are accepting Jesus as God, and are trusting in His payment for all our sins and believing He's in charge of our lives.
 - ii) If you're still not convinced we're talking about something past tense and not "the" end times, the second part of this verse tells that God Himself will rule there then.
 - e) A classical debate among bible scholars is whether or not the " Valley of Jehoshaphat" is a literal valley or does it mean something else. That term " Jehoshaphat" means God judges. The rest of Verse 2 explains what God judges. Speaking of the rest of Verse 2:
5. Verse 2 (Part 2): There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.
- a) The "I" that starts this sentence refers to God Himself. Religious Jewish people believe it's referring to God Himself judging the world as most people believe God will judge each of us based on how we lived our lives. The point being whether we think of God the Father or we think of Jesus, either way it's God doing some big time judging.
 - b) To explain this, we need to discuss both the "where" and the "how" of this valley. I've read some scholars who argue it's about eternal judgment in heaven as there is no big valley in Israel called the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Again, that term means God judges, which is why some scholars think it only refers to the eternal judgment.
 - i) Personally, I'm different. I've always held the view when studying my bible that if a literal translation makes sense, seek no other sense. The book of Zechariah tells us that another sign of Jesus' return (God Himself coming down to earth as taught by Jewish rabbi's) is that a new valley will form just east of Jerusalem. If you have been to Jerusalem, from the Mount of Olives (a hillside just east of that city where Jesus met with His disciples and where Judas betrayed him) to the walls of the old city is a short walk and it is not much of valley. My point is Zechariah predicts in Chapter 14 Verse 4-6, that one day there will be a big earthquake there that'll form a large new valley. God Himself will come to that valley.
 - ii) The point of all this stuff, is my view is the "Valley of Jehoshaphat" will be a literal place where God judges the world. Could I be wrong? Sure. But at the same time the rest of Zechariah Chapter 14 describes God judging the nations there and then and a lot of non-Jewish people get killed at that time.

- iii) All I'm saying is Zechariah Chapter 14 definitely describes part of the "end times" scenario as does Joel. I believe both of those events are describing the same thing.
 - iv) Time for a related question: If all of this is true, why not just have one bible book that gives us all these details? Why do we have to study all over the bible in order to put this story together? The same reason one can't find one chapter in the bible on the job of the Holy Spirit. or one chapter on baptism. God spreads his message over the entire bible in order to prevent people from "ripping out a key chapter".
 - v) The best way I like to explain this is the term "hostile jamming". During the World War's in order for radio messages to not be intercepted, the army would broadcast their messages over a wide spectrum. It'd be like broadcasting part of the message on one radio station, and putting a part on another. That way an enemy can't put a more powerful station on that same frequency to prevent enemy broadcasts. My simple point here is God spreads out His message over the whole bible so no part can't be "hostile jammed".
- c) OK enough of all of this. Let's get back to Joel. My point is if the "Valley of Jehoshaphat" is literal or figurative, either way it describes God judging a lot of Israel's enemies. One of the important things to grasp here is this is a "Jewish thing". What I mean by that is when it does occur, it's in a post-Christian-church era. Both the Old and the New Testament tell us that God's not through with Israel as a unique entity. In a sense, this is all based on the fact that God made an unconditional promise to Abraham that his descendants inherit the land of Israel and God can't go back on that promise. A future day will occur where God will once again focus on Israel as a unique entity.
- i) Many people have never thought about Paul's letter to the Romans as making that specific point: Chapters 1 to 8 explain how we Christians are justified by faith. In Chapters 9-11, Paul then uses the nation of Israel as an illustration of the fact that God can't go back on His unconditional promises. My point is Romans Chapter 9 focuses on Israel as an entity before Jesus. Chapter 10 focuses on Israel during all this time era of the Christian church. Romans 11 then talks of a future era, of God once again focusing on Israel as a unique entity. My point is I believe that is what Joel is discussing to start this chapter.
- d) Before I jump into why all this judgment is necessary, let me answer the question many of you might be thinking right about now: If this is a "Jewish thing", why should I care? Yes it's in the bible and yes it's interesting to learn about the world's future, but how does any of this affect my life here and now? At the least, all of this is a reminder to us that we can die at any time and God wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him before all this "bad stuff" begins. The most valuable thing God gives us is our time, and the best thing we can do with that time is give it back to Him and use it for His glory. Of course, we still have to live life and do "things". Still, as opposed to just being a vegetable in front of a computer screen or a television, we can use our lives for His glory. That's the point for you and me!
- e) OK enough personal guilt. Back to God and the Israelites. Why is all of this necessary? It is because the Israelites are "God's chosen people" and He will judge the nations based on how the nations have treated His people. So are we just discussing those nations who will be attacking Israel when all this "end time" stuff happens or is Joel discussing all of Israel's enemies through all of human history? Don't know how big that valley is! As my regular's know, I argue that our resurrected bodies will be in more than three dimensions. That can be one way to get lots of people in one valley. Could I be wrong? Of course. I just know that the bible says there will be a big time of judgment against the nations of the world. It is based on how those nations treated Israel.
- i) Let me try this one more way: Why am I pro-Israel? Because the God I worship is "Pro-Israel" and I want to be on the winning team! I have no idea when all of this will begin, but I know who wins in the end and I support Israel for that reason.

- ii) So what does any of this mean today? One reason I pray for Jerusalem's peace is the bible commands us to. (See Psalm 122:6). The other way is if a situation arises where I can be Pro-Israel, I do, not because I think that country is perfect, but only because I accept the fact that God is Pro-Israel and I don't want to mess with what God considers His land, end of issue.
 - iii) In the meantime, I just realized I spent several pages on the first two verses. I need to pick up the pace or we'll never get through this chapter.
- 6. Verse 3: They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine that they might drink.
 - a) If God's going to judge those who've harmed the Israelites, what's the specific charge? We get a few clues of how bad it was in this verse. While we do not know a lot about the type of damage done by the Babylonian and the Assyrian invasions, we do have some history of what the Romans did when they conquered Israel in 70AD. The Romans killed over 1.5 million Jewish people, and they sold the rest into slavery. My point is when we read here of those selling "God's chosen people" (children) for a prostitute or for wine, we're getting a pretty good idea of how gruesome life must have been back then.
 - b) Think of this as one big gruesome reminder that God knows all things and He'll judge us based on how we've lived. Further, He's going to judge those who've harmed his people and make them eternally suffer as nations based on how they've treated the Israelites.
 - c) Let me pause to ask another fairly obvious question: How do we know a bunch of Jewish people didn't write this because they were suffering and they wanted God to punish those groups that harm them? In other words, how do we know Joel is God inspired? We know Peter quoted it and it was accepted as biblical. Still, how do we know the future will be as Joel described it? Part of the answer is God wants us to have a "wait and see" attitude if it does come true. Part of the answer is the fact that Israel is the only nation in world history to be conquered, scattered and come back together again to form a nation. The fact Israel exists is a continuing proof that God is real and His word is real. Why do think the world is so "hell bent" on it's destruction! You'll never understand why non-Christians hate it so much until one understands the bible and God's eternal plans for His chosen people!
 - d) That lecture leads me back to this verse. The fact that people have so much hatred for His people is evident by their willingness to sell Israelite children for cheap sex and booze! It is no better today with all the efforts to destroy that country and kill them today!
- 7. Verse 4: "Now what have you against me, O Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done. ⁵ For you took my silver and my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples. ⁶ You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland.
 - a) If you haven't noticed, I've been obsessed with the "why" question so far in this lesson. It is time to focus on the "who" question. With that said, it's time for a quick history lesson:
 - i) Tyre and Sidon were powerful cities north of Israel along the Mediterranean Sea. They were partially conquered by the Persian Empire and those who escaped were later conquered by Alexander the Great. The point is those cities were big powers in the region. For those of you who've heard of the Phoenicians, that's who lived in Tyre and Sidon. The Philistines were a traditional enemy of Israel way back before the days of King David a few hundred years earlier. The word "Palestine" was the Greek translation of "Philistine". The Romans renamed Israel Palestine as an insult to the Jewish people! By the way, the Babylonians also conquered the Philistines a long time before the Romans, but the term "stuck around" to the Roman conquest!
 - ii) The point is whatever time frame Joel was writing about, he makes references to a time that his audience could relate to: Traditional enemies and powers in the area did damage to the Israelites and sold the survivors for sex, booze and slavery!

- b) This leads me back to my speculation that when all the "end times" occur. Will this be one big judgment of all nations that attacked Israel through history, or just those around at the end times? That's why I like the idea of our resurrected souls existing in more than three dimensions so they could all "fit" in this valley. Either that, or there is a long waiting line for that judgment.
 - i) Near the start of this message, I talked about a shirt I saw in Israel that had all the nations that fought Israel over the millenniums with lines through them, to remind us that they no longer exist and Israel still exists. That's sort of how I see how God is going to judge those nations. Whether all the soldiers will be there or just some who represent each nation, either way, I wouldn't want to be in their shoes when it begins. Personally, I'd rather watch this show from God's "balcony" than be there!
 - ii) The point for us is we'll know when all of this is occurring as the world will watch it happen. If I'm right, we'll hear about a big earthquake in Jerusalem where a new valley is formed and then we'll know where close to this event! Until then, God does not want us to worry over it or be obsessed over it. He wants us to be aware of the fact it'll occur one day and to use our lives to be a witness for Him until then.
 - c) Think of life this way: We live in a world that's doomed for destruction. Our only hope of surviving is based on our trust in Jesus. Therefore, God calls us as Christians to spread the word that all of "this" is coming, and we can be rescued from it based in our trust that Jesus is God, and we're forgiven of our sins. That's why all this "tough stuff" is here in the bible as a motivation tool to keep us busy for Jesus until whenever all of this begins!
 - i) Now that I've scared everyone half to death, time to get back to Joel!
8. Verse 7: "See, I am going to rouse them out of the places to which you sold them, and I will return on your own heads what you have done. ⁸ I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away." The LORD has spoken.
- a) Yes, I will discuss who the Sabeans are. Before I do that notice a change of focus occurs in Verses 7 to Verse 12. God's now talking to those who refuse to trust in Him as God. It's as if He's saying, "You don't want me to rule over your life? Let's get the show going and see who's going to win! Take Me on, give it your best shot and we'll see who's really in charge of this world!" I know it sounds crazy to us Christians that people would want to take on God, but many people don't want Him to rule over our lives. Most people wrongly think their good deeds outweighing their bad deeds or they wrongly think they don't need God to be the center of their lives, or they believe in some other god. Either way, most people are in big trouble. This is God saying, "OK then, you don't want me, let's duke it out!"
 - b) Now that I've given the big picture, I can focus on the details. Essentially God's saying He is going to "rouse them out of their places" by encouraging Israel's enemies to attack them so He can show off His power.
 - c) The Sabeans were a nation of traders who lived in what is today Saudi Arabia. What I'm fascinated about here is the fact that God said He'll sell the children of those other nations that conquered Judah and sell them. A couple of thoughts here.
 - i) First, when the Babylonians conquered the Southern Kingdom of Judah, many of the children were probably sold to the Sabeans and even the Greeks as mentioned a few verses back. In other words, Joel was using illustrations that people of that time can understand and relate to.
 - ii) Here's the part that "bugged me". It's been over 2,500 years. Will God resurrect all of these people to sell their children to the Israelites? How will that work? What I suspect (along with some other bible commentators) is that when Jesus judges the world in a Post-Christian era, the nations that did harm to Israel will not just suffer in eternal hell, but also have to suffer in ways to reverse the damage done over all those years. Do I fully get it? No, but again, "if the plain text makes perfect sense, seek no other sense." The short version is the punishment will fit the crime!

- d) OK John, before you move on, we can use another of your, "why should we care" lectures: We get the idea that Israel will win in a post-Christian world. What does any of this end time stuff has to do with us Christians living today? Great question:
- i) First, it's a reminder that if we trust in God's promises to us through Jesus, then we must also trust in His promises to the nation of Israel. It's not possible to believe in one of those promises without believing in the other!
 - ii) Next it's a reminder to us that God will treat all people fairly for eternity. If there's no God, lets face it, this world would be very unfair, and what's worse, this world would ultimately have no purpose!
 - iii) Finally, it's a reminder that despite all the bad things that occur in this world, God not only is going to win against those who don't want Him to rule over the world, but those who don't want His rule will suffer eternally. Therefore, our job is to try to convince as many as possible to join the winning team before it's too late!
- e) Meanwhile, Joel is busy describing how God's enemies are going to prepare to fight Him!
9. Verse 9: Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. ¹⁰ Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, "I am strong!"
- a) Back in the days of WWII, it was common around the United States to hold "metal drives" where people would donate scrap metal that could be melted down to be converted into a weapon of some sort. That is in effect is what God's asking "the nations" to do.
 - b) So how do you know this proclamation is for the "nations" and not for Israel? For starters when Isaiah gave his own "end time" predictions he said the opposite: "They'll beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." (Isaiah 2:4.) My point is in Isaiah we have the opposite of what we have here in Joel. The difference is simply Joel is describing a time of preparing for war, and Isaiah's describing a time of peace when God will rule over the world.
 - c) The next logical question is what will motivate the nations to fight Israel once and for all? I suspect it won't take much motivation if today's news is any indication. What I suspect is going to happen is a series of events will occur that'll tell all Israel's enemies, it's time to unite and fight them. Then we'll see people get "psyched up" and convince themselves of how they can win as described in Verse 10.
 - d) Of all things, it may help to realize what is Satan's motivation in all of this. His goal is to prevent Jesus from ruling over the world one day. That prevention allows Satan to rule a bit longer and not be banished forever. All that means is Satan will work to motivate the nations to go attack Israel as if they need more motivation!
 - e) Anyway a big battle scene is coming and Joel's describing the preparation here.
10. Verse 11: Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there. Bring down your warriors, O LORD! ¹² "Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side.
- a) Here's the verses where God's literally daring Israel's enemies to unite with the intention of wiping Israel out once and for all. If my guess is right, we're reading an Old Testament equivalent of what Revelation calls "The Battle of Armageddon". From the standpoint of Israel's enemies, it's not the physical location of land that's important to them, it's the fact that Israel exists as a nation and they want them to stop existing. From Satan's standpoint he wants to prevent Jesus from ruling the world from Jerusalem one day. My point is all of these entities have their motivation to see Israel come to an end.
 - b) Notice the actual lack of a physical battle here. The "Battle of Armageddon" is a not a real battle with one side firing weapons at the other. It's more of a instant wipe out. It's about people realizing they really are fighting against God and they're wasting their time trying to actually kill Him. Notice the phrase "sit and judge" in Verse 12. God's actually going to sit there and judge nations based on how they've treated Israel when all this begins.

- c) I should probably give a quick lecture on "a-millennialism" versus "pre-millennialism".
- i) Most Roman Catholics and a lot of traditional Protestant churches hold a view that the last 2,000 years of human history is God's way of judging Israel's enemies. It's a view that they don't see a "big battle scene" but history is that battle scene. You'd think that debate would have come to an end when Israel was back in that land!
 - ii) In the Greek language to put an "a" in front of a word often make that word into a negative. All I'm saying is the term "a-millennialism" refers to those bible scholars who don't believe in a literal 1,000 year rule by Jesus from the land of Israel. Those of us who believe in pre-millennialism argue we're living in an era that is prior to a literal 1,000 year rule by Jesus, where once again the focus is on Israel as a nation.
 - iii) Unfortunately many Christians don't see it that way. They look at the fact of Israel back in that land as a "coincidence" and has nothing to do with God's eternal plans for the Christian church. Personally, I've never trusted "coincidences" on the grand scale and the fact that Israel is the only nation in world history to be scattered and then come back together again to be a nation can't be a coincidence. Even if that is not enough to convince you, the Hebrew language is the only one in world history to come back from being a dead language to be used daily in that country. Yes I'm making it obvious what my views here are, and yes the debate is a lot deeper than what I've touched upon here. I just wanted to stress the fact that most Evangelical Christians agree with my "pre-millennial" view, while most Roman Catholics and traditional Protestants do not.
 - iv) The reason I needed to stress that is because as we read about this "word wrap up" issue, and my strong pre-millennialism view is coming out in these verses. One of the reasons I hold this view is I can't read passages like Joel and read it any other way besides a literal view of all this "end time" stuff happening as Joel describes it.
- d) Speaking of Joel, we're reading of God encouraging those nations that really hate Israel to go attack them thinking they can win.
- i) That leads me to one more issue to bring up while I'm in the neighborhood. That is, does God "encourage" nations or people to hate him? A similar example would be the Pharaoh of Egypt who tried to destroy the Israelites. Did God harden that man's heart? Yes the bible says He did. Do I believe God's hardened the hearts of those that hate Israel today? Yes I do. So does that mean God's encouraging those who hate Israel to go to hell? Here's how I answer that question:
 - a) I hold the view that if God created the world, He has every right to do with it what He wants. It's His world in the first place and we must accept that!
 - b) Next, I'm positive God gives us what we want. It's the idea of thinking, "If you want to hate something I'll encourage it, even though that's not what I want for your life!" As one pastor I know put it, "Don't go down that road, it's been greased and it's hard to turn back!"
 - c) In effect, we're back to the idea of "God's desire for our lives" versus what's His "permissive will". He desires all people to turn to Him and trust Him to guide their lives. He permits us free will and that includes the idea that we can turn from Him and in effect send ourselves to hell.
 - d) That's what we're reading the enemies of Israel effectively doing, whether they realize it or not!
- e) The good news is we're done analyzing the life of the enemies of God's people and what's their motivation to opposing God. The rest of this chapter, which is the rest of the book is focused on what God's going to do to protect His people and how we should react based on the fact that God wants to bless us. That's a key Gospel message right there: The fact that God wants to bless us just because He does, and out of gratitude for it, He expects us to be obedient to Him in order to be a witness for Him. With that said, back to Joel:

11. Verse 13: Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow-- so great is their wickedness!"
- a) What is common in bible prophecy is to use illustrations that most people understand for a prophet to communicate how God's going to work. Think of it this way: Did any of the people who wrote the bible have any knowledge of nuclear bombs or guided missiles? Of course not. Therefore, they use illustrations they could relate to.
 - b) So how will God literally destroy the enemies of Israel? I don't know. I've always figured if God is God He can do what He wants, how He wants and when He wants. Therefore if Joel is describing God judging the world like a "harvest of grapes" that's the best way for Joel to describe either a vision he saw or what God told Him to write down.
 - c) For us Christians who've read the New Testament, it's hard not to read this verse and not think of a similar comment in the book of Revelation. Chapter 14 describes two separate gatherings. First it describes Jesus Himself using a sickle to gather the grapes (the people who believe in Him) as to gather together those living at that time to join Him in heaven.
 - i) Then an angel is sent with another sickle to destroy those who desired to destroy God's chosen people. That's Revelation 14:15-18 in a few thoughts.
 - ii) So which one is Joel describing? I'd say the second one, as I'd argue is Joel's seeing the same thing but He only is describing the wicked being "swept up" in that great end time battle like a man with a sickle harvesting grapes. As the saying goes, the Battle of Armageddon isn't a real battle, it's more of a wipe-out! That's what we've got in view both here in Joel as well as Revelation 14.
 - iii) Meanwhile, Verse 14:
12. Verse 14: Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.
- a) I have no idea how many people make up a "multitude", but I get the impression it's large enough where it's impossible to count. So why is it called "Valley of Decision?" I assume that the armies desiring to destroy Israel already have a hatred of them that God allowed and they're now due for judgment.
 - b) I'm reminded of the classic debate question of, "If a soldier is just following orders, does it make it right for that soldier to do something immoral?" I can think of a couple of movies that focus on that specific question. The point is that God will hold all people accountable for their actions despite their orders to do otherwise. That's the judgment that takes place here. Will it be a group judgment or individual judgment? Both. As I've beaten to death in many a lesson, God will hold us accountable as groups as well as the fact He'll judge us individually for salvation. A simple example of a group judgment is a nation being killed based on how they've acted. Most of us veteran Christians can name at least one ministry or church that God allowed to die off because they were no longer doing His will!
 - c) Anyway, harsh judgment will occur at the "end times" and we're reading of it here!
13. Verse 15: The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine.
- a) A logical question is when will all of this take place? One of the reasons "amillennialists" do argue that this is describing world history has to do with the world wars fought and how the Israelites have suffered during the Holocaust as an obvious example! As horrid as that was, no one can say the moon stopped shining and the stars didn't come out! All I am saying is I'm positive all of this is "End Times" and my proof text is that one way we'll be able to realize it is "end time" is because when all this happens, the sun, moon and the stars will stop shining at that time!
 - b) This verse is similar to the one's near the end of Chapter 2, where Joel predicts that when the Day of the Lord comes these heavenly bodies will not be shining. That's also why I'd argue that when Peter quotes the last part of Chapter 2, Peter wasn't saying what occurred at Pentecost (people speaking in tongues) was a fulfillment of Joel, but just that what Joel's saying was an example of how God is working in a mighty way through the church.

- c) My point is simply that "Pentecost" was not a fulfillment of Joel's prophesy. Joel is talking about Jesus coming back to rule the world and the proof that all this hasn't happened yet, is we've never experienced a time in world history where the sun, moon and stars have all been darkened at the same time of a great battle taking place in the land of Israel. All I'm saying is I'm convinced this battle is literal, it will take place in the future and we'll be able to recognize what's occurring in Israel (most likely on our television sets, etc.) as we won't be able to see the sun, moon and stars when all of this is happening.
 - d) Now that I've scared everyone half to death, I've done my job and it's time to move on!
14. Verse 16: The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.
- a) The good news is we're pretty much done describing the fate of the "bad guys" and now we're going to focus for a few verses on the rewards for the "good guys".
 - b) What one has to keep in mind here is the text is focusing on a time era where once again God is focusing primarily on the nation of Israel. So where is the Christian church when all of this takes place? I'd argue already in heaven. I'm positive we either get to see all of this from heaven or be involved in some capacity, but I'm equally as positive the focus is on the nation of Israel at this future point in world history. It's God's way of saying He's going to win, deal with it and watch the enemies of Israel get wiped out, and watch God as He works to help His people and protect them from Israel.
 - c) As some of you may know, most of Israel today is secular. I'm guessing most of them do believe in God but don't attend a weekly synagogue service. I'm reminded of the joke of what is a secular Jew? "It is one who understands what the God he or she doesn't believe in requires of him or her!" Anyway, despite the fact that most Israelites are secular, God is going to "roar from Zion" and be a refugee for His people? How will that work? I have no idea, but again, if the literal text makes perfect sense, seek no other sense.
 - d) If you read the bible as a whole, it's amazing how often God's appearing is compared to a lion's roar. I don't see it as Jesus literally roaring as a lion. I see it as God working in such a way that it is as powerful as a lion's roar! Could it be literal? Of course. However, I am speculating that Joel's point here is that God's going to work in such a mighty way at that time it's like a roar of a lion in it's power.
 - e) The underlying point is God made a promise that He'd give the land of Israel to specific descendants of Abraham (i.e., "the Israelites") and it's going to require Jesus Himself to return to make this happen. Again, if "God is God", I don't worry about the "how", I just figure if the bible is God's word, it's going to happen and we have to deal with it. Until it all begins, our jobs as Christians is to be a witness for Him that all this will occur one day!
15. Verse 17: "Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her.
- a) So how do we know this is not one big "fairly tale" concocted by some ancient Israelites in order for them to have hope in the future? The way to tell whether or not this will be true is to watch the future and see if it unfolds as predicted. That's what Joel's saying here.
 - b) The way I look at it is, if I trust in God's promises to me through Jesus, then I also have to trust in God's future promises to the nation of Israel. As I say, "I'm pro-Israel because the God I worship is Pro-Israel."
 - c) Let me put it another way: Let's say I'm wrong in my pre-millennial view and I shouldn't take the bible that literally. As long as I'm trusting that Jesus died for every sin I've done or ever will do and believe He's in charge of my life, we can wait and see if the world will end the way the bible predicts. My point is history will tell us one day which view is right and which view is wrong. Personally, I'd rather take the bible too literally than not literal enough. I figure God can't hold it against me if I took it too literal!
 - d) As to the prediction itself, it's pretty obvious. It's saying a day will come where Jerusalem will never again be invaded by a foreign army. Obviously we haven't seen it happen yet!

16. Verse 18: "In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD's house and will water the valley of acacias.
- a) Would you like more proof that this is something future and literal? Israel is a land full of hills and valleys. The first part of the verse can describe times in Israel's history when it's full of vineyards and animals that produce milk. It's the second sentence that argues well it must be future. That's because the second sentence describes the existence of the Temple standing in Jerusalem and water flowing out of that temple. If you've ever read any of the history of the temple, it's never been a water source. Ezekiel Chapter 47 describes a literal river that flows from God's temple. It grows to a point to where it can't be walked across it. Picture a water flow that accumulates to a point where it gets deeper and deeper and you can see this river that Ezekiel saw. To state the obvious, that river doesn't exist today!
 - b) The big question is, is Joel seeing that same river? I'd argue yes. Joel lived about 200 years before Ezekiel. I don't think Ezekiel copied Joel's vision and ran with it. I'd argue both of those men were inspired by God to describe a future time when God Himself will literally be ruling from Israel and we get signs how to recognize this as it will occur.
 - c) One of my favorite bits of bible trivia to point out is that when an angel visited Mary prior to Jesus being born, that angel told Mary that her son would inherit King David's throne. To any Jewish person living when Mary did, David's throne would be in Jerusalem, not in heaven. Heaven is God's throne! All I'm saying is the New Testament gives us a clue that we're seeing Jesus as "LORD" doing all of this as He returns to set up this eternal kingdom from Jerusalem. (Reference Luke 1:32.)
 - d) Again, one can look at every verse in this chapter as clues to when all of this happens!
17. Verse 19: But Egypt will be desolate, Edom a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood.
- a) You want to see examples of the losers in this final battle? We get them here. Egypt has been a traditional enemy of Israel for millennia. As a simple modern example, I just heard about a big music festival in Israel and the "best song" winner was a tune called "I hate Israel". All I'm saying is it's been thousands of years and the hatred of that country hasn't changed in all that time!
 - b) The land of Edom is the hills just east of the Dead Sea and is part of Jordan today. Even though the land of Edom isn't called Edom today, it's still one of the "hot spots" of hating Israel and Joel uses them as an example of who'll be judged when this occurs.
 - c) What popped in my head is the prophet Isaiah who lived roughly around the same time as Joel, said that there will be a highway that runs from Assyria (think Iraq) that goes to Egypt through Israel. So if Isaiah's predicting a highway will run through those places in the end times, (See Isaiah 11:16, 19:23), why will those countries be empty as stated here in Joel? The key is to read Isaiah and see who that highway is for: The Israelites and people from those countries who believe in God. Putting Joel and Isaiah's predictions together, a way to recognize when all the end times occur is the only people living in those two other countries will be those who believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Obviously it is not occurring today, which is another reason I'm not a "amillennialist".
 - d) The good news is we only have two more verses to cover in Joel. Let's keep rolling:
18. Verse 20: Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations.
- a) One reason why scholars argue that Joel was written during the time that Israel was split into two kingdoms, is that he only refers to the Southern one in his book. (To remind you, the Southern Kingdom was called Judah.) So does this mean when Jesus returns, the area associated with Israel will only be the size of Judah? Of course not. In fact, Ezekiel 48 tells us the size of Israel and it'll cover much of Jordan and parts of Iraq if memory is right. All I'm saying is Joel's saying Judah's reign as a kingdom will be part of an eternal kingdom!

- b) This sort of reminds me of a classic line that some American Christians use: It is that I'm neither a Democrat or a Republican. I'm a "monarchist" and Jesus is my king. Anyway at the end of Joel here we get one final reminder that Jerusalem and the territory around it is going to exist forever and to state what I consider the obvious, Jesus will rule there as our king when all this begins!
19. Verse 21: Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon." The LORD dwells in Zion!
- a) Remember how I stated that most Jewish people living in Israel today are secular? Notice the book of Joel ends with the reminder that God will pardon them when all this occurs.
- b) OK, time for one final explanation on how all this works:
- i) Am I convinced that the only way for a Jewish person to be saved today is by their belief in Jesus as God? Of course, that's one of the basic rules of Christian theology.
- ii) The way to understand that concept is to accept the idea of a perfect God perfectly judging all sin. God's standard to be with Him is perfection. That's the only way we can know for sure what is His standard is if we accept His perfection. One has to accept God's perfect payment for our sins to be with Him forever. That's also a reason why our "good deeds can't outweigh our bad deeds" as a salvation method.
- iii) I'm getting into all that basic theology to understand the idea of God pardoning a group of people He hasn't pardoned in the past, nor is He pardoning today.
- iv) I'm equally as convinced there are people in heaven who were naïve about Jesus as God will judge them fairly based on what they did know or could know and how one reacts based on that information.
- c) What I'm getting at is we have to be reading about a future Post-Christian era where God is judging Israel as a nation differently than how He judges people today. Does that mean God is going to wave a "magic wand" and all Israelites will be saved one day? I see this is it will become obvious one day that Jesus is God and Israelites will act accordingly based on what will be obvious then. Could I be wrong about the method? Of course. The point is a day is coming where God will collectively pardon Israel and that day hasn't happened as of yet. That's why I'm positive this is some sort of end-time event.
- i) Could it be two separate things, where one is individual judgment and the other is collective judgment? Of course! I'm positive God judges each of us individually. I am also positive there is group judgment (think our church, or our nation) will be judged based on how we lived based on what information we had about Jesus.
- ii) What scares me to consider is that we live in an era of time where information is so plentiful and easy to reach at our fingertips, there is no excuses today one can give about being naïve about Jesus!
20. OK bottom line time: God wins and those who trust in Him wins. The Israelites will also win in the end not because they deserve it, but just because their the chosen people! Let me ask the big question one final time: Why should we Christians care about all this end-time Israel stuff?
- a) The easy answer is that we live in a world that will be destroyed for all those who refuse to trust in Jesus as God. Our job as Christians is to be a living witness in this dying world that the only way to escape it is to trust that Jesus is God and in charge of our lives. That's why we are called to use our lives to be a witness for Him. It's not to be "more saved" or to earn more points in heaven, but to use our lives as God's called us to do. That's why Joel and a few other prophets tell us how the world ends so we can recognize it if we see it. In the meantime, let's close in prayer and ask God's help in what He's called us to do.
21. Let's pray: Father, We thank You that You've separated us to be a part of Your eternal kingdom. Help us to use our lives as You've called us to live. Help us to use the gifts you've given us and the desires we enjoy to make a difference for Your kingdom here on earth. None of us know the day or hour when all of this end-time stuff begins. We just know you've called us to be a witness for You until it starts, so guide us to live as You desire we do! We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.