

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JOEL 1-3

Hear about the football game between the animals and insects? The two squads gathered on the gridiron for a real grudge match. Dressing out for the animals were the elephant, lion, tiger and bear. Suiting up for the insects was the firefly, flea, gnat, and butterfly.

Well, you can imagine the outcome... The animals dominated. Every time the elephant ran the ball he gained 40-50 yards. The lion swept around the end for touchdown after touchdown. Defense for the insects was as weak as a flea. And the offense was no better.

Every time the Yellow Jacket dropped back to pass he was sacked by the Bulldog. *Oops, that just slipped out...* Well, the halftime score was unbelievably pathetic... Catch this... the [Animals 70](#), the [Insects 0](#).

The animals thought they had the game locked up.

But at the start of the second half a new player entered the game for the Insects - [the centipede](#).

His impact was immediate and dramatic. He ran back the opening kick-off. He scored every time he carried the ball. No one could tackle him. He ran, passed, blocked. He was an incredible football player.

On defense, every time the elephant had the ball, the centipede tackled him for a loss. The centipede dominated the second half, leading the Insects to a come-from-behind victory, [Animals 70](#), [Insects 77](#).

After the game, the elephant was curious.

They asked the flea, "That centipede is a quite a football player. Why didn't he play in the first half?"

The flea answered, "*Hey, it takes a centipede a whole half just to put on his shoes.*" A centipede has so many legs and feet he has lots of shoes... get it...

As it turned out the football-playing centipede was one *big, bad bug*. And this was the situation facing the prophet Joel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

The Jewish nation was facing a *big, bad bug* - not a centipede - but a plague of grasshopper-like locust.

In an age before pesticides - and long before the *Orkin man* - a black cloud of locust swept across the fertile fields outside of Jerusalem. The plague killed the nation's crop, and crippled their economy. Joel was called by God to call a wayward nation back to Him.

Chapter 1 begins, "The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel." This is all we know of the author. No mention of *when he wrote, who he was, or what he did*. All we know is "*Joel the son of Pethuel.*"

"*Joel*" means "Yahweh is God," which is a central theme in the prophecy. "*Pethuel*" means "enlarged by God." And when people learn that Yahweh is God, the crisis situations they face serve to enlarge their faith.

Most conservative scholars place Joel in the reign of King Joash, around 830 BC. Which would make Joel the first of the writing prophets. Joel spoke to the Southern Kingdom of

Judah, and was a contemporary with both the Prophet Obadiah and the Prophet Elisha.

Joel begins, “Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.” What the people of Judah had endured was a crisis of unprecedented proportions... Verse 4...

“What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.” Judah faced a terrible pestilence - a devastating plague of locust.

In the mid-90s I traveled to Nashville, Tennessee to attend a pastors conference. While there, I witnessed an invasion of what the locals referred to as “locust.”

They were actually cicadas. But it was bizarre. The little critters were everywhere. You’d walk down the sidewalk and they’d smack you in the face. We’re talking real pests. Call them what you want, but they really *bugged* me! The Nashvillians told me the cicada phenomena occurs once every seventeen years.

It’s interesting, I found a YouTube video dated 2011, seventeen years later. They had struck again! (clip)

As bothersome as these cicadas are, they're nothing in comparison to a swarm of locust. The locust is a dull-yellow grasshopper. It's length is about 3 inches.

Locust have two antenna about 1 inch long. Their face looks like that of a horse, and they travel fast.

A swarm of locust can reach 100 feet high, and 4-5 miles long. They move across the terrain and strip the land of everything green. Nothing gets spared. The locust even eat the bark off the trees and devour small branches. Locust are nicknamed "[hunger incarnate.](#)"

Swarms of locust have been known to eat every blade of grass over 90 square miles. After a swarm sweeps over a spot it looks like the land was scorched.

The four types of locust mentioned by Joel probably refer to the four stages of a locust's development...

The [chewing locust](#) are the babies... [Swarming locust](#) are the mothers who multiply in great numbers... [Crawling locust](#) still have small wings that allow them to hop, but not yet fly... And [consuming locust](#) are the dive bombers. They're the adult locust. They're the ones that do the most extensive damage...

The December 1915 issue of National Geographic described a plague of locust that covered both Israel and Syria for a total of five months - beginning in late February and not ending until July. The plague began with swarms so thick they blanketed out the sun.

The swarms unleashed on the land covered 400 to 600 feet a day. They consumed all traces of vegetation.

This was the crisis the nation faced in Joel's day! It crippled the nation's economy. It put their very survival at stake. This pestilence was a national emergency.

This kind of plague would *bug* anybody!

In the Chinese language words are formed by linking together symbols. Take the word **“crisis.”** It's the combination of symbols for two words, **“danger”** and **“opportunity.”** And a crisis is both. On one hand, it poses *danger*, on the other hand it creates *opportunity*.

This plague was a wake-up call - an opportunity for Judah to learn what the name **“Joel”** declares, **“Yahweh is God.”** And He can be trusted even in tough times.

Verse 5 lays out the only sin mentioned in this prophecy, **“Awake, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth.”** Apparently, idolatry was not the problem at the time of Joel, as it would be later. The big corruption in his day was drunkenness.

And 2800 years later in modern America, not much has changed. John Fielding referred to alcohol as **“the liquid fire by which men drink their hell beforehand.”**

And if you've ever had close contact with the life of an alcoholic, you won't consider Fielding's description an exaggeration. Alcohol clouds your judgment, impairs decision-making, lowers normal inhibitions.

Intoxication numbs certain feelings that God wants us all to address... And if you've ever tried to love an alcoholic, then you are painfully aware of how alcohol can ruin a relationship. Call it, **hurt in a glass.**

Here's a provocative statement. Think it through with me. **Alcoholism is a disease. Drunkenness is a sin.**

Of course, not everyone who gets drunk is an alcoholic. Some folks binge drink. They find a fun in getting smashed. They like the buzz. God doesn't want us under the control of anything but His Spirit. Thus, if you like to get drunk you should knock it off. A Christian is free to drink in moderation - but not to get drunk.

Alcoholism though is more complicated. There's an old AA saying, **"Once you're a pickle you can never be a cucumber."** Some folks are chemically predisposed to alcohol. Once they start, they can't stop. That means one drink becomes a drunk... *Budweiser is not your bud. Neither does it make you wiser...* For an alcoholic it's a sin to take a first drink. You need to stop, dry out, and commit to a comprehensive plan to avoid alcohol.

Joel continues, **"For a nation has come up against My land, strong, and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a fierce lion.**

He has laid waste My vine, and ruined My fig tree; he has stripped it bare and thrown it away; its branches are made white." Joel is using the idiom of an invading army to describe the plague of locust, OR he's using the locust as a type of a coming military invasion.

I personally believe He's doing the latter. He uses the local catastrophe of the locust as a springboard to describe a devastation that will occur in the future.

“Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.” Don't trivialize the hard times you've endured. Take heed. Grieve over your losses, *perhaps God has something He wants to teach you?*

“The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord; the priests mourn, who minister to the Lord.” The plague is so horrific it's disrupted Temple worship. Daily offerings have ceased.

“The field is wasted, the land mourns; for the grain is ruined, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails. Be ashamed, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley; because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine has dried up, and the fig tree has withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree - all the trees of the field are withered; surely joy has withered away from the sons of men.” Israel was barren and bummed. Not just the shrubs, but their joy had withered. They had turned to artificial stimulants - *they relied on Jack not Jesus.*

The Jews faced a **crisis**. But it was an **opportunity** to drink deeply from God - not their numbing alcohol.

“Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; wail, you who minister before the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God; for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.” Sackcloth was a coarse, rough material. As clothing it'd be like wearing sandpaper.

A sackcloth shirt would not be very comfortable.

The exhortation to put on sackcloth meant to lay aside the creature comforts and distractions, and get serious with God. Be prepared to mourn over your sin.

Joel cries out in verse 14, “Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.” *How do you respond when a crisis strikes?* Joel gives us three suggestions.

First, he tells God’s people to **pull back** from the crisis. Create some space. Get some objectivity. Call an assembly - **go to Church** - gain God’s perspective. **Before you face the crisis seek the Lord’s face.**

Second, **pull together**. Gather the elders and Christian friends - call together people of faith - draw from their encouragement, and support, and prayer. In a crisis, seek help - turn to a brother, not a bottle.

And finally, **pull apart** from the world. Joel says “consecrate a fast” - cut off your normal intake of food, or entertainment, or sports. Change your schedule to hear from God. Make Him your sole priority for a time.

In a crisis... **pull back - pull together - pull apart**

Verse 15, “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty.” Here’s the theme of the book. Five times Joel mentions “*the day of the Lord*” - a term used by the biblical writers to speak of future cataclysms.

The expression denotes a time when God intervenes in human history, and brings about His own conclusion.

“History” will truly become “His Story.” God will judge the Earth and establish His Kingdom. He’ll bring order to man’s madness. Joel uses the locust as a *local* example of what God will one day do on a *global* scale.

Imagine, Mrs. Donna’s class of third graders having recess. The kids have been cooped up all day. They race out to the playground, and immediately run wild.

Of course, Donna arrives a tad later. But immediately she starts putting things into order. She stops any bad behavior, sets up some rules, gets a game going...

What happens on the playground is a microcosm of God’s plan for the ages. Today is the day of man. God is letting mankind run wild. He’s allowing us our freedom. We’re showing how to abuse that freedom.

But soon God will come out... And He’s going to get a grip on things. At first it’ll be ugly. In the end He’ll make all things beautiful. “*The day of Lord*” will begin with the rapture of the Church. It’ll continue with the Great Tribulation, followed by the Second Coming of Christ, and finally the Lord’s Thousand Year Kingdom.

In Genesis 1:5 at creation, God said, “the evening and the morning were the first day.” The nighttime precedes the morning. The sun goes down before a new day dawns. There’s darkness before there’s light.

And this will be true of “*the day of the Lord.*” The Jews look forward to God’s intervention. They’re aware of God’s wonderful promises, and rightly believed *that day* will be full of blessing and prosperity for Israel.

But what they conveniently overlook is that before a new day dawns a nightfall of judgment will occur.

Their **prosperity** will be preceded by **persecution and purification**. This is why Joel calls to them now to repent, put on their sackcloth, and cry out to the Lord.

Verse 16, “Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed shrivels under the clods, storehouses are in shambles; barns are broken down, for the grain has withered.

How the animals groan! The herds of cattle are restless, because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep suffer punishment. O Lord, to You I cry out; for fire has devoured the open pastures, and a flame has burned all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field also cry out to You, for the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the open pastures.”

Chapter 2, “Blow the trumpet in Zion...” (clip)

Moses made two silver trumpets, that were blown for various reasons - *to break camp, to prepare for battle, and to gather for worship*. Here judgment is coming.

Also in Revelation 8-9 the Great Tribulation highlights seven trumpets that blast out judgments on the earth. They alert the Jews to break camp and flee to the wilderness. They sound the battle cry, and they call the Jews to gather together and turn back to God.

“And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is

coming, for it is at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains.

A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations.”

Locust swarms had covered Israel with “*thick darkness*,” but they were illustrative of a people - an army - that would blanket the land in the same way.

In a sense Joel is wearing tri-focal glasses... He sees immediate, then distant, then an end times event.

In his own day, He’s dealing with a plague of locust.

One-hundred years into the future, the Assyrian army, will invade the land of Israel from the north.

And thirdly, this is a foreshadowing of what the Bible calls **the Battle of Armageddon**, at the end of the age all the armies of the world will surround Jerusalem. *I believe the book of Joel has all three scenarios in view.*

“A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; surely nothing shall escape them.” In an immediate sense this is a depiction of a plague of locust. Before it the landscape is garden green. In its rearview mirror the ground is a desert - it’s nothing but scorched earth.

“Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run.” Again, Joel is using the locust to describe a future army. Locust have the face of a horse. The

Italian term means “**little horse.**” And they’re moving fast. A locust leaps like a stallion.

“**With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array.**” These invading locust foreshadow the futuristic army that’s destined to come against Israel at the end of the age.

Perhaps Joel even sees them in a vision. Blackhawk helicopters like grasshoppers, paratroopers floating in like a swarm. Modern artillery devastating a landscape.

Remember that four types of locust are mentioned in chapter one. Its interesting that the first four judgments in the book of Revelation feature four horsemen...

The **white horse** or Antichrist. The **red horse** or war. The **black horse** of famine. The **pale horse** or death.

Also in Revelation we see seven trumpets that sound out God’s judgment. The fifth trumpet is a plague of locust that rise up from the bottomless pit - from hell.

These are not ordinary locust. Common locust feed on vegetation, but these are ordered not to harm “**the grass of the earth, or any green thing... but only those who do not have the seal of God on their forehead.**”

We’re also told in Revelation 9:7, “**And the shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle...**”

This too is similar to Joel's descriptions. John sees an army of locust-like demons that harm those who aren't committed to God. The situation will become so bad people will desire to commit suicide, but death will take a vacation. The situation in

the Prophet's day, and his description of it, are both types of future events.

Verse 6, "Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color. They run like mighty men. They climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks.

They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief." You can't destroy them. You can't *cut them down* or *keep them out*. Sounds like the demons in Revelation 9...

"The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness." Again, in Revelation when the **seventh bowl** is poured a colossal earthquake strikes. When the **sixth seal** is broken the sky rolls up like a scroll. When the **fourth trumpet** blasts a third of the sun, moon, and stars refuse to shine. We can only imagine the catastrophic phenomena these plagues describe. Obviously John and Joel agree that in the end, in the day of the Lord, Mother Nature will go nuts.

Mother Nature will have a serious case of PMS.

"The Lord gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?" This is what Jesus said about the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24:22, "Unless those days were shortened, no flesh

would be saved; but for the elect's sake (the Jews) those days will be shortened.”

“Now, therefore,” says the Lord, “turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments...” I've seen people fall at the altar, weeping and crying - but their tears were only crocodile tears.

They weren't sincere. It's one thing to tear your garments, it's another thing to have a broken heart.

Joel is saying, “*enough with the antics.*” God wants **repentance** not just **remorse**. A person can be sorry they got caught and never show a desire to change. God wants more than a *show*, He wants real *sincerity*.

“Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him - a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?”

One of my flaws is a quick temper - a short fuse.

But God is slow to anger. He has great patience and enduring kindness. *Turn to Him, and He'll turn to you.*

Verse 15, “Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room.” Normal activities should cease - this assembly should take precedent over nursing and weddings.

“Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, “Spare Your people, O Lord, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” Everyone should pray for God’s deliverance.

A crisis becomes an opportunity when it snaps us to attention, and calls on us to cry out to God for help.

“Then the Lord will be zealous for His land, and pity His people. The Lord will answer and say to His people, “Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.”

“But I will remove far from you the northern army, and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea; his stench will come up, and his foul odor will rise, because he has done monstrous things.” This northern army will be camped between the *western sea* or **Mediterranean**, and *eastern sea* or **Sea of Galilee**. It’ll be driven from the land of Israel by the hand of God. A stench will rise from its slaughter.

This northern army refers to Assyria in the short run, and to Israel’s end time enemies in the long run - either the Russian coalition spoken of in Ezekiel 38-39, or the armies of Antichrist in Daniel 11. *Both get defeated.*

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things!” Notice the contrast, “*monstrous things,*” now “*marvelous things.*”

Both come from the Lord - blessing and judgment.

“Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their strength. Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you - the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.” Unlike Egypt that drew it’s water from the Nile, Israel lived dependent on the rain. Whenever God wanted to wake them up He would withhold the rain.

There are two rainy seasons in Israel. The former or autumn rains, and the latter or spring rains. Here, Joel promises that if the people repent God will restore both rainy seasons - both the former and the latter rains.

Former Israelis Prime Minister, Golda Meir, once commented, "Imagine! Moses led all of our people through the wilderness for forty years and brought them to the only place in this area that has no oil." But God knew what He was doing. The Lord wanted His people to *trust in Him* - not their oil, or river, or gold.

Verse 24, “The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.”

Joel is speaking of olive oil. When the rainy seasons return it’ll cause the ground to prosper once again.

“So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, my great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of

the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame. Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.” *Put to the test - yes! Put through the fire - yep! But put to shame - never!* God’s will is to restore us.

God has power to “*restore the years that the locusts have eaten...*” What lust, and greed, and selfishness, and pride chewed up and spit out, God can restore.

God can overcome the terrible consequences of sin in our lives. He promises to restore to you *wasted years*, and *untapped potentials*, and *lost opportunities*, and *neglected talents*, and *squandered blessings...*

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “*Lost years can never be restored literally. Time once past is gone forever... but there is a strange and wonderful way in which God can give back to you the un-ripened fruits over which you mourned. The fruits of wasted years may yet be yours.*”

When Mickey Mantle came up with the Yankees, his manger, Casey Stengel told a reporter, “*This guy is going to be better than Joe DiMaggio and Babe Ruth.*”

But Mantle never realized his potential. Before he died he held a moving press conference where he admitted his heavy drinking wasted his potential.

Tears came to his eyes as Mantle confessed, “*One of the things I messed up, besides baseball, was being a father. I wasn’t a good family man.*” Perhaps shortcomings with your family are your chief regrets.

We've all made mistakes. We've all got regrets... Can God really restore the years the worm has eaten?

You bet He can! After Samson sinned and became a slave of his enemies, God restored his strength one last time. He killed more in his dying, than in his living.

After Job's terrible ordeal, the last chapter of Job tells us God restored to him double all that he'd lost...

After Peter's crushing denial of Jesus, the Lord came to him by the Galilee and gave him a second chance...

Can God restore the damage you've done to *your marriage? your kids? your career? your witness?* Yes, a dozen times, yes! Repent and trust God. He'll restore to you the wasted years and the toll that sin has taken.

And here's how He'll do it, verse 28, **“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”** These are special verses. They get quoted frequently in the NT. Peter quoted them on the Day of Pentecost when he gives an explanation for the miracle that occurred in the upper room. He told them in Acts 2:16, **“This is what was spoken by the Prophet Joel...”**

Notice, Peter refers to **“what Joel spoke,”** not the **when.** Joel is speaking of the Day of the Lord. At the end of the age, when the Jews embrace Jesus, God will pour out His Spirit on Israel and all His people.

Now, on the Day of Pentecost the **what** of Joel's prophecy happened - *not the when, but the what*. God poured out the same power and anointing on His Church that He'll pour out on all Israel in the last days.

Regardless of gender or age - on both menservants and maidservants - on all who embrace Jesus, God has promised to pour out the new power of His Spirit.

Don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.

And prior to it happening to Israel, God wants to fill us with *unspeakable joy and unquenchable boldness!*

Verse 30, "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke.

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord." This all happens at the end of the age when Jesus comes to institute His Kingdom.

"And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls." Paul quotes Joel 2:32 in Romans 10, explaining how we Gentiles have entered God's family.

Apparently, the "*whoever*" here really means "*whoever*" - either Jew or Gentile. Salvation is not limited to a select few, but "*whoever*" calls on the Lord.

Chapter 3, “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land.” When Jesus returns He’ll gather the Jews from the ends of the earth, and re-plant them in the land of Israel.

Then He’ll judge the nations of the world in “*the Valley of Jehoshaphat.*” Tradition identifies this valley as the gorge east of Jerusalem. The Kidron Valley is between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives.

The name “*Jehoshaphat*” means “Yahweh has judged.” And this is what Jesus will do in that day.

In Matthew 25 Jesus spoke of this judgment. “When the Son of Man comes in His glory... all the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them... as a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats.”

It’s interesting the basis on which they’re separated. Jesus said, “how they treated the least of these My brethren.” *And who were His brethren?* Not the Church. We’re His bride. No, Jesus was born a Jew. The Jews were His brothers. Here’s how the nations will ultimately be judged - *by how they treated Jews.*

Not only does Jesus’ promise confirm the prophesy of Joel, but it harkens back to God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, “I will bless those that bless you, and I will curse him that curses you.” Jesus will judge the nations by how they treat

the Jews. *Woe, to the United States if we ever turn our backs on Israel.*

Verse 3, “They have cast lots for My people, have given a boy as payment for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink.” Nations enslaved the Jews.

Indeed, what have you to do with Me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia? Will you retaliate against Me? But if you retaliate against Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your retaliation upon your own head; because you have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried into your temples My prized possessions. Also the people of Judah and the people of Jerusalem you have sold to the Greeks, that you may remove them far from their borders.

Behold, I will raise them out of the place to which you have sold them, and will return your retaliation upon your own head. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off; for the Lord has spoken.” All the neighboring nations are guilty of mistreating Israel. They’re ripe for judgment.

“Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for war!

Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, ‘I am strong.’” Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O Lord.” God is challenging the nations to come up against Him.

He's saying, "Go ahead, make my day!" He's angry with the nations of the world and He is calling them together to the valley of Megiddo for the final battle.

Notice verse 10, we're use to reading Isaiah 2:4, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks," but this is after the coming of Jesus, and His judgment of the nations. This is after God establishes His Kingdom and ushers in His peace.

The world will convert instruments of war into implements of peace. This verse is engraved on a wall outside the United Nations building in New York City.

But a better motto for the UN would be this verse in Joel. For the world is headed for just the opposite.

Paul warns in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 when men say, "Peace and safety! Then sudden destruction comes upon them." When Jesus returns we'll no longer need weapons, but until then keep your powder dry, and a bomb or two on stand by. There're bad guys out there.

Verse 12, "Let the nations be awakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow - for their wickedness is great."

Remember what the Apostle John said of Jesus in Revelation 19:15, "He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." God will crush the nations as grapes! Blood will flow like juice!

“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel.”

Notice *the Valley of Jehoshaphat* is also called *the Valley of Decision*. I've heard it said, "We make our decisions and then our decisions make us." How true that will be in the final day. God will decide on us, in accordance with the decisions we made in our lives.

CS Lewis tells us, when we die, "There will be God without disguise: something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side... That will not be the time for choosing.

It will be the time when we discover which side we have really chosen, whether we realized it or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.”

“So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again.” Since 70 AD, for the last 1947 years, Jerusalem has been trampled by Gentile feet. Today, Muslim knees bow and pray on the Temple

Mount. But when Jesus returns, Jerusalem and Zion will be liberated!

“And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Acacias.” Ezekiel 47 describes the spring that bubbles up in the Temple and becomes a mighty river flowing east towards the Dead Sea. The valley of Acacia is northeast of Dead Sea.

The Chapter closes, “Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of violence against the people of Judah, for they have shed innocent blood in their land.

But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had not acquitted; for the Lord dwells in Zion.” God will forgive His people. He’ll wipe away their guilt and they shall abide forever.