

THE BOOK OF JOEL
Lesson 10, Chapter 4 Continued 2 - END

We concluded our previous lesson with Joel 4 verse 13. The narrative centers on the time when the prophecy of the war to end all wars has begun. This is a Holy War, which means the outcome is already determined...God (and Israel) wins. God has drawn the nations (all gentile) of the world into this war (unbeknown to them) in order to judge them. The war these nations are fighting has a single purpose and aim: to destroy Israel once and for all. What exactly is the material motivation or the catalyst... the cause...that makes all these nations decide to do this is not stated. Whatever it is, we are told it will be sudden. I suspect the world in general will be quite surprised by it all, but at the same time most will agree with it. Whenever we read of prophecies being fulfilled we find the people of the prophesy are never quite prepared for it, and are always caught by surprise despite (in some cases) the centuries of having been warned. Of course, when a lot of time passes between a prophecy and its fulfillment, people can forget about it or it becomes so distant to their minds as to be all but forgotten. This can be a fatal mistake in the most literal sense.

Previous verses of earlier Joel chapters also indicate that the primary aggressors that will come to fight against Israel are the nations immediately surrounding it. So, apparently the other nations of the world that are farther away will side with, and support, those surrounding nations. Assuming that at the time this occurs the world's geopolitical map in the Middle East looks mostly like it does today, then it is likely these closely surrounding nations will include Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Egypt. This probably will also include the non-Arab state of Iran.

Let's re-read that last half of Joel chapter 4.

RE-READ JOEL CHAPTER 4: 13 – end

There are a few different ways to translate the beginning of verse 14. Most English translations say "Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of Decision". However, others say something like "tumult, tumult" or "melee, melee" or "chaos, chaos" in the Valley of Decision. The Hebrew word being translated is

hamon. It can mean a large crowd, or it can mean tumult or chaos. The point of this opening to verse 14 is to express the excruciating and eardrum-bursting sounds of battle when enormous numbers of combatants engage one another. My father and my wife's father both fought in WWII. We each remember our dads saying that the thing they recall the most vividly was the extreme noise of war. Men shouting and screaming; guns discharging; bombs and artillery exploding.

Next is the issue of calling this the Valley of Decision. Just as I do not think that the Valley of Jehoshaphat is the formal name of a place, and therefore is not intended to indicate the location of the battle, neither is the Valley of Decision. Rather they both are expressions such as saying that someone is in the valley of despair. A valley is a low point in geography. When a human is said to be in a valley of some sort, it means that person is at an emotional low point. So, what decision and whose decision is being depicted here? In our modern Western vocabulary, it is probably better to help us to get the intended sense of it if we translate this expression as "the valley of the verdict". It is God making a judicial decision and carrying out the sentence. Judgment is actually a legal term and it almost always used in that sense in the Bible. Saying that the gentile nations of the world are being judged is meant in the context of them being put on trial in order that a verdict... guilty or not guilty...is rendered. In the case of the nations, according to Joel the verdict is guilty as charged. The nations have been put by God into the Valley of Judgement (put them on trial), and now the time of the verdict (the Valley of Decision) has arrived. The verdict is guilty and the sentence has been previously announced: death and destruction.

Although I've explained it before it bears repeating: this verdict of death and destruction is a corporate verdict to be carried out in a corporate scope. It is about entire nations as a whole, and not about individual people. Individual people will be judged by God as guilty or not guilty according to their trust in the saving power of Christ along with their faithful (or unfaithful) obedience to the Father. Nations will be judged by a different standard in the end. It will be mostly according to their support of, or their hatred for, Israel. It seems that all nations will, in the end, come to be against Israel and be Israel's enemies to one degree or another. So, here I want to offer some circumspection. I imagine it will not be that all nations will have equal levels of animosity towards Israel. Some may despise them to the highest and most murderous level (think of modern Iran or WWII

Germany), while others find primarily political or economic reasons to join in supporting those nations who hate Israel the most and are attacking them with such ferocity (think many European nations). Perhaps what happens will be much like it is as I write this lesson in October of 2023, as the people of the Palestinian territory of Gaza, led by Hamas, have attacked Israel in a barbarian way not seen since the Nazis' treatment of the Jews in the late 1930's and early 1940's. Some nations have come out declaring they are for Hamas, even though they are not joining Hamas in fighting Israel. Others of these nations are aiding and abetting Hamas, others are actively advocating for them, and still others merely expressing their sympathies for Hamas and affirming their justification for why they did what they did, and at the same time expressing their disdain for Israel. I think it might be more this way in the Battle of Armageddon. Nonetheless, since God's judgment and verdict will be against nations as corporate bodies, then all those who are the citizens of those nations... regardless of their personal feelings for Israel and the Jewish people... will be adversely affected.

I have no doubt that all of your listening to my voice are for Israel and against Hamas. Yet, if your particular nation came under judgment today, you would not be spared. This is why I strongly call upon you all to prepare! You...all of us...have been warned. Your trust in Yeshua is not going to shield you or your family so that you miraculously escape hardship when that day comes, nor will you likely know in advance the day it all begins. So, the best response is to prepare by acquiring and storing emergency supplies and food and having a plan. In fact, I say unequivocally that it is your duty to plan and prepare because this is the reason that God has given those who claim to worship Him advanced notice that the secular world is completely unaware of. At the same time, I urge you: don't approach this preparation out of fear. Approach it out of common sense, forewarning, and wisdom. If you do you'll make better, more reasoned decisions. Do your homework and then go to reputable companies to get planning and information about preparation. Don't go to fear mongers who play on your emotions. This way you'll get the right products and not overly spend or buy things that aren't really needed. This is why I want to direct you to go to www.practicalprepc.com. There you will get good, solid information to help you acquire the right things, of good quality, at a good price and not be scammed.

Verse 15, then, turns from saying (as earlier in Joel) that the sun and moon WILL become black to the sun and moon HAS become black. That is, this long prophesied event is now underway. The prophesied events are happening. The Day of Yehoveh has begun. Since the upsetting of the cosmos is happening, then it is the sign of a theophany that is underway; God is making an appearance and this spells doom for the nations. This revelation fits with several prophecies but few more dramatic than that written in Zechariah 14. Turn you Bibles there and follow along with me.

READ ZECHARIAH 14 all

Here we have a vivid description of what the battle of the nations against Israel will look like. It is going to spread throughout Israel all the way to Jerusalem, with (a staggering) half of the population of Jerusalem being killed by the nations. It is at some point in that battle that the Lord ends His punishment of Israel and turns His wrath to decimate those gentile nations that He had been using to decimate Israel.

One of the more controversial matters to deal with in Zechariah's prophecy, however, happens in verse 4. Before we talk about that, the first words of chapter 14 are a bit obscured by the CJB translation. Actually, what the first words say is, "Look, a Day of Yehoveh is coming". Or, in most Bibles, "a Day of the Lord is coming". So, since this is a Day of Yehoveh then we can expect a theophany to accompany it; and sure enough, that is what we see in the next several verses.

In verse 4, one of the more famous and often-spoken ones within Evangelical Christianity, it says that "His" feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, splitting it in two. The common interpretation of this is that the "His" is referring to Christ. The problem is, up to this vs. 4, and in every verse after, God is being referred to as Yehoveh. The Father... or perhaps the totality of the Godhead. That is, everywhere our English Bibles say "the Lord" in Zechariah 14 (Adonai in the CJB), in fact the Hebrew Scripture says "Yehoveh". So, it is emphatically and literally Yehoveh whose feet shall stand on the Mt. of Olives causing it to split. This is the epitome of a theophany...God making an appearance... and by using the word "Yehoveh" several times it makes it awfully difficult to assume that this is NOT

speaking about the Father but instead is speaking about Yeshua. And yet that's what nearly all gentile Christian Bible translators do.

This same passage goes on to speak of the decimation of the nations that came to attack Israel, and the divine protection over the remnant of Jerusalemites that survived once God intervenes on Israel's behalf. And, it also speaks of God locating Himself in Jerusalem with the nations coming to Him on Sukkot every year to worship Him. This is another way of saying God is seated on the throne in Zion, whereby Zion is a name usually reserved for a redeemed Jerusalem, such that sometimes Zion is also used to describe the Temple Mount area. So, this can only be taking place after the war, when peace has been restored. This couples well with Joel 4:16 that says that Yehoveh roars out of Zion, He thunders out of Jerusalem. Roaring and thundering are used biblically to describe when God speaks. We also read that Heaven and earth quake (once again, this is what happens when God appears). Joel goes on to say that as God is now ensconced in Zion, He is a refuge to His people (the remaining people) and is a stronghold...that is, an impregnable fortress...for the remnant of Israel. Just as with Zechariah, a moment comes during the battle against the nations when the nations are winning and Jerusalem is being savagely attacked, and the Jewish loss of life reaches approximately 50%. By any human measure all hope of Israel surviving is gone. But, God arrives to turn the tide and to carry out His promise to destroy the nations and to restore Israel. And, it is because He miraculously rescues His people, Israel, that they will finally comprehend that He is their God, that He is alive and well and able to deliver them, and so they will finally shuck off the blinders from their eyes and fully turn to Him as God and Savior (as it says verse 17).

As part of the process of Israel coming to realize that He **is** their God and Has come to protect and liberate them, God also purifies Jerusalem from the uncleanness of the gentiles that have trodden it down and polluted it with its false religions and idols for millennia. Never again will it be overtaken and occupied by pagans; instead, it will only be inhabited by the righteous. Zechariah writes in 14:21:

CJB Zechariah 14:21 *Yes, every cooking pot in Yerushalayim and Y'hudah will be consecrated to ADONAI-Tzva'ot. Everyone who offers sacrifices will come, take*

them and use them to stew the meat. When that day comes, there will no longer be merchants in the house of ADONAI-Tzva'ot.

Saying that "every cooking pot" in Jerusalem will be consecrated to Yehoveh is an expression meaning every family...every person (since every person needed a cooking pot)... in Jerusalem will be cleansed and made righteous in obedience to the Law of Moses (something most Israelis have not done for a very long time). Even though this statement is clear in its meaning, we are not to confuse the matter of righteousness with perfect cleanness. Righteousness has to do with sin. Cleanliness has to do with the laws of purity, which only become sin if not followed. That is, being unclean is not sin. However, not taking the prescribed steps in the Torah to become clean is sin. So, when Jerusalem is said to be a sanctuary this isn't about the condition of the people, or about a place to be safe, or a government designation (like the sense of some cities in the USA designating themselves as Sanctuary Cities); rather it is meant to strongly reconnect Jerusalem as the earthly abode of the God of the Covenant. Jerusalem was always described in the Old Testament as where God's places His holy name and where He is to be worshipped, and where He appears above the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies of the Temple, once per year. That is, this is His sanctuary. This connection alone makes Jerusalem a place of refuge and security exclusively for God's people because only God's people are the people of the Covenant.

Thus, as we read the prophecies of the various Minor and Major Prophets that offer different perspectives on their fulfillments, each seeming to introduce certain elements and information that others don't, we must be careful not to see any of them conflicting, nor should we gather them together in an attempt to construct a well-defined timeline showing the beginning of one End Times event that, only once ended, the next one neatly starts and ends leading to the next after that in perfect serial progression (as is so popularly done today in the form of charts). What happens in the End Times is a much more complex process that looks more like a bowl of spaghetti than a neat line with marks on it. Some things will take a long time to come about while other things will be of short duration. Also, many events will go on at the same time, some necessarily overlapping, others starting, pausing, and then starting up again, etc. The End Times theater of operation is large, the number of people involved is large, and many things are going to happen in parallel, with prophecies often giving identical events

different names. This is why although we can get from the Bible a good 30,000-foot view of future, as-yet fulfilled prophecy, we need to be humble and cautious about becoming rigid or doctrinal about the granular details. Prophetic fulfillment only becomes fully known in detail in hindsight.

Verse 18 speaks of when the Holy War against the nations is past, and Israel has been fully restored, as promised. Of course, the first thing mentioned about Israel's restoration is agricultural in nature. Mountains trickling down with wine, hills overflowing with milk, brooks full of water. This is because practically all Israelites in Joel's day were farmers and herders. So, the new abundance of food production reflects how Israelites would have measured it. God has now blessed Israel with His eternal blessings (as promised in the Covenant of Moses) and equally has cursed Israel's enemies according to the curses of the Mosaic Covenant. Here I must pause to tell you of my great heartache and concern. I have spoken on this before, and will again, because of the gravity of the matter.

The Constantinian Church out of which I came...as did most of you...and in which many more of you may still be part of...careened off the path of following the divinely crafted and given Law of God. The modern Church (and I am necessarily speaking generally and not universally) tends to be ignorant of this fact, of their own Church history and beginning, and generally speaking are uninterested in hearing that 1) the Church that they are part of is in no way the Church that Christ created and His followers practice for 3 centuries before being taken over by the Roman Emperor Constantine; and 2) that God's Law for all humanity was handed down in the form of the Law of Moses. How every Believer in the God of Israel was to live their lives, having relationship both with God and their fellow man, was presented in the Law of Moses along with the blessings for those who obeyed this Law and curses for those who did not. Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, strongly and clearly said in Matthew 5:17 -19 that none of His followers should misinterpret or misrepresent His teachings to mean an abolishment of, or even the slightest change to, the Covenant of Moses. This admonition included His gentile followers who have been given a pathway to join the Hebrews in partaking of the blessings of the Covenant by means of their trust in Yeshua of Nazareth as their divine Lord and Savior.

Throughout the books of the Minor Prophets, we see how when God determines to judge Israel or the nations, it is always in terms of their ongoing violations of His Covenants. Thus, the glaring principle that is so painfully obvious (to those with the ears to hear and eyes to see) is that divine blessings are doled out according to faithfully following the laws of the Covenant, and curses are doled out against those who disobey those same laws. Christ changed none of that and in fact emphatically stated that He did not; but the Constantinian Church that spawned the many branches and denominations we see in existence today did change it. First, they declared God's law as set down in the Law of Moses to be dead and gone. Next, the Constantinian Church declared that Israelites weren't allowed to participate in the salvation that the Jewish Messiah Yeshua offered. And, now in modern times, it has become vogue to claim that Christ as Savior is sufficient for living eternally with God, regardless of how we then go on to live our lives, ignore Him, mistreat our fellow man, adopt grossly immoral lifestyles, or refuse to acknowledge and/or obey God's commandments in general. I can already hear the pleas that "my church isn't a Constantinian Church." Here's how you can know if it is or it isn't.

- 1) Does your Church believe the Law of Moses is dead and gone, replaced by something else, and/or doesn't apply to Believers? Then it is a Constantinian Church.
- 2) Does your Church practice a Sunday Sabbath or believes Sabbath can be any day one chooses...or that there is no longer any Sabbath at all? Then it is a Constantinian Church.
- 3) Does your Church honor the manmade and pagan-infected Easter and Christmas, but at the same time does not practice...or even denounces.... the God-ordained biblically appointed times? Then it is a Constantinian Church.

All these things are the opposite of what Jesus taught and His followers did. Yes, it is good that you believe in Christ. But then choosing to be part of an institution that also adopts pagan practices and denounces people who try to obey the same commandments that Yeshua and His followers did puts you on the wrong side of God. What does Christ say to those who insist on remaining tied to institutions trying to have it both ways? He says:

CJB Revelation 18:4 *Then I heard another voice out of heaven say: "My people, come out of her! so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not be infected by her plagues..."*

The Book of Joel and others of the Minor Prophets tell us of the unending expectation of God for us to obey the Covenant of Moses, even if at times we fail (these failures are called sins), and even if some of the laws and commandments cannot currently be fully carried out as intended due to current world circumstances beyond our control. Joel speaks of the day of reckoning (The Day of the Lord) that we'll all face if we are alive at the time. But even in death there will be a day of reckoning. What will be the standard for the reckoning that God will use to measure us by, even as Believers? Certainly, sincere trust in Christ is at the top of the list of that standard. However, our obedience or disobedience to His universal moral standard, the Law of Moses, is part of that standard as well. I don't imagine our saying to Him that we were taught or didn't believe that this standard applied to the people of the Constantinian Church will be well accepted as an excuse. Rather, what those who offer that excuse will probably hear is what I call the most terrifying passage in the Bible. It says:

CJB Matthew 7:21-23 ²¹ *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.* ²² *On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?'* ²³ *Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'*

These words were spoken just minutes after Yeshua had told His followers that they were to continue to obey the Law of Moses, and what would happen to them if they didn't, or (perhaps even worse) should they think to teach others NOT to obey. But, that's not all he said. Let's continue with the next recorded words to come from His mouth.

CJB Matthew 7:24-29 ²⁴ *"So, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on bedrock.* ²⁵ *The rain fell, the rivers flooded, the winds blew and beat against that house, but it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on rock.* ²⁶ *But everyone who hears these*

words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, the rivers flooded, the wind blew and beat against that house, and it collapsed- and its collapse was horrendous!" ²⁸ When Yeshua had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at the way he taught, ²⁹ for he was not instructing them like their Torah-teachers but as one who had authority himself.

Yeshua says that I have told you how it is and what to do...now do it. Act. Trusting Him involves action. If you do act, He says, it will be like the sensible man who built his house on the rock. But, if you do NOT act you will be like the stupid man who built his house on the sand. What happened when the troubles came upon the man whose house was built on the rock? His house stood and he was delivered from the storm. What happened when troubles came upon the man whose house was built on sand? His house collapsed and what followed was horrendous for him. All of this is connected to Matthew 5:17 – 19, which tells us to be obedient to the Torah... to the Covenant of Moses.

Bottom line: the nations that will be decimated in the near future...as we find it in Joel, and Zechariah, and elsewhere in our Bibles... as they go up to fight against Israel (not realizing they are actually fighting against God). They are actually being summoned to court for a trial, and they have already been judged guilty and will face the consequences laid down by the Covenant of Moses. Why do they fight Israel? Because they don't know the Mosaic Covenant and the brotherhood with Israel that is offered to all. Everyone... even those who claim belief in Jesus...who are lawless (which in biblical terms lawless can only be referring to the Law of Moses) will be rejected and barred from the Kingdom of Heaven. The Prophets are there for us not so much to see the future, but rather to help us understand God's plan of redemption and what we must do to get on board and stay on board. Over and over, we are told that worshippers of the God of Israel are obligated to obey the Laws of Moses not always by the letter but by the spirit of each law. We are to do this not just because this is commanded by Yehoveh but also as proof of sincerity of our claim that we trust Him.

The last half of Joel 4:18 speaks of a fountain that will flow from the house of Yehoveh and how it will water the Acacia Valley. This is speaking of the dry Jordan Valley where wadis...usually dry river beds...are populated by Acacia trees.

There is much belief among Christian scholars that this isn't a real river being spoken of, but rather a spiritualized river that waters the soul and not the land. I think that is not the case as the passages we read from Zechariah 14 show that the Mt. of Olives will be split in half and water will flow in enormous volumes in two directions. One of those directions is towards the Dead Sea, which is at the far end of the Jordan Valley. So, I think this is speaking of a literal river that will make the Jordan Valley spring to life with even more agriculture.

Verse 19 is interesting to me because of the mention of Egypt. It explains that as a result of the nations coming against Israel, no doubt Egypt will be one of them and so they, too, will be desolated as will Edom. Perhaps Egypt and Edom are being singled out because they have been historic enemies of Israel. On the other hand, they have also provided refuge for Israel at times. It may be because they represent the nations nearby to Israel...surrounding Israel. Some commentators think they are merely representative of all the nations that will come against Israel; I find that unacceptable. I'm not sure I know the answer as to why these two nations were singled out. However, as regards Egypt, there has always been a complicated relationship between Israel and both Egypt and Edom but for different reasons.

As regards Egypt, they served as a place of refuge for Israel as the Middle East struggled through a famine. It was to the Hebrew Joseph that God gave the warning of the coming famine, and it was Joseph that the Pharaoh put in charge of the effort to store away enough food for his nation (including Jacob and his family who were living there). But even more, it is easily forgotten that Joseph married an Egyptian woman and it was she who bore Joseph his 2 sons Ephraim and Manasseh that became 2 of Israel's most populous and prominent tribes. This means those 2 sons were half Hebrew and half Egyptian. Thus, all of the families descended from Ephraim and Manasseh were part Egyptian. We also find Egypt as the place that Mary and Joseph fled to protect the infant child Yeshua from the treacherous King Herod.

As for Edom, Edom (meaning red) is the land occupied by Jacob's brother Esau. So, because Esau came from the same Hebrew father as did his twin brother Jacob, then Edom should have had a friendly relationship with the Israelites but usually didn't. No matter, clearly for God's own good reasons He designated

Egypt and Edom for punishment. Later in other prophecies we find a special place of blessing for Egypt in the aftermath of the End Times battles.

Verse 20 holds up Judah in contrast to Egypt and Edom (again, I think, due to the familial relationships involved). Egypt and Edom are devastated, but Judah is restored and given the greatest abundance; a kind of paradise is established. The statement that Judah and Jerusalem shall dwell forever means they will be forever inhabited, just as for a nation or city to be desolated means that they shall become uninhabited. Even so, this is apparently only for a time.

While it is odd to think about, the punishment upon the nations doesn't mean they will no longer exist. In fact, the earth will remain full of nations right on through the 1000-year reign of Messiah. So, in a very real sense, just as Israel is renewed so will the nations be renewed. They will have their slates wiped clean and given a new beginning. Israel is said in the final verse of Joel to have their bloodguilt cleansed, thus removing any final curse of the Mosaic Covenant from the land and the people.

This ends our study of the Book of Joel.