

# The Prophecy of Joel

With Help From Jeremiah 23 And The Book of Acts

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is threefold. The first is to work on understanding the book of Joel, perhaps the most enigmatic of all books in the Old Testament. And the conclusion to which I am going to come has four parts, that God through Joel is describing —

1. His judgment of the Jews on the land of Israel just prior to the return of Jesus the Messiah.
2. His raising up an army of Gentiles as the instrument of His judgment of the Jews. This army will invade the land of Israel, destroy its food supply, and kill many Jews.
3. His judging the Gentile army for its evil act of seeking to harm His possessions, the Jews and their (His) land.
4. His revival and restoring the Jews to authentic spiritual believers in Him, such that they will be the “great nation” and Kingdom of God which He promised in Genesis 12:2, living on His gift to them of the land of Israel with abundant food and in complete security.

The second purpose of this paper is to consider how Jeremiah 23, with its ideas of the Davidic Shepherd who will rule over Israel, and the Book of Acts, with its ideas of the hope of Israel which is in conjunction with the apostle Peter’s quotation of Joel 2:28-32, correlate with Joel.

The third purpose of this paper is to respond to a trend within Christianity which considers the Old Testament rather passé and irrelevant. The claim is that Jesus and the New Testament gospels have demonstrated that the authors of the Old Testament were not entirely accurate in the ideas that they presented. For example, Moses meant well when he said the temple was a “permanent” structure, but Jesus clarifies what Moses meant by showing that it is not. Instead, Jesus is the permanent temple of the people of God, thus rendering the old temple irrelevant for even the Jews.

As a result, while deriving the original author’s intent in the Old Testament is a noble task, it does not lead the Bible student to the truth. Only the New Testament, and specifically the gospel accounts of the life, words, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is the truth of God, which must be used to correct the misconceptions of the Old Testament authors. This perspective also makes studying the Old Testament an interesting task, but we see that the student can soon become less than enthusiastic in pursuing this task, because the only appealing portion of the Bible is the New Testament. If the New Testament exists partly to point out the errors in the Old Testament, then what use really is the Old Testament? Does it not make more sense to study only the truth—the New Testament?

In addition, this trend in Christianity claims that the Old Testament is a fine collection of documents for Jews as an ancient nation and the people of God in Old Testament times. But Jesus and the New Testament demonstrate that the Jewish nation has been replaced by a new people of God, who are comprised of both Jews and Gentiles who embrace Jesus as their Messiah and who will live together in the eternal Kingdom of God which has begun to come

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into existence in a substantial and concrete way by means of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

Consequently, this trend is ultimately claiming that the Old Testament is neither correct nor inerrant, to use a more historical term for this issue. I think that this trend is wrong and results in destroying the validity and God's intended usefulness of the Old Testament. While advocates of this trend claim that it is essential to get at the original author's intent in each document of the Old Testament, the problem with their perspective is the supposition that the author's intent may not be the truth, as for example regarding the longevity of the temple. Just as I would not want to take a class on mathematics in school that uses a textbook which presents erroneous ideas, so also I have no interest in taking a class on the nature of reality in God's school of life which presents erroneous ideas. Therefore, this trend of reducing God's textbook on His plans and purposes to only the New Testament renders, in my opinion, any study of the Old Testament unappealing.

In this paper, I am assuming that God was correct in what He intended to communicate through Joel, even if He was not providing a plethora of details with respect to His meaning. I assume the same of Joel, when he speaks apart from God. He, too, is correct in what he meant but left out many of the details which could have been added to what he was saying—whether he knew them or not. I assume the same of the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament. In fact, the entire Bible is correct in everything it means to say on the topics which it addresses. Therefore, if Jesus appears to be saying something different from Moses, we either misunderstand Jesus or Moses or both. This also implies that deriving an accurate understanding of the original authors' intents after 3,500-2,000 years is a difficult and lengthy task. In addition, the inerrancy of the biblical authors also implies that no one but the biblical authors will be able to derive a 100% accurate understanding of themselves. In other words, only the Bible is inerrant. None of its students, who is not a biblical author, is. Therefore, when advocates of this trend claim that their study of Jesus and the gospels has led them to conclude that Moses is wrong, they are asserting that they have a higher level and more accurate knowledge of the Old Testament than Jesus did, who, I would claim, considered the Old Testament to be completely true.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the process of studying Moses and Jesus is the same. In fact, it is the same as coming to a correct conclusion about what any author, including God through Joel, intends to communicate—*if the author desires to communicate his ideas such that the reader will be able to understand exactly what he means*. This process uses the three instruments or tools of language, history, and common sense, which are the only legitimate tools for interpreting not only Joel, but also any written document whereby the author desires to communicate his ideas to readers so that they can be understood. I am implying that the converse of this is also true. When an author desires to communicate his ideas in such a way that he can be

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<sup>1</sup> Arguing for this fact would take more time and space than I desire to devote in this paper, but, briefly, Jesus' declarations to the Jews in John 10 that Psalm 82 and the rest of the writings of the Old Testament "cannot be broken," i.e., cannot be ignored *because they are all inerrant and infallible*, are the foundational ideas for concluding that the entire Bible is inerrant. If God has not provided an inerrant and infallible Bible, then we are left to our own subjective judgments to decide what is true and what is false in it. This is contrary to Jesus' perspective on the Bible and, ultimately, leads to futility and despair because of the minimal confidence with which we can hold our conclusions about what is true vs. what is false in the Bible. The only way that we can have a healthy and sane level of confidence as to what is truth is for God to have given us an inerrant and infallible set of documents, which we call the Bible. Therefore, that we start with it as a sure anchor and source of ideas which we can count on as being true.

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understood, then he uses language, history, and common sense to do so. After accurate communication has taken place, after both the author and the reader have used these tools to convey one specific meaning and to construe this meaning, respectively, the all important question is, Are the author's ideas true or false? The Bible is the only set of documents in which each idea that an author communicates is true.

In this paper, I may not always explicitly state when I am using language vs. history vs. common sense in my seeking to understand what God and Joel (along with the other biblical authors which we will need to examine) are saying, but I hope that it will nevertheless be clear when I am doing so. Indeed, the better way to refer to this process is that the reader is always using all three tools at the same time—his familiarity with the author's language, his familiarity with the author's personal history and historical context (that may extend for many years before him and many years after him), and his familiarity with how common sense, the rational and logical perception of things which is triggering ideas in his mind, works in engaging with and participating in reality around him, the reader, and which includes him.

## Explanation of Joel

### Joel 1:1

Joel begins his book,

**Joel 1:1** The message of Yahweh which came to Joel, the son of Pethuel,<sup>2</sup>

We learn here that God, i.e., the God of the Jews whose name is Yahweh, communicated to a man by the name of Joel, *Ya'El* in Hebrew, meaning Yahweh is God, ideas which he is going to pass on to somebody or a group of people. Joel does not explicitly state who is or who are the recipient(s) of these ideas and this message, but we will find out as we progress through his book. We also learn here that Joel's father is a man named Pethuel, *Pethu'El* in Hebrew, possibly meaning a Scrap of God—perhaps not a very flattering name for a human being, but better to be a scrap of God than not of God at all.

This is the whole of Joel's introduction to his book, which is unfortunate, because, of the twenty times the name Joel is mentioned in the Old Testament, this Joel, who is the son of Pethuel, appears only here in his own book. In other words, this is the only information we have about the prophet Joel in order to determine when and where he lived during the history of Old Testament Israel. As a result, we cannot conclude from this first verse when Joel lived in Israel (if this is where he lived) and the Ancient Near East (certainly he lived somewhere in the ANE). It is interesting to note that this short introduction in Joel, with no helpful chronological information, is in contrast to the book of Amos and his introduction –

**Amos 1:1** The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

As another example, the prophet Hosea writes in his introduction,

**Hosea 1:1** The message of Hosea which came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel,

Both Amos and Hosea provide enough information to date them and their writings easily, because they mention the kings of the southern Kingdom of Judah and the northern Kingdom of Israel who reigned during their speaking and writing what God wanted them to communicate to the Jews of their day. This time period can be found in the following chart which comprises the kings and prophets of Old Testament Israel from 1100 B.C. to 430 B.C. and shows that both Amos and Hosea lived during the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. An (I) after a prophet's name in the chart indicates that he was a prophet to the northern Kingdom of Israel, and a (J) after his name shows that he was a prophet to the southern Kingdom of Judah. I have located Joel in the chart near the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., because this is where some commentators place him. However, we will see that the dates for his life

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<sup>2</sup> All quotes from the Bible in this paper are my translations of the passages.

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are flexible. His name is also in *bold* letters, because his written document is part of the Old Testament, as are those of *Obadiah, Jonah, Amos*, et. al. If a prophet's name is *italicized*, he is mentioned in the OT (Old Testament) Passage in the far right column.

**United Kingdom**

<b><u>Date (B.C.)</u></b>	<b><u>Prophet</u></b>	<b><u>King</u></b>	<b><u>OT Passage<sup>3</sup></u></b>
1100			
	<i>Samuel, "man of God"</i>		I Samuel 1-24
1000	<i>Saul, "man of God"</i>	Saul (1025-1006)	I Samuel 9-31
	<i>Gad, Nathan, [Asaph – 1 Chron. 16:7; 2 Chron. 29:30]</i>	David (1006-968)	I Samuel 16-I Kings 2
	[ <i>Heman, Jeduthun – 2 Chron. 35:15</i> ]	Solomon (968-928)	II Samuel 12-I Kings 11

**Divided Kingdom**

		<b><u>Israel's King</u></b>	<b><u>Judah's King</u></b>	
	<i>Shemaiah "man of God" (I) "old prophet" (I) Ahijah (I)</i>	Jeroboam I (928-909) "son of Nebat"	Rehoboam (930-913) "son of Solomon"	I Kings 12-14
		Nadab (909-908)	Abijah (913-910)	I Kings 15:25-31; I Kings 15:1-8
900	<i>Jehu (I &amp; J) [Azariah (J) – 2 Chron. 15]</i>	Baasha (908-886)	Asa (910-869)	I Kings 15:32-16:7; I Kings 15:9-24
	[ <i>Hanani (J) – 2 Chron. 16]</i>	Elah (886-885)		I Kings 16:8-14
		Zimri (885)		I Kings 16:15-20
		Tibni (885-880)		I Kings 16:21-22
		Omri (885-874)	Jehoshaphat (869-848)	I Kings 16:23-28; I Kings 22:41-50
	<i>Elijah (I) (870-850) "a prophet" (I) "a man of God" (I) one of "the sons of the prophets" (I) Micaiah (I)</i>	Ahab (874-853)		I Kings 16:29-22:40
	<b>Obadiah (E) (853-841)</b>	Ahaziah (853-852)		I Kings 22:51-II Kings 1:18
	<i>Elisha (I) (850-800) "sons of the prophets" (I)</i>	Joram (852-841)	Jehoram (848-841)	II Kings 1:17-8:15; II Kings 8:16-24
	<b>Joel (I&amp;J)</b>	Jehu (841-814)	Ahaziah (841)	II Kings 9:30-10:36; II Kings 8:25-29, 9:29
			Athaliah (841-835)	II Kings 11
			Joash (835-796)	II Kings 12
800		Jehoahaz (814-798)		II Kings 13:1-9
	<b>Jonah (I) (793-760)</b>	Jehoash (798-782)	Amaziah (796-767)	II Kings 13:10-25; II Kings 14:1-22
	<b>Amos (I) (760-750)</b>	Jeroboam II (782-753) "son of Joash"	Azariah (792-740) (Uzziah)	II Kings 14:23-29; II Kings 15:1-7
	<b>Hosea (I) (753-715)</b>	Zechariah (753)		II Kings 15:8-12
		Shallum (752)		II Kings 15:13-15
		Menahem (752-742)	Jotham (740-735)	II Kings 15:16-22; II Kings 15:30-38
	<b>Micah (J) (742-687)</b>	Pekahiah (742-740)		II Kings 15:23-26
	<b>Isaiah (J) (740-700)</b>	Pekah (740-732)	Ahaz (735-715)	II Kings 15:27-31;

	[Oded (I) – 2 Chron. 28]			II Kings 16
		Hoshea (732-722)		II Kings 15:30 & 17
700			Hezekiah (715-697)	II Kings 18:1-20:21
	<b>Nahum</b> (J) (663-612) <i>"His servants the Prophets" (J)</i>		Manasseh (697-642)	II Kings 21:1-18
			Amon (642-640)	II Kings 21:19-26
	<b>Zephaniah</b> (J) (640-621) <b>Jeremiah</b> (J) (627-586) <b>Habakkuk</b> (J) (612-588) <i>Huldah</i> (J), [Neco – 2 Chron. 35]		Josiah (640-609)	II Kings 22:1-23:30
			Jehoahaz (609)	II Kings 23:31-33
600	<b>Daniel</b> (J) (605-535)		Jehoiakim (609-598)	II Kings 23:34-24:7
			Jehoiachin (598-597)	II Kings 24:8-17
	<b>Ezekiel</b> (J) (593-571) <b>Lamentations</b> (585)		Zedekiah (597-586)	II Kings 24:18-25:26
	<b>Haggai</b> (520)			Ezra 5:1; 6:14
500	<b>Zechariah</b> (520-480)			Ezra 5:1; 6:14
	<b>Malachi</b> (430)			

Because we cannot determine from the introductory first verse of the book of Joel the dates of this prophet, his speaking, and his writing, we will have to look for clues regarding these dates in the rest of the document. For example, does he mention events which can be found in other books of the Old Testament or other historical documents and books, so that his existence can be dated? We will see.

### **Joel 1:2**

Moving on, the second verse of Joel 1 reads,

**Joel 1:2** Hear this, old men, and listen, all those who are dwellers of the land. Has this occurred in your days or in the days of your fathers?

God through Joel is addressing two groups of people. The first are “old men.” The second are “all those who are dwellers of the land.” These two references together sound like the Jews. The concept of “old men” or “elders” was a common one in the Ancient Near East. For example, Joseph had “old men” or “elders” in his household, and the nation of Egypt did likewise at the same time, according to Genesis 50:7,

**Genesis 50:7** And Joseph went up in order to bury his father, and all the servants of Pharaoh, the old men of his house, and the old men of Egypt.

In addition, the nation of Israel, at an early stage of their existence around 1500 B.C., had “old men” or “elders” as part of their social structure, as seen in Exodus 3:16, which is in the midst of Moses’ encounter with God who has appeared in a burning bush. God commands Moses,

**Exodus 3:16** Go and gather the old men of Israel, and you shall say to them, Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has appeared to me. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac,



and Jacob. He has said, I have surely visited you and what has been done to you in Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, on the basis of the word for “old men,” it is very likely that Joel is addressing Jews, or at least people who live near the land of Israel in the Ancient Near East. The second group to whom God addresses Himself are “dwellers of the land.” What land? Is this the land of Israel where the Jews are living? In other words, is this the land that God promised in Genesis 12:1-3 to Abraham and to his descendants, whom the rest of Genesis demonstrates as those people whose ancestry can be traced to Abraham through his son Isaac (not Ishmael), and through his son Jacob (not Esau), and through his twelve sons Reuben, Simeon, et al.? The promise of Genesis 12:1-3 reads,

- Genesis 12:1** And Yahweh said to *Avram*, Go from your land, from your native land, and from the house of your father to the land which I will cause you to see.  
**12:2** And I will make you a great nation (*goy gadol*, גֹּיִם גְּדוֹלִים), and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.  
**12:3** And I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you, and in you all the families of the ground will be blessed.

These first three verses of Genesis 12 are the basis for understanding all the history of the Jewish people, because God, around 2000 B.C., makes these specific promises to *Avram*, i.e., Abraham (God changes his name in Genesis 17), and to his descendants with the intention to fulfill them at a later date –

1. The promise of the land of Israel
2. The promise of descendants
3. The promise of Abraham’s descendants becoming the greatest nation on earth
4. The promise of eternal life to Abraham
5. The promise of eternal life to those who properly acknowledge Abraham’s greatness
6. The promise of using Abraham as the means to provide eternal life to other ethnic people besides the Jews

I say that God intends to fulfill these promises in their entirety to the Jews, because it does not make sense to think otherwise on the basis of God’s character. He is completely good, moral, and right. This being the case, does it make sense that He would declare something to be true when it is also false? No. Would God say that He is going to provide Abraham and his descendants with the land of Israel and then refuse to give it to them? No. Would God say that He is going to transform the Jews eventually into the most important, powerful, and moral nation in human history and then refuse to follow through on this promise? No.<sup>4</sup> As a result, these six promises become the foundation of God’s relationship

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<sup>3</sup> In the biblical quotes, I will not include quotation marks to indicate the speaking of a speaker, because, especially in the books of the prophets, it is difficult to know when God is speaking vs. the prophet who is speaking vs. God’s or the prophet’s message simply being presented. Therefore, I will leave it up to the reader as part of the exercise of thinking through the meaning of all these passages to discern the identity and words of a speaker.

<sup>4</sup> There is the incident in Exodus 32 when the Israelites make a golden calf in disobedience of God and He declares that He will destroy them all and start over with Moses. In this way, God is saying that He will abandon the twelve tribes of Israel, whom He has promised that all of them figure into the Jews’ history, especially the tribe of Judah (cf. Genesis

with the Jews and the first principles for understanding their history. Whatever the Jews do and whatever happens to them until the end of the present realm have their basis in these promises which God makes through Abraham.

The rest of Genesis explains how Abraham acquires a son, Isaac, and through him, other descendants, who constitute the Jews. However, they never become “a great nation” in Genesis. In fact, the book ends with their being in Egypt because of needing to obtain food during a famine in the land of Canaan, where Abraham had immigrated from southern Iraq, the land of the Chaldees. But the Hebrew phrase *goy gadol* (“great nation”) becomes one of the most important in the whole Bible as it relates to this promise by God. He is stating that, eventually, He will transform the Jews into the most important and most powerful people of the whole world. We will keep this in mind as we study the rest of Joel. Neither, in Genesis, do the Jews actually acquire the land of Canaan that God is giving to them. Abraham travels from Ur to this land, but neither he, Isaac, nor Jacob and his twelve sons possess it completely. Then, Jacob and his sons leave the land of Canaan and migrate to Egypt, where they remain for four hundred years.

The New Testament book of Hebrews reveals that Abraham looked forward to the blessing which God is promising him in Genesis 12:1-3 (cf. Hebrews 11:8ff.), and Galatians (along with the rest of the New Testament) reveals that “families” bless Abraham and find God’s blessing by virtue of having the same kind of belief in God as Abraham. Again, this blessing ultimately is eternal mercy and life for both Abraham’s physical descendants, the Jews, and those who cannot trace their ancestry to Abraham through Jacob and Isaac, i.e., Gentiles. However, we will see that an earthly blessing involving the land of Israel and living safely and prosperously on it is a unique and important factor of God’s choosing the Jews as Abraham’s physical descendants to be His people.

Because the most important “dwellers of the land” in the Old Testament are the Jews to whom God has promised the land of Canaan, which is eventually renamed the land of Israel, it seems a strong possibility that, in the book of Joel, God is addressing Jews. So, for the time being, we will run with this option, until we encounter a statement in Joel, if there is one, which contradicts it. Thus, the “old men” are the men who have lived the longest among the Jews, and “all the dwellers of the land” are the Jews who are living on the land of Israel, which God has promised them. However, there is still another important question to answer, When are these Jews living on the land? Is Joel addressing his contemporaries, who must have lived some time before the appearance of Jesus the Messiah? Otherwise, Joel would be a New Testament book. Or is he addressing Jews who will live in his future, either in the near future or in the distant future? We will see that the clues in the rest of the book will allow us to answer this question.

In the second part of verse 2, God asks the Jews if “this” has ever happened before. The question specifically is, Has “this” occurred in your days? And it also is, Has “this” occurred in the days of your fathers? In other words, has the event to which God is referring, which is most likely contemporaneous with the Jews whom God is addressing, ever occurred during their own lifetimes or those of their ancestors, going back as far as Abraham (I would assume,

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49). Therefore, it certainly appears as though God is perfectly willing to dismiss His promises. However, it becomes clear from the story in Exodus 32 that God was basically testing Moses to find out if he would remind Him of His promises, so that at no time was God actually intending to break them.

because he was the first Jew and the first “father” of the Jews, followed by the Jewish “fathers” Isaac, Jacob, et al.).

What we have here is the first helpful clue as to the “timing” in the book of Joel. Even if the event to which God is referring happens after Joel’s own life, its seriousness, gravity, effects, etc. can be measured with those of other events in Israel’s history, so that the previous events were not as serious and grave (if Joel is talking about God’s judgment of the Jews), or as wonderful and enjoyable (if Joel is talking about God’s blessing the Jews), or both. In other words, if “this” event is something that the Jews would like to avoid because of the suffering which it has caused them, then no event in their contemporary lives or before was as serious and grave and caused so much suffering. Or, if the event is something that the Jews would embrace with enthusiasm because it just plain felt great, then no event in their contemporary lives or before was as wonderful and enjoyable.

At this point, we should bring in passages from the book of Deuteronomy with its description of the Mosaic Covenant and its connection to God’s promises in Genesis 12. These passages reveal how this covenant contributes to the basis for understanding the Jews’ history and adds to the guiding principles for making sense of what they do and what God does to them. We begin with Deuteronomy 4:1,2, which reads,

- Deuteronomy 4:1** And now, Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to do, in order that you may live and enter and inherit the land which Yahweh the God of your fathers is giving to you.
- 4:2** You shall not add to the message which I am commanding you, and you shall not take from it, in order to guard the commandment of Yahweh your God which I am commanding you.

We notice that Moses, who is making this speech to the Israelites as they are poised on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, ready to cross into the land of Canaan after their 40 year journey through the Sinai Desert around 1500 B.C., reveals that their possessing the land of Canaan so that it becomes their land, the land of Israel, has a condition. This condition is that they obey the Mosaic Covenant. In this way, God through Moses is revealing the inextricable and necessary connection between His promises to Abraham five hundred years earlier and their obeying the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant. The obvious implication is that obeying the covenant will result in their acquiring and living well on the land, while disobeying the covenant will result in their failing to gain possession of life on the land.

Another few verses near the end of Deuteronomy 4 make this last point clear,

- Deuteronomy 4:25** When you give birth to sons and sons of sons, and you become old in the land, destroy yourselves, make an idol, the image of anything, and you do evil in the eyes of Yahweh your God so as to cause Him to be angry,
- 4:26** I call heaven and earth to witness against you on that day that surely you will perish quickly from the land where you are crossing the Jordan to inherit. You will not live long on it, because you will surely be destroyed.
- 4:27** And Yahweh will cause you to scatter among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the Gentiles where Yahweh will drive you.

- 4:28 There you will serve gods made with human hands, gods of wood and stone who do not see, do not hear, do not eat, and do not smell.
- 4:29 From there you will seek Yahweh your God, and you will find Him, because you will seek Him with all your heart and all your soul [*nephesh*].
- 4:30 When you are in distress, and all these words find you in the last of the days, then you will return to Yahweh your God and obey His voice,
- 4:31 because Yahweh your God is a compassionate God. He will not leave you, He will not destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant of your fathers, which He swore to them.

We see that God through Moses is threatening the Jews with His wrath and destruction if they disobey the covenant. He will cause them to lose the land and lose their lives. Nevertheless, we also see that God offers them words of hope. In spite of their disobedience and expulsion from the land which they initially acquired, they will seek God “in the last of the days” and return to obeying Him properly. And this will all happen because God will not forget His promises to Abraham. The implication is that He will actually cause them to seek Him and obey Him properly. We will come back to this point later in our discussion of Joel.

These verses in chapter 4 of Deuteronomy are a good lead up to the best place in this book, chapter 28, to learn about the strong and unbreakable connection between the Mosaic Covenant and the promises which God made to Abraham. The first fourteen verses of Deuteronomy 28 read,

- Deuteronomy 28:1** And it will happen, if you diligently listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep watch to perform all His commandments, which I am commanding you today, then Yahweh your God will set you high above all the Gentiles of the earth (עַל כָּל-גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ).
- 28:2 And all these blessings will come upon you, and they will overtake you, because you listened to the voice of Yahweh your God.
- 28:3 You will be blessed in the city, and you will be blessed in the field.
- 28:4 The fruit of your belly will be blessed, the fruit of your ground, the fruit of your animals, the offspring of your cattle, and the young of your flocks.
- 28:5 Your basket will be blessed, and your kneading bowls.
- 28:6 You will be blessed when you enter, and you will be blessed when you leave.
- 28:7 Yahweh will set your enemies, who rise up against you, to be struck in front of you. They will go out to you in one way, and they will flee before you seven ways.
- 28:8 Yahweh will command the blessing to be with you in your storehouses, and with respect to all the endeavors of your hand. And He will bless you in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.
- 28:9 Yahweh will cause you to rise up as the set apart people, just as He swore to you, because you will guard the commandment of Yahweh, and you will walk in His ways.
- 28:10 And all the peoples of the earth (כָּל-עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ) will see that the name of Yahweh is called in reference to you, and they will be afraid because of you.
- 28:11 And Yahweh will cause you to be the first in goodness in the fruit of your belly, in the fruit of your animals, and in the fruit of your ground, according to the ground that Yahweh swore to your fathers to give to you.
- 28:12 Yahweh will open for you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its time, in order to bless all the works of your hand. And you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow.

**28:13** Yahweh will give you as the head and not the tail. And you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, because you will listen to the commandment of Yahweh your God, which I am commanding you today to guard and to perform,  
**28:14** and you will not turn aside from all the words which I am commanding you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

The first verse states clearly that the Jews' obedience to the Mosaic Covenant will result in their "being set high above all the Gentiles of the earth." This is a reference to God's promise to Abraham that He will develop the Jews into a "great nation" (*goy gadol*). We also notice that, in v. 9, Moses says specifically that God will cause them to become great, because they will keep the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant. However, as we will learn from Deuteronomy 30 later in this paper, Moses also means that God will cause them to obey Him properly, which makes sense in the light of the fact that he mentions that God swore to transform them into a great nation. When, in Genesis 12 God promises Abraham and his descendants that they would become the greatest nation on earth, and then in Genesis 22 He swears that He will uphold this promise, God is in effect committing Himself to causing the Jews to obey Him properly in order to satisfy the necessary condition for His following through on His promise.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, here in Deuteronomy 28, Moses is saying that the Jews "will guard the commandment of Yahweh" because He both promised and "swore" that He would make them great.

The rest of Deuteronomy 28:1-14 describes the Jews' greatness in terms of God's providing them with abundant food and offspring, while also making them an object of fear to the Gentiles. Following this description, verses 15-68 of Deuteronomy 28 explain God's reaction to their disobedience,

**Deuteronomy 28:15** And it will happen, if you do not listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep watch to perform all His commandments and statutes, which I am commanding you today, all these curses will come upon you, and they will overtake you.  
**28:16** You will be cursed in the city, and you will be cursed in the field.  
**28:17** Your basket will be cursed, and your kneading bowls.  
**28:18** The fruit of your belly will be cursed, the fruit of your ground, the offspring your cattle, and the young of your flock.  
**28:19** You will be cursed when you enter, and you will be cursed when you leave.  
**28:20** Yahweh will send on you the curse, the confusion, and the rebuke within every endeavor of your hand which you perform, until you are destroyed, and until you perish quickly, because of the evil of your actions, where you have abandoned Me.  
**28:21** Yahweh will cause the plague to cling to you until it has finished you off from the land where you are entering to possess.  
**28:22** Yahweh will smite you with pulmonary tuberculosis, with a fever, with inflammation, with fiery heat, with the sword, with fungus, and they will pursue you until you perish.

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 22 contains the story of God's testing Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac. And, when Abraham demonstrates his unwavering belief in God by being willing to obey His command, God explicitly states that He swears an oath to fulfill His promises to him. It must be to this oath which God swears that Moses refers when he says in Deuteronomy 28:9, "...just as He swore to you..."

- 28:23 And the heavens above your head will be bronze, and the earth under you will be iron.
- 28:24 Yahweh will set the rain of your land to be dirt, and dust will go down on you from the heavens until you are destroyed.
- 28:25 Yahweh will give you to be struck before your enemies. You will go out one way towards them, and you will flee before them in seven ways. And you will be for terror to all the kingdoms of the earth (לְכָל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ).
- 28:26 And your carcasses will be for food to all the birds of the heavens and to the beasts of the earth. And there will be nothing to cause them to be afraid.
- 28:27 Yahweh will smite you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with scabs, and with itching, from which you will not be able to be healed.
- 28:28 Yahweh will smite you with madness, with blindness, and with confusion of heart.
- 28:29 And you will be those who feel at noon, just as the blind man feels in the darkness. And you will not prosper in your ways, but you will be only oppressed and robbed all the days. And there will be no savior.
- 28:30 You will be engaged to a woman, but another man will violate her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not enjoy its fruit.
- 28:31 Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat it. Your donkey will be robbed from you, but it will not return to you. Your flock will be given to your enemies, but there will be no savior for you.
- 28:32 Your sons and your daughters will be given to another people, and your eyes will see and fail towards them all the day. And there will be nothing for the power of your hand.
- 28:33 A people whom you do not know will eat the fruit of your ground and all your labor, and you will be only oppressed and crushed all the days.
- 28:34 And you will be driven mad by the appearance of your eyes which you see.
- 28:35 Yahweh will smite you with horrible boils on your knees and your thighs, from which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.
- 28:36 Yahweh will cause you and your king, whom you cause to arise over you, to go to a nation whom neither you nor your fathers know. And there you will serve other gods, wood and stone.
- 28:37 And you will become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the peoples where Yahweh has driven you.
- 28:38 You will cause to go out a great many seeds of the field, but you will gather little, because the locust will consume it.
- 28:39 You will plant and cultivate vineyards, but you will not drink the wine. And you will not gather, because the worm will eat them.
- 28:40 Olives will be yours within all your borders, but you will not anoint with oil, because your olives will drop.
- 28:41 You will bear sons and daughters, but they will not be yours, because they will go into captivity.
- 28:42 The cricket will possess all your trees and the fruit of your ground.
- 28:43 The stranger who is among you will rise up above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower.
- 28:44 He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, and you will be the tail.

- 28:45 All these curse will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not listen to the voice of Yahweh your God to guard His commandments and statutes which He commanded you.
- 28:46 And they will be among you as a sign and an indication, and among your descendants into perpetuity,
- 28:47 because you did not serve Yahweh your God with joy and goodness of heart from the abundance of all.
- 28:48 And you will serve your enemies, whom Yahweh will send against you, with hunger, thirst, nakedness, and lack of all things. And He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.
- 28:49 Yahweh will carry against you a nation from afar, from the end of the earth, just as an eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you do not understand,
- 28:50 a nation of strong faces who does not carry faces to the elderly, and they will show no grace to the youth.
- 28:51 And they will eat the fruit of your beasts and the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed, who causes to remain for you no grain, no new wine, no oil, no offspring of your cattle, and no young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish.
- 28:52 And they will cause you to be restricted within all your gates, until your high and unassailable walls, in which you trusted, come down in all your land. And they will cause you to be restricted within all your gates in all your land, which Yahweh your God has given you.
- 28:53 And you will eat the fruit of your belly, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom Yahweh your God has given to you, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you.
- 28:54 The man who is tender and very gentle among you, his eye will do evil toward his brother, the wife of his bosom, and the rest of his sons who remain,
- 28:55 from giving to one of them from the flesh of his sons whom he eats, because he has caused all to remain for himself, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy is oppressing you within all your gates.
- 28:56 The woman who is tender and gentle among you, whose sole of her foot has not been tested to cause to set it on from her being gentle and tender, her eye will do evil toward the husband of her bosom, her sons, her daughters,
- 28:57 her afterbirth, which issues from between her feet, and her sons whom she bears, because she will eat them by hiding them in her lacking all, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy is oppressing you within your gates.
- 28:58 If you do not keep watch to perform all the words of this Torah, which are written in this book, to fear this honored and to be feared name, Yahweh your God,
- 28:59 then Yahweh will cause to be awesome your wounds, the wounds of your descendants, great wounds and to be trusted, horrible and to be trusted sicknesses.
- 28:60 And He will cause to return on you all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they will cling to you.
- 28:61 Also every sickness and every wound, which is not written in the book of this Torah, Yahweh will cause to go up on you, until you are destroyed.
- 28:62 And you will be left few of men, whereas you were as numerous as the stars of the heavens, because you did not listen to the voice of Yahweh your God.

- 28:63** It will happen that, just as Yahweh rejoiced over you to cause you to be good and to be many, thus Yahweh will rejoice over you to make you die and to destroy you. And you will be torn away from the ground where you are entering to possess it.
- 28:64** And Yahweh will cause you to scatter among all the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth. And there you will serve other gods whom you and your fathers do not know, wood and stone.
- 28:65** Among those Gentiles you will find no rest, and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot. And Yahweh will give you there a trembling heart, failing eyes, and despair of soul.
- 28:66** And your lives will be hanged in front of you, and you will be in dread night and day. And you will not trust in your life.
- 28:67** In the morning you will say, "Who will give me evening?" And in the evening you will say, "Who will give me morning?" because of the dread of your heart, which you dread, and from the appearance of your eyes, which you will see.
- 28:68** Yahweh will cause you to return to Egypt in ships, by the way about which I spoke to you, "You will not cause again to see it." And there you will sell yourselves to your enemy as slaves and maidservants, and there will be no buyers.

This is a very long way of Moses' saying that the Jews will suffer greatly if they are not appropriately obedient to God and the Mosaic Covenant. They will lack food. They will encounter horrible diseases. Their relationships with one another, right within their families, will deteriorate to the point that fathers and mothers hide food from their children, and the food which they are eating is their own children. And God will expel them from the land that He has given them and scatter them among the Gentiles. Indeed, all their suffering will drive them mad and into a level of despair and anxiety which is indescribable.

We should note also that these many items of God's response to the Jews' disobedience may not all take place at the same time. Certainly, they could. But nothing in the text requires that we interpret Moses as saying that all these elements of God's response will happen only once in history and will happen all together. Therefore, we should leave open the possibility, especially now that we are 3,500 years down the road from when Moses first spelled these out and we can examine all the history of the Jews which has transpired, that he is mixing together items which occur at different moments of history.

The Mosaic Covenant, therefore, with passages such as Deuteronomy 28, along with the Abrahamic promises of Genesis 12:1-3, becomes the basis for God's relationship with the Jews throughout all human history in the present realm. If the Jews obey the covenant, they receive the promises. If they disobey the covenant, they lose the promises—at least for a while, because this only makes sense if God remains absolutely committed to fulfilling His promises to them as an entire nation at some time in history. In other words, if God was inerrant in what He meant when He made the promises to Abraham, then God will eventually transform the Jews into the greatest nation on earth. Specifically, then, Deuteronomy 28 is the basis for God's response to the Jews who live on the land of Israel, whether the response is positive or negative.

Thus, there are three possibilities for the *kind* of event about which Joel is writing in verse 2 of chapter 1 –



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1. It is God's judgment on Israel with painful effects of suffering.
2. It is God's mercy and blessing on Israel with effects which make them feel good and fully satisfied in their lives.
3. It is both #1 and #2, a combination of God's judgment and mercy/blessing on Israel.

We will keep looking for clues in the book of Joel as to which option above is correct.

### **Joel 1:3**

Moving along, in the third verse of chapter 1, God through Joel tells the old men and Jews living on the land of Israel,

**Joel 1:3** To your sons relate it (f.), and your sons to their sons, and their sons to the next generation.

God wants these Jews to talk to their children about something, and He wants their children to continue the process—to at least the third generation. I say “at least,” because there is no reference to anyone in the future beyond the third generation. However, assuming that it is always important to God that the Jews (and Gentiles, for that matter) continue conveying to all other human beings what He is about, it makes sense that, here in Joel 1:3, God intends for the Jews never to stop passing on the information contained in the word “it.” Thus, His mention of sons, sons’ sons, and the next generation is a way of saying, “As long as there are Jews who have breath, you all keep talking about it.”

And this is the question, What is the “it,” especially when God has been using the masculine demonstrative pronoun “this” (*zoth*, זה) up until now, and the word “it” (*ha*, ה) is feminine? Even the word “days” in the previous verse is masculine. So “it” cannot be referring directly to “days.” Or can it? In other words, the switch from a masculine reference to a feminine reference may be simply a matter of style, specifically poetical style on God's/Joel's part. In the original Hebrew, the first chapter of Joel's book reads like a funeral dirge, and the feminine pronoun *ha*, as the suffix of the preposition *'alay*, meaning “concerning/about,” contributes to the solemnity of God's communiqué better than the masculine *k*. Thus, it makes sense that “it” is the same as “this,” i.e., the event about which God is speaking. And what is this event? We will find out as we go on, starting with the next verse.

### **Joel 1:4**

Verse 4 of chapter 1 reads,

**Joel 1:4** The leftovers of the locusts (#1), the locusts (#2) have eaten, and the leftovers of the locusts (#2), the locusts (#3) have eaten, and the leftovers of the locusts (#3), the caterpillars have eaten.

The first thing to notice in this verse is that there are four different Hebrew words for locusts. And I think that the fourth actually means caterpillar, which is a locust in its pre-cocoon stage. Other translations use adjectives such as gnawing, swarming, etc. to distinguish between these “different” locusts, but all locusts gnaw, swarm, creep, and strip. Therefore, other translations are using these adjectives simply to point out that there are four different words in Hebrew for locusts. And, it makes sense that this is the point—that God is describing a devastating and catastrophic *agricultural* destruction of and on the land of Israel. Imagine an entire society’s food supply all of a sudden disappearing with no expectation of it reappearing anytime soon. What would this do to the society? It would produce mass chaos and suffering, both physically and emotionally.

It is very likely that locust attacks in the Ancient Near East were so prevalent and potentially harmful to societies that even the Jews adopted four different words to name the locusts. It was not just that locusts were a problem in the Ancient Near East, but that locusts, locusts, locusts, and locusts/caterpillars were a problem in that region of the world. Therefore, the Jews created at least four words to refer to locusts, and God is emphasizing that this particular agricultural ruin will be absolutely catastrophic. Nothing like it will have occurred in these Jews’ lifetime or in the lifetimes of previous Jews living on the land of Israel.

The second thing to notice is that we have a solid clue as to when the Jews are living to whom God is speaking through Joel, especially if we can find evidence in the Old Testament or other historical books about such a dreadful locust attack on the land of Israel. For example, there is the eighth plague in Exodus 10 around 1500 B.C. before God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. However, that was in Egypt, not in the land of Canaan/Israel. So Joel cannot be speaking of that locust attack. Even Psalm 78:46 and Psalm 105:34 are speaking of the Egyptian plague as can be seen by considering the context of these verses,

**Psalm 78:43** When He [God] set in Egypt His signs, and His signs in the field of Zoan,  
**78:44** and He turned their rivers to blood, they could not drink from their streams.  
**78:45** And He sent among them a swarm of flies, and they ate them, and frogs, and they destroyed them.  
**78:46** And He also gave to the caterpillar their crops, and their labor to the locust.

**Psalm 105:23** And Israel came to Egypt, and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.  
**105:24** And He caused His people to be very fruitful, and He caused them to be stronger than their enemies...  
**105:26** He sent Moses, His servant, Aaron, whom He had chosen...  
**105:29** He turned their waters into blood, and He caused their fish to die...  
**105:34** He spoke and locusts and locusts came, and there was no numbering them.

Later, in the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., God through the prophet Amos in chapter 4, verse 9 mentions the same kind of destruction by locusts in the land of Israel –

**Amos 4:9** I struck you with mildew and mildew. Your many gardens, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees the locust (*gazam*, גַּזָּם) ate. And you did not return to Me, declares Yahweh.

In this last verse, the NAS95 translates the Hebrew *gazam* (גַּזָּם) with “caterpillar,” and it is the same word that it translates “gnawing locust” in Joel 1:4, while I have translated it “locust (#1)” in Joel 1:4. Is Amos speaking of the same locust attack as mentioned by Joel? Perhaps, if it can be established that Joel is most likely referring to events in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., when Amos lived, spoke, and wrote. But can this be established, and does this make the most sense of Joel? We will see.

Another interesting reference to locusts in Amos is in 7:1-3,

**Amos 7:1** Thus Adonai Yahweh caused me to see, and, behold, He was planning a locust-swarm at the beginning of the sprouting of the spring crop. And, behold, the spring crop was after the mowing of the king.

**7:2** And it happened that when it finished eating the vegetation of the land, I said, Adonai, Yahweh, please forgive! Who of Jacob will stand, because he is small?

**7:3** Yahweh relented concerning this. It shall not be, said Yahweh.

This locust attack in verse 1 in Amos 7 is actually a *fifth* Hebrew word for locust, *gobay* (גֹּבַי), in addition to the four words found in Joel 1:4. Were locusts a problem in ancient Israel and the Middle East? It would certainly seem so. However, it makes sense to interpret the locust attack of Amos 7:1-3 as something which never occurred. God permitted Amos to *foresee in a vision* the devastation that it would cause, if it were to happen. But, when Amos appealed to God for mercy on behalf of the Jews, God changed His mind and decided not to send the locusts. Therefore, obviously Joel is not talking about this attack, and we cannot, on the basis of it, date Joel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

Thus, there is the possibility that God is talking about the same locust attack of Amos 4:9. But, if He is not, then there is still the possibility that the attack in Joel took place sometime between Amos’ locust attack in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the appearance of Jesus as the Messiah, because Joel’s attack is worse than that mentioned in Amos 4:9, which had to occur before it. As we continue, we will look for more clues to see if we can pin down with greater accuracy the date of Joel’s locust attack and agricultural destruction of the land of Israel. We also need to remember that, whenever it occurs, nothing like it has happened before the time of the Jews to whom God is speaking in Joel and who are living in Israel (cf. Joel 1:2).

### **Joel 1:5-7**

Moving on, verses 5-7 of Joel 1 read,

**Joel 1:5** Wake up, drunkards, and weep. Wail, all you drinkers of wine, on account of the sweet wine that was cut off from your mouths,

**1:6** because a nation (*goy*, גּוֹי) has gone up on My land, mighty and innumerable. Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness.

**1:7** It has set My vine for destruction and My fig tree for splintering. It has stripped them bare and thrown them out. They caused the branches to become white.

The Jews, “all those dwelling on the land” (Joel 1:2), have disobeyed God by using the wine with which He has provided them to get drunk consistently. However, now there is no wine. Again, an agricultural catastrophe has destroyed the supply of grapes and wine. And God is calling on the Jews to grieve this loss, and even more appropriately, to grieve their immorality of drunkenness.

We were probably expecting God to reference the locusts again as the cause of the disappearance of the grapes and wine, but, instead, God says in v. 6 that the cause is “a nation” (*goy*, גוֹי) which “has gone up on My land.” This sounds like a human army, not a swarm of locusts, who have invaded the land of Israel. Indeed, it is a powerful army comprised of a vast number of soldiers. The power of this army to destroy what it attacks is likened to a lion and a lioness, which, with their teeth, chew to bits any flesh that they decide to eat. Thus, this army’s capability to destroy its enemies is not a pretty picture. Imagine a lion taking meat into its mouth, mashing it into small pieces, and swallowing it. This is what this “army” has done in the land of Israel which it has invaded.

And what has it chewed to bits? Certainly, the vineyards of the Jews, because they have no more wine with which to get drunk. Therefore, this army has caused tremendous agricultural devastation. But, also, this army has chewed up God’s “vine” and His “fig tree.” Indeed, the army has stripped these “plants” bare, so that all that is visible is the white of their “branches.” However, are God’s “vine” and “fig tree” literally plants? Perhaps, if He is choosing to call these plants His plants. But it also makes sense that God is referring to the Jewish people. It is they whom the army has destroyed and mashed to pieces with their “weapons,” in addition to the planted food of the people of Israel. And, again, according to Joel 1:2, nothing like this has happened during the lifetime of the Jews who are still alive or during the previous history of all those Jews who have lived on the land of Israel.

An important question is, Who or what is this powerful “army?” Is it the locusts of v. 3? Have they destroyed not only the crops of Israel, but also the people of Israel? Perhaps, if the people’s getting chewed to bits is their starving to death because of the lack of food. Or is this army made up of human beings, who, with powerful weapons or simply their vast numbers, wreak havoc on the Jews’ crops and on the persons of the Jews themselves. Or is this army both actual locusts plus human beings? Thus we have three options for what verses 4-7 mean –

1. The locusts of verse 4 are actually locusts, which are being spoken of metaphorically as the “nation” of verses 5-7, which has invaded God’s land, so that there has been only one attack of insects on the land of Israel and on the Jews.
2. The “nation” of verses 5-7 are actually human beings, which are being spoken of metaphorically in v. 4 as locusts, so that there has been only one attack of human beings on the land of Israel and on the Jews.
3. The locusts of verse 4 are actually locusts, and the “nation” of verses 5-7 are actually human beings, so that there have been two attacks, most likely contemporaneous with one another, on the land of Israel and on the the Jews, who are living on the land.

As before with figuring out who is the audience of Joel, we will need more information to determine which option above is correct, but we will always want to keep in mind that nothing like this has ever occurred to the Jews who are living or who have lived on the land of Israel (cf. Joel 1:2). We can also now conclude, at least for the time being, that this event to which God is referring is a very negative one and not a positive one. It causes massive devastation of the land of Israel and incomparable suffering to the people of Israel living on the land. This is God's judgment on the Jews, not a blessing, and this is painful and not enjoyable.

Before we move on to gather more clues from the rest of the book of Joel, it would be helpful to list and keep in mind the insect attacks on and the human invasions of the land of Israel over the course of history, so as to compare them with the language which Joel is using to describe these two kinds of destructive forces here and throughout the rest of his book.

### *Insect Attacks on the Land of Israel*

It is difficult to come up with a comprehensive list of locust attacks on the land of Israel, but these creatures, which are a kind of grasshopper, migrate annually north from eastern Sudan, through Egypt, and east into Saudi Arabia, sometimes appearing in Israel. Therefore, the list would probably have to include every year for thousands of years. Indeed, the most recent major locust attack in the Middle East was in 2013 when 30 million locusts devoured crops in Egypt and threatened Israel's agricultural industry. The question for us is, when is the attack mentioned in Joel, and is Joel talking about actual insects or human beings who are as thick on the land as locusts can be?

### *Human Invasions of the Land of Israel*

- 722 B.C. – The Assyrians descend from the north out of northern Iraq, destroy the northern Kingdom of Israel, and exile its inhabitants throughout the entire Assyrian Empire, which, at the time, comprised a large portion of the Ancient Near East. Over the years, these Jews continue spreading and eventually become the Ashkenazi of eastern Europe and the Sephardic of western Europe, i.e., mostly Spain.
- 605-586 B.C. – The Babylonians descend from the north out of central Iraq, destroy the southern Kingdom of Judah, and exile its inhabitants to mostly the city of Babylon on the Euphrates River. Jerusalem and the temple which Solomon built are both destroyed.
- 539 B.C. – Persia (modern day Iran) conquers Babylon but does not have to invade the land of Israel. In fact, Cyrus (559-530 B.C.), king of Persia, permits the Jews to return from exile to Israel, but many Jews remain in Babylon. Darius, ruling

- from 521-486 B.C., permits the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, which is completed in 516 B.C.
- 333 B.C. – Alexander the Great and his army from Greece defeat the Persians at the Battle of Issus in south/central Turkey and begin establishing sovereignty over the latter's empire, including the land of Israel.
- 330 B.C. approximately – Alexander the Great and his army invade and establish sovereignty over the land of Israel. Very little destruction occurs compared to the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions.
- 323 B.C.-61 B.C. – Invasions by both the Seleucids from the north and the Ptolemies from the south for control of the land of Israel. The Seleucids are the successor rulers over Syria after Alexander the Great's death in 323 B.C. The Ptolemies are the successor rulers over Egypt.
- 61 B.C. – The Roman general Pompey sacks Jerusalem, and the land of Israel comes under the control of the Roman Empire.
- A.D. 70 – The Roman general Titus under Emperor Vespasian destroys Jerusalem and Herod's temple, thus squelching the Jewish rebellion which had been brewing from before the time of Jesus 40 years earlier. Under siege, the Jews resort to cannibalism in Jerusalem (according to the Jewish historian Josephus).
- 132-135 – Emperor Hadrian summons his best general Sextus Severus from Britain and battle-hardened troops from Germany to suppress the Bar Kokhba revolt with the intent to deal with the Jews once and for all, making sure that they can never again cause problems for the Roman Empire. As many as 580,000 Jews are killed, with 50 fortified towns and 985 villages being razed, and the remaining Jews are either sold into slavery or expelled from the land of Israel. The Jewish religious center shifts to Babylon where Jews, who are descended from the Babylonian exiles, have continued to live. The Babylonian Talmud (meaning "what has been learned," i.e., from the Old Testament) comes into existence through their efforts.
- 313-630 – Christian rulers of the Roman Empire, such as Constantine, build churches and monasteries on the land of Israel, so that the rights of the very few Jews in the land after the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt are heavily restricted.
- 614 – The Sassanids (Persians) invade the land and restore Jewish rights.
- 629 – The Byzantine (Roman) army recaptures Jerusalem and expels all the Jews from it.
- 632-661 – The four successors to Mohammed with their Muslim armies conquer the land of Israel along with Egypt, Syria, Persia, and Armenia. The Muslims occupy Israel until 1917 when the Ottoman Empire comes to an end during World War I.
- 1071 – The Seljuk Turks from central Asia, converting to Islam as they migrate west, conquer Jerusalem. They later form the Muslim Ottoman Empire with its capital at Constantinople, renaming it Istanbul.
- 1099-1291 – Christian crusaders from Europe unsuccessfully attempt to expel completely the Muslims from the land of Israel.
- 1291 – The Muslim Mamluks of Egypt defeat the Crusaders and take control of the land of Israel. In order to prevent any further crusades from being successful, the

- Mamluks destroy ports and roadways, so that cities and towns decline, and Jerusalem is mostly abandoned.
- 1517 – The Ottoman Turks defeat the Egyptian Mamluks and gain control of the land of Israel. There are only about 1,000 Jewish families on the land of Israel in 1517, so that the population is mostly Muslim Arabs with some Christian Arabs.
- late 1800's – Large scale immigration of Jews into the land of Israel during the rise of the Zionist movement which begins in Yugoslavia.
- 1916 – Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France during World War 1 to control jointly the land of Israel after the war.
- December, 1917 – British forces enter Jerusalem and end 400 years of Ottoman rule.
- November, 1947 – U.N. Resolution 181 partitions the land of Israel into two states, one Jewish and the other Arab, to go into effect May 14, 1948.
- May 15, 1948 – Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq invade Israel to drive out the Jews, who defeat them soundly. An armistice is signed in February, 1949.
- June 5-10, 1967 – The Six-Day War, where Egypt, Syria, and Jordan invade Israel but are defeated. Israel then controls all Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula.
- October, 1973 – The War of Yom Kippur, where Egypt and Syria invade Israel but are defeated. Israeli troops advance to within 20 miles of Damascus and cross the Suez Canal. They then withdraw from both locations. A ceasefire is claimed by both sides after 20 days.
- 1987 – Sheik Ahmed Yassin in Gaza founds Hamas and begins the First Intifada, a revolt against Israel. This lasts for four years until 1991.
- 1991 – Iraqi Scud missiles hit Israel during the Gulf War.
- September, 2000 – After Israeli defense minister Ariel Sharon enters the temple mount, where Jews are forbidden by the Muslims, the Second Intifada begins and lasts for one year.
- June-July, 2006 – Israel-Gaza Conflict
- July-August, 2006 – Israel-Hezbollah (southern Lebanon) Conflict
- 2006-the present – Continued attempts by the Palestinian Arabs to eliminate Israeli control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Of all the destructive invasions of the land of Israel by either insects or human beings, the most devastating were those of the Assyrians in 722 B.C., the Babylonians around 600 B.C., and the Romans in both A.D. 70 and 132-135. Indeed, it would seem that the catastrophic effects of the Roman army under General Sextus Severus in 132-135 was the worst, in that it resulted in the Jews' being absent from the land of Israel for almost 1800 years, i.e., until the late 1800's and early 1900's. Is God through Joel referencing this Roman invasion of A.D. 132-135, so that the Jews whom He is addressing lived 40 to 100 years after Jesus? Possibly, and perhaps Joel is referring to a combination of the two Roman invasions and destructions in A.D. 70 and A.D. 132-135, collapsing them into one event. But we need to take a look at the various passages in the book of Revelation which describe God's judgment on the Jews in Israel just prior (75 years or so) to the return of Jesus, who will set up his messianic government, i.e., the Kingdom of God in Israel, which will last for a

long time. Revelation mentions that this kingdom endures for a thousand years, which may simply be symbolic of a long time, and certainly long enough for Jesus to rule over the Jews as their king and truly make his mark as the head of the only morally perfect government on earth in all of human history.

The first important events of God's end-times judgment of the Jews are in Revelation 6, where, each broken seal causes a different kind of suffering for them. However, it seems most reasonable to interpret these events as occurring during the long interval between Jesus' first coming and God's intensifying His judgment actions beginning with the first trumpet of Revelation 8. So I will not quote Revelation 6 here.

After the seals, there are the seven trumpets which begin the final days, about 75 years, of God's judgment of the Jews. When the damaging results of these trumpets have ended, Jesus will return and set up his messianic government in Israel, i.e., the Kingdom of God in Israel. The first four trumpets are in Revelation 8, and I am translating them with the Hebrew word *shophar*, because they are probably like the ram's horns and their sounds in the Old Testament (as we will see when we get to Joel 2:1ff.),

- Revelation 8:1** And when the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for half and hour.
- 8:2** And I saw seven angels who have been standing in front of God, and seven *shophars* were given to them.
- 8:3** And another angel came and stood at the altar. He was holding a golden censer, and much incense was given to him, in order that he could contribute to the prayers of those who have been set apart on the golden altar which is in front of the throne.
- 8:4** And the smoke of the incense with respect to the prayers of those who have been set apart went up from the hand of the angel in front of God.
- 8:5** And the angel took the censer, and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and he threw it onto the land, and the result were peals of thunder, sounds, flashes of lighting, and an earthquake.
- 8:6** And the seven angels who have the seven *shophars* prepared themselves to sound them.
- 8:7** And the first sounded, and the result was hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were thrown onto the land. And a third of the land was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.
- 8:8** And the second angel sounded, and it was as though a huge mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. And a third of the sea became blood.
- 8:9** And a third of the created things in the sea, those which were alive, died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.
- 8:10** And the third angel sounded, and a huge star fell from heaven, burning like a lamp, and it fell on a third of the rivers and the springs of water.
- 8:11** And the name of the star was Wormwood [cf. Jeremiah 23:15, *la'anah*, לַאֲנָה], and a third of the waters became wormwood [bitter], and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.
- 8:12** And the fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them were darkened, and the day, that is, a third of it, did not shine, and the night likewise.



**8:13** And I looked, and I saw one eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice, Damn, damn, damn those who dwell on the land, because of the remaining soundings of a *shophar* of the three angels who are about to sound.

We can see that the first four *shophars* bring certain damaging, indeed devastating, effects on the “land.” I have translated the Greek word *gay* (γῆ) as “land,” while every other English translation, including the Complete Jewish Bible, translates it “earth.” This latter word makes it sound as though the events of Revelation involve the whole world. However, consider these elements of the book of Revelation –

1. Even though the “book” of Revelation is written to seven “churches” in western Asia that would comprise mostly Gentile gatherings of believers in Jesus the Messiah (Revelation 1:11), and Jesus is described having “bought for God with his blood those who come from every tribe, language, people, and nation” (Rev. 5:9), he is “the Lion who is from the tribe of Judah, which, in turn, is the source of David” (Rev. 5:5). Yes, Jesus rescues both Jews and Gentiles from God’s condemnation, but he is fundamentally Jewish in nature.
2. Before the angels are permitted to harm “the *gay* (γῆ), the sea, or the trees,” they seal “the slaves of our God on their foreheads,” and these slaves are from the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:1-8).
3. The large, Gentile army of Revelation 9:13-19 attacks somewhere, but where? Because of the consistent antipathy which has existed for thousands of years between the Gentiles and Jews, it makes the most sense that this army attacks not the whole world, but the *gay* (γῆ) of Israel.
4. It is “the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship in it, leaving out the courtyard which is outside the temple..., because it was given to the Gentiles” that are measured in Revelation 11:1. And the Gentiles “will trample the set apart city for forty-two months,” and this city is Jerusalem, where there are also God’s “two witnesses” to whom He “gives and they speak on His behalf” in “the great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified” (Rev. 11:2-8). “A great earthquake occurs” after these witnesses’ death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, “and a tenth of the city falls, and seven thousand people die” (Rev. 11:13).
5. The people who are gathered for judgment are the army on horseback, and they are thrown “into the great winepress of the wrath of God,” which is “outside the city” of Jerusalem (Rev. 14:17-20).
6. After another great earthquake, “the great city is split into three parts.” This city is called “Babylon,” and it becomes the focal point of much of God’s judgment until it is finally destroyed (Rev. 16:11). But the evidence also indicates that, like the references to the “great city” in Revelation 11, this is Jerusalem, which has been the center so to speak of unbelief and people’s refusal worldwide to embrace Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah.

The above is not an exhaustive list from the book of Revelation, but it helps direct us towards concluding that *gay* (γῆ) in most of its passages refers to the land of Israel. Add to

this the very Jewish-centric and land of Israel-centric characteristics of the Old Testament prophetic books, including Daniel, which seems more often to be interpreted incorrectly as referring to worldwide circumstances, and the judgment and salvation scenes in Revelation fit nicely into God's plans for the Jews on the land of Israel, especially His promise to bring His curses on them if they disobey Him and to transform them into the greatest nation on earth (cf. Deuteronomy 28 and Genesis 12 respectively).

Therefore, making a strong connection between Joel as an Old Testament prophet and the book of Revelation seems to be the best direction to go, but it only makes sense if the Jews continue to be at the center of God's earthly and historical purposes until the end of the present realm. But this must be exactly where they are, because, for example, God has not yet "made them a great nation" according to His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2. There is also the fact that the return of the Messiah figures prominently in the judgment and salvation scenes of Revelation, implying that it is the Jews' rejection of Jesus as their Messiah which has constituted their greatest disobedience of God and for which God brings such harsh judgment on them as described in Revelation. Nevertheless, it is also Jesus who will rescue them from God's judgments during this later time period and then set up his kingdom in Jerusalem. Thus, God's "making Abraham's descendants a great nation" is actually to make them a great kingdom, i.e., the Kingdom of God, with Jesus, the very icon of God and anointed king, ruling over them. Consequently, to disconnect the concept of the Kingdom of God, where Jesus is the king of this kingdom, from the land of Israel and his ruling over the Jews on this land, is to misunderstand the Old Testament and the book of Revelation.

Thus, it makes sense to interpret the book of Revelation as referring mostly to the Middle East and to the land of Israel with the Jews being the occupants of this land. If this is the case, then, as mentioned above, there are really only two time periods which the book of Revelation, itself written around A.D. 80-90, could be describing. These are either A.D. 90-135, along with the return of the Messiah much later, or 1900-the return of Jesus the Messiah, which includes a significant immigration of Jews to the land of Israel, along with the return of the Messiah which is still future to us. We will continue to consider which of these two periods makes the most sense as corresponding to the events of Revelation. In the meantime, a brief list of the first four *shopbars* of Revelation 8 is –

1. Hail, fire, and blood appear on the land of Israel, burning a third of the land and the trees, with also all of the grass being burned.
2. Something like a fiery mountain ends up in the sea (the Sea of Galilee?), turning the sea into blood, so that a third of the sea creatures die. This also destroys a third of the ships (fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee?).
3. A huge star falls on the rivers of Israel, making their waters bitter, killing many of the Jews who drink them.
4. The light from the sun, moon, and stars becomes a third less bright.

So far, only the first and third *shopbars* of Revelation 8 have corresponding elements to Joel 1:4-7. There is the agricultural destruction of the locusts of Joel 1:4, as well as the lack of grapes for making wine because of the "nation" and its army in Joel 1:5 which correspond

to the first *shophar* of Revelation 8, where hail, fire, and blood destroy a third of the land and the trees, and all of the grass. Then, there is the death of many Jews in Joel 1:7 which corresponds to their dying of drinking the bitter waters of the streams during the third *shophar*. However, the Jews' death in Joel is because the army of the invading "nation" has mashed them to bits like a lion chewing its food, while their death during the third *shophar* of Revelation is because they have drunk poisonous water. Therefore, Joel could be referring to God's judgment of the Jews as described in Revelation, but we will need more corroborative evidence to determine if this is correct.

The fifth and sixth *shophars* are in Revelation 9,

- Revelation 9:1** And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star which had fallen onto the land from heaven, and the key to the pit of the abyss was given to him.
- 9:2** And he opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke from the pit, like the smoke of a furnace, went up from it.
- 9:3** And out of the smoke came locusts (*akrides*, ἀκρίδες) onto the land, and power was given to them as the scorpions of the land have power.
- 9:4** And it was told to them not to harm the grass of the land, nor any tree, but only men who do not have the seal of God on their forehead.
- 9:5** And it was given to them not to kill them, but to torture them for five months, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings a man.
- 9:6** And in those days men will seek death, and they will not find it. And they will desire greatly to die, and death will flee from them.
- 9:7** And the appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle, and on their heads it was like crowns that were like gold, and their faces as the faces of men.
- 9:8** And they had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.
- 9:9** And they had breastplates like the breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, like many horses running into battle.
- 9:10** And they have tails like scorpions and stingers. And in their tails is their power to harm men for five months.
- 9:11** They have as their king the angel of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is *Abaddon*, and in Greek he has the name *Apolluon*.
- 9:12** The first damning judgment has gone away. Behold, two damning judgments are still coming after these things.
- 9:13** And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard one voice from the four horns of the golden altar that is in the presence of God,
- 9:14** which said to the sixth angel, who has the *shophar*, Release the four angels who have been bound at the great river Euphrates.
- 9:15** And the four angels, who have been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released, so that they could kill a third of the men.
- 9:16** And the number of the armies of cavalry was twenty thousands of countless thousands. I heard the number of them.
- 9:17** And thus I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them, and they had fiery red, blue, and yellow breastplates. And the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions. And out of their mouths proceed fire, smoke, and burning sulphur.
- 9:18** A third of the men were killed by these three plagues, by the fire, smoke, and burning sulphur which proceeded out of their mouths.

- 9:19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails. For they are like serpents, having heads, and they harm with them.
- 9:20 And the rest of the men, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons and gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood idols, which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk.
- 9:21 And they did not repent of their murders, nor of their witchcraft, nor of their immorality, nor of their thefts.

Certainly, the fifth *shophar* begins with words that sound like Joel 1:4, “and out of the smoke came locusts onto the land.” However these locusts, *akrides* (ἀκρίδες) in Greek, do not act like conventional grasshoppers. For example, they have the potential to kill people, but they are told by God only to torture them. They look like horses prepared for battle, and they can sting like scorpions because their tails are a weapon. They wear breastplates, have faces of men, and the sound of their wings is that of chariots. These locusts appear to be more like human beings with special weapons than actual grasshoppers or locusts. However, because they come up out of the abyss, they also could be some sort of demonic beings. Therefore, the fifth *shophar* of Revelation could correspond to Joel 1:5-7 with its description of a “human” army, if perhaps the “human” army is more demonic than human, or both. On the other hand, it could correspond to the locusts of Joel 1:4, if the locusts of this latter passage also are more demonic than human, or both. More clues to come in Revelation may help us decide what correspondence there is between Joel 1:4-7 and Revelation 9:1-12.

The sixth *shophar* releases the four angels who have been waiting for this day. However, the additional description of these “angels” sounds more like a huge army of human beings, indeed “twenty thousands of countless thousands,” and they are given the responsibility of killing “a third of the men.” Which men? Jews on the land of Israel, which will be a devastating loss to their country and their society. This could definitely be that to which Joel 1:5-7 is referring when the “mighty and innumerable nation” goes up on God’s land and strips His “vine” bare. This army in Revelation 9 rides on horses, and the horsemen wear fiery red, blue, and yellow breastplates. The mouths of their horses spit fire, smoke, and burning sulphur as that which has a killing effect on the Jews. In spite of the large scale destruction of the Jewish population, the remaining people on the land still refuse to repent of their immorality, which only demonstrates the hardness of not only the Jews’ hearts, because they have continued to reject their Messiah, but also is indicative of the hardness of the human heart in general.

At this point in our discussion, we should also bring in the apostle Paul’s words in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 as a very likely description of the ruler of this army of “twenty thousands of countless thousands.” He is the Man of Lawlessness and the Son of Destruction because of his extreme opposition to God and the Jews,

- 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Let no one in any way deceive you, because it [the return of the Messiah] will not happen unless the rebellion comes first and the Man of Lawlessness, the Son of Destruction, is revealed,
- 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so as to sit in the temple of God by proclaiming that he himself is God.
- 2:5 Do you not remember that, when I was still with you, I was saying these things to you?

- 2:6 Indeed, you know what now restrains him, so that he will be revealed in his own time.
- 2:7 The mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only, the one who restrains him will do so until he is out of the middle.
- 2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy by the breath/spirit of his mouth and will bring to an end at the appearance of his coming.
- 2:9 The lawless one's coming is according to the working of the opponent with all power, signs, and false wonders,
- 2:10 and with all deception of immorality for those who are destroyed in return for their not embracing the love of the truth in order that they may be saved.
- 2:11 On account of this, God is sending to them an energy of deception, so that they believe falsehood,
- 2:12 so that they all may be condemned, who do not believe the truth but instead take pleasure in evil.

Paul is convinced that, in his day, God is progressing with the story of the Man of Lawlessness, just as He is progressing with the story of Jesus the Messiah, who will destroy this man (and his army as described in Revelation 9:15ff.) when he appears for the second time to rescue the Jews from their enemies, as well as to set up his messianic kingdom in Jerusalem and Israel. Thus, if we can find good evidence to conclude that Joel's invasion of Israel is Revelation's invasion of Israel, then we can put these pieces of the puzzle together and be more definitive in our interpretation of Joel.

Moving on in Revelation, the end of the sixth *shophar* is in chapter 11, followed by the seventh *shophar*, but Revelation 10:7 should be noted first,

**Revelation 10:7** But in the days of the sound of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, indeed, the mystery of God has reached its goal, just as He proclaimed the good news to His servants, the prophets.

This verse explains that God's goal is very close, which we will see is the establishing of the Kingdom of God in Israel by His Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. All creation history has been pointing to this moment, when God rules the Jews, the earth, and the universe through His proxy, Jesus the Messiah, from the city of Jerusalem on the land of Israel. The seventh *shophar* is the end of this "mystery," i.e., God's speaking in the Bible of Jesus' setting up his kingdom but not actually bringing it about until Jesus returns. Then, the end of the mystery occurs. And Revelation 10:11 is important, too,

**Revelation 10:11** And they said to me, It is necessary for you again to prophesy concerning many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.

John, the author of Revelation, is now instructed to direct his words beyond the Jews on the land of Israel to the Gentiles surrounding them. This is followed immediately by Revelation 11, which includes the end of the sixth *shophar* and the entirety of the seventh *shophar*,

- Revelation 11:1** And a reed like a staff was given to me, saying, Get up and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who are worshiping in it.
- 11:2** And leave out the courtyard, and do not measure it, because it was given to the Gentiles, and they will trample for forty-two months the city which is set apart.
- 11:3** And I will give to the two witnesses for a thousand, two hundred, and sixty days, while clothing themselves in sackcloth.
- 11:4** These men are the two olive trees and the two lampstands, which stand in the presence of the Lord of the land.
- 11:5** And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouths, and it eats their enemies. Indeed, if anyone wants to harm them, it is thus necessary for him to be killed.
- 11:6** These have the authority to close the sky, so that no rain rains during the days of their prophesying. And they have the authority over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the land with every plague, as often as they want.
- 11:7** And when they have reached the goal of their witnessing, the beast, who comes up out of the abyss, will make war with them, conquer them, and kill them.
- 11:8** And their corpses are in the street of the great city, which is spiritually called *Sodom* and *Egypt*, where also their Lord was crucified.
- 11:9** And those from peoples, tribes, languages, and nations see their corpses for three and a half days, and their corpses are not allowed to be placed in a tomb.
- 11:10** And those who dwell on the land rejoice and cheer over them. And they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tortured those who dwell on the land.
- 11:11** And after three and a half days, the spirit of life entered them from God, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who observe them.
- 11:12** And they heard a loud voice from heaven, saying to them, Come up here. And they went up into heaven in a cloud, and their enemies observed them.
- 11:13** And in that hour there occurred a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. And seven thousand names of men were killed in the earthquake. And the rest became terrified, and they gave glory to the God of heaven.
- 11:14** The second damning judgment has gone away. Behold, the third damning judgment is coming quickly.
- 11:15** And the seventh angel sounded, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world of our Lord and His Messiah has come, and he will rule into the ages of ages.
- 11:16** And the twenty-four old men, who sit on their thrones in the presence of God, fell on their faces and worshiped God.
- 11:17** They said, We thank You, Lord God, the Almighty One, who is and who was, because You have received Your great power, and You rule.
- 11:18** And the Gentiles were enraged, and Your anger came, and the time to judge the dead came, and to give the wage to Your servants, the prophets, to those who are set apart, to those who fear Your name, to the small and to the great, and to destroy those who destroy the land.
- 11:19** And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened, and the ark of the covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightening, sounds, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm.

Briefly, the sixth *shophar* ends with God's causing two men to appear in Jerusalem, who speak about God ("prophesy") and make it clear that it is God who has sent them, because they perform certain miracles, even killing people who oppose them with fire which comes

out of their mouths. However, eventually, their enemies, i.e., the enemies of God who have followed the leader of the vast army that has invaded Israel, along with probably Jews who continue to reject God, will kill them, sparking a huge celebration among even the Jews because of how torturous it was to listen to the truth which these two witnesses of God kept proclaiming. Then, God will resurrect them, cause an earthquake to occur in Jerusalem, and kill many Jews in the city. Nevertheless, other Jews will respond positively to all that is happening, “giving glory to God” with authentic inwardness and belief. Thus, we can now briefly list the first six *shopbars* –

1. Hail, fire, and blood appear on the land of Israel, burning a third of the land and the trees, with also all of the grass being burned.
2. Something like a fiery mountain ends up in the sea (the Sea of Galilee?), turning the sea into blood, so that a third of the sea creatures die. This also destroys a third of the ships (fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee?).
3. A huge star falls on the rivers of Israel, making their waters bitter, killing many of the Jews who drink them.
4. The light from the sun, moon, and stars becomes a third less bright.
5. An army of “locusts,” probably demonic in nature, because they come out of the abyss, torture the Jews for five months in the land of Israel.
6. Another army, this time human and a vast number of “twenty thousands of countless thousands,” invades the land and kills a third of the Jews, but many of the rest still do not repent. Nevertheless, some do repent after the two witnesses are resurrected and an earthquake in Jerusalem kills many of its inhabitants.

Comparing the six *shopbars* with Joel 1:4-7, there is a possible correspondence between the locusts/agricultural destruction of Joel 1:4 and the first *shopbar* of hail, fire, and blood burning the land and its grass. There is also a possible correspondence between the innumerable human invasion/destruction of Joel 1:5-7 and the sixth *shopbar* of an army of “twenty thousands of countless thousands” invading the land of Israel and killing a third of the people.

Moving on in Revelation 11, the seventh *shopbar* sounds in verse 15, which will result in the appearance of the Messiah to judge all the Gentiles for their rebellion against God and their invasion of the land of Israel, while also recompensing authentic believers with immortality. This seventh *shopbar* also involves the seven bowls of wrath of Revelation 15 and 16 and which also immediately precede and include the return of the Messiah along with the battle of *Har-Magedon* (Armageddon),

- Revelation 15:1** And I saw another great and wonderful sign in heaven, seven angels who have the last seven plagues, because with them the wrath of God is brought to its goal.
- 15:2** And I saw something like a sea made with glass, mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast, his image, and the number of his name. They were standing on the sea made of glass, and they held the lyres of God.
- 15:3** And they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and wonderful are Your deeds, Lord God the Almighty One. Righteous and true are Your ways, king of the Gentiles.

- 15:4 Who does not fear, Lord, and will glorify Your name? Because You alone are set apart. Because all the Gentiles will come and worship in front of You, because Your righteous deeds have been revealed.
- 15:5 And after these things I looked, and the temple of the tent of bearing witness was opened in heaven.
- 15:6 And the seven angels who have the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in clean, bright linen, and they were wrapped around their chests with golden belts.
- 15:7 And one of the four living beings gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, He who lives into the ages of ages.
- 15:8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power. And no one was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels reached their goal.
- 16:1 And I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, Go and pour out on the land the seven bowls of the wrath of God.
- 16:2 And the first went out and poured out his bowl on the land, and it became a harmful and wicked sore on the men who have the mark of the beast and who worship his image.
- 16:3 And the second poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood like that of a corpse. And every living thing in the sea died.
- 16:4 And the third poured out his bowl on the rivers and the springs of the waters, and they became blood.
- 16:5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, Righteous are You, the One who was and who is, the Different One, because You have judged these,
- 16:6 because they poured out the blood of the set apart ones and the prophets. And You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.
- 16:7 And I heard the altar saying, Yes, Lord God the Almighty One, true and righteous are Your judgments.
- 16:8 And the fourth poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was given to it to scorch the men with fire.
- 16:9 And the men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God, who has the power over these plagues. And they did not repent so as to give Him glory.
- 16:10 And the fifth poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was darkened. And they gnawed their tongues on account of the pain.
- 16:11 And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores. And they did not repent of their deeds.
- 16:12 And the sixth poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the sunrise of the sun would be prepared.
- 16:13 And I saw out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits like frogs.
- 16:14 For they are spirits of demons performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the war of the great day of God the Almighty One.
- 16:15 Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who remains alert and who keeps his garments, so that he does not walk about naked and they see his shame.
- 16:16 And they gathered them to the place which is called in Hebrew *Har-Magedon*.
- 16:17 And the seventh poured out his bowl on the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, It has happened.



- 16:18 And there were flashes of lightening, sounds, and peals of thunder. And there was a great earthquake, such as has not occurred since man existed on the land. So great an earthquake. So great.
- 16:19 And the great city became split in three parts, and the cities of the Gentiles fell. And Babylon the Great was remembered in the presence of God, to give to it the cup of the wine of the wrath of His anger.
- 16:20 And every island fled, and the mountains were not found.
- 16:21 And huge hailstones, weighing a talent, came down out of heaven on the men. And the men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hailstones, because its plague was so great.

The first scene in the midst of the seven angels with the seven bowls of wrath demonstrates that there will be Jews who not only survive the devastation brought about by the seven *shopbars*, but also obtain authentic belief in God, because these Jews sing the “song of Moses,” whereby they praise God for His mighty deeds and for being the “king of the Gentiles.” This song is reminiscent of Exodus 15:1ff. when the Israelites sing and worship God for His destroying Pharaoh’s army which was pursuing them as they left Egypt. However, in the Revelation rendition, the Jews sing about the Gentiles’ coming before God and worshiping Him because they have recognized His greatness. In addition, Revelation 15:1 indicates that God’s wrath and judgment of the Jews is reaching its conclusion. This is the wrath and judgment, which began in Jesus’ day with the seven seals which have occurred throughout the Jews’ history, and have become most intense starting with the seven *shopbars*.

After the first scene of the singing Jews in Revelation 15:1-4, there is the series of seven bowls of wrath, which contain seven plagues that will get poured out on the land of Israel and the Jews. These plagues, which also constitute the judgment brought about by God as a result of the seventh *shopbar*, are –

1. A painful sore on those Jews who have submitted to the ruler of the huge army which has invaded their land.
2. The sea (of Galilee?) turns to blood, so that its living creatures die.
3. The rivers and streams of Israel turn to blood. An angel praises God for giving the Jews who have rejected His prophets what they deserve. They have poured out the blood of His prophets by killing them, and He has given them blood to drink.
4. The sun’s heat increases and makes life miserable for the Jews on the land. Yet, they still do not repent of their immorality.
5. The capital city of the vast army’s ruler, the Man of Lawlessness (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2 above), who has invaded the land of Israel is the location of the next plague, which causes such painful sores that people gnaw their tongues. Like the Jews, these Gentiles do not repent of their immorality. Indeed, they curse God instead.
6. God dries up the Euphrates River in the Mesopotamian Valley in order to make it easier for armies from other countries besides that of the Man of Lawlessness to invade Israel and gather at *Har-Magedon* (Armageddon).
7. In the air there are flashes of lightening, sounds, and peals of thunder, with an earthquake in Jerusalem that splits the city into three parts. In addition, the earthquake causes cities outside of Israel and inhabited by Gentiles to collapse. The

final phase of this seventh bowl of wrath involves huge hailstones which fall to the earth on people. But, again, they will not repent of their evil.

These seven plagues of the seventh *shophar* do not appear to correspond to either the locust attack of Joel 1:4 or the army invasion of Joel 1:5-7. However, we will see that some of them correspond to another event mentioned in Joel. Thus, now that we have briefly reviewed all the above passages in Revelation, we can ask the question, For the most part, do these seven *shophars* (trumpets) and seven bowls of wrath constitute the one event of which, so far, Joel is speaking in Joel 1:4-7 that brings about massive agricultural and personal destruction for the Jews on the land of Israel? And the answer is, Very possibly. But we will keep considering the clues along the way throughout the rest of Joel to answer this question, while we also keep in mind these seven *shophars* and seven bowls of wrath of Revelation. Indeed, there will be one clue in Joel which turns out to be hugely important.

### **Joel 1:8-10**

Next, Joel describes how the Jews will respond in the midst of God's judgment which is happening to them. Joel 1:8-10 reads,

- Joel 1:8 Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.
- 1:9 The offering and drink offering have been cut off from the house of Yahweh. The priests, those who serve Yahweh, mourn.
- 1:10 The field has been destroyed. The ground mourns because the grain has been destroyed. The new wine has dried up. The oil has dried up.

First, Joel exhorts (or simply describes while using an imperative verb) the dwellers of the land of Israel to cry out in lamentation like a young women who has just lost her fiancé. In whatever manner he has died, he is gone from her forever. She had her heart set on a beautiful wedding, a romantic wedding night, a life of mutual love and support into their older years. But all these dreams and expectations have been smashed to pieces. She is, in effect, a young widow, mourning over what could have been but never will be. Joel likens such grief to that which the people of Israel will experience during the horrible circumstances which he is describing.

Second, Joel indicates that the prescribed religious life of the Jews has been brought to a halt. The Levitical priests of the temple, the "house of Yahweh," have nothing to offer to God. There are no animals to sacrifice, and there is no grain to offer on the altar of God—as further stated in v. 9. Why? Because, as we saw above, the land has been devastated by an invading "army," which has destroyed not only the food supply for the Jews, but also the supply of animals and plants for properly worshipping Yahweh in the temple. In v. 10, God continues referring to this latter aspect of the agricultural elements in Israel. As if the dirt is a person, it mourns because of its inability to grow grain, wine, and olive oil, all important ingredients for worshipping Yahweh, especially in the temple, according to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Exodus 29:41; Exodus 29:40; Exodus 30:24ff. respectively).

However, the question for us is, Does God mean that an actual temple is standing on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem and actual priests are mourning their lack of offerings during these catastrophic events which are occurring on the land of Israel? Or is it possible that there is no temple and there are no Jews designated as priests at the historical moment of Joel's events, because these disappeared prior to these events? Nevertheless, if there were a temple and priests, they both could not provide proper worship of Yahweh because of the devastation brought about by the invading army.

We considered when we looked at Deuteronomy 28 that its events of God's response to the Jews' disobedience do not all have to take place at the same time in history. Thus, it seems possible and reasonable to conclude that God means here in Joel 1:9 that the loss of animals and food for the Jews also results in the loss of opportunity to worship Him appropriately, whether or not there is a temple with its entourage of priests. As a result, this statement fits with even the situation in Israel as described in Revelation—if there is no temple yet when God brings judgment on the Jews prior to the return of their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. I say yet, because one reasonable way to interpret the Old Testament prophets is that the temple building in Jerusalem is rebuilt by the Jews once Jesus establishes his millennial kingdom there. And the purpose of this temple is to provide the Jews with the most important place for them to demonstrate their authentic belief in Yahweh according to the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, they act out their belief both by following and worshipping Jesus as their Messiah, the very icon of God on earth, and by following as carefully as possible the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, including those which prescribe sacrifices and offerings in the temple. In this way, the Jews finally become the people whom God commanded them to be as a nation on the land of Israel according to the Mosaic Covenant.

Perhaps, too, God states the temple and priest situation this way in Joel 1:9 in order to point out the importance and relevance of these two elements of proper worship of Him according to the Mosaic Covenant, which also indicates that they both will come back into existence in the future as part of His causing the Jews to be a great nation, i.e., when Jesus returns and sets up his messianic kingdom.

### **Joel 1:11-13**

The next three verses in Joel 1 read,

**Joel 1:11** Be ashamed, farmers. Wail, vinedressers, over the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has been destroyed.

**1:12** The vine has dried up, and the fig tree withers. The pomegranate, also the palm tree, and the apple tree, all the trees of the field, have withered, because joy has dried up from the sons of men.

**1:13** Gird up and lament, priests. Wail, servants of the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, servants of my God, because the offering and drink offering have been withheld from the house of your God.

Once more God mentions a level of catastrophe with respect to the food supply such that the Jewish farmers can do nothing but grieve heavily. They have lost all their crops, and the

cause is not only the locusts of 1:4 and the “army” of 1:5-7, but now drought is mentioned. Verse 12 describes the vines and other plants simply drying up and withering. In turn, this drought of water has created within the Jews a drought of joy. They are saddened beyond description, because they have no food. All of them are in despair. This could be the fourth bowl of wrath in Revelation 16:8ff. where the sun’s heat becomes so intense that it makes life miserable for the Jews on the land of Israel.

In v. 13, God again brings the Levitical priests into the mix. He had already mentioned the old men, all the dwellers of the land, the drunkards, along with the farmers and the vinedressers, and finally the “sons of men,” i.e., the rest of the Jews on the land. But, starting with v.9, it is the turn of the priests, whose responsibility is to present to God the various offerings of the Mosaic Covenant. But there are no offerings, because there is no grain and no wine, and, by implication, there are no suitable animals to sacrifice to God.

Therefore, God’s call to the priests is to express their grief with wailing and wearing sackcloth. Imagine how sad is this situation, such that an entire nation, indeed the chosen people of God, are spending all their time crying hysterically, because they are starving and being crushed physically and in spirit by a huge swarm of insects (literally?) and a massive army (that corresponds to Revelation 9) which has invaded their land. When in history does this occur such that nothing before it can compare in its scale (cf. Joel 1:2)?

It is important that we also note that God is speaking to priests who serve him by bringing offerings to His altar, meaning to His altar in the temple. Thus, it would seem that He is addressing Jews who are living on the land of Israel during the time when the tabernacle/temple exists. This could be only from approximately 900-586 B.C., from 516 B.C. to A.D. 70, and some time in the future when the temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem—if God is speaking to actual priests, unless He is speaking metaphorically here with the intent to say that, if there were a temple and priests serving in it, then this is what it would be like for them in the midst of this scale of devastation. All they could do is weep and grieve the loss of their jobs, because they have nothing to offer God. While this metaphorical interpretation is an option, does it make the most sense in the light of the language and the history of the Jews? We will continue looking for clues to answer this question.

### **Joel 1:14,15**

The next two verses of Joel 1 read,

**Joel 1:14** Set apart a fast. Proclaim an assembly. Gather the old men, all those who are dwellers of the land at the house of Yahweh, your God. And cry out to Yahweh.

**1:15** Aha, for the day, because the **Day of Yahweh** is near, and it will come as destruction from *Shaddai*.

Now God calls for the Jews to express their trust in Him and devotion to Him first by fasting. Is this a joke? They already have no food and are, therefore, “fasting.” So what does God mean? Probably that they should consider this God-induced deprivation as an opportunity not only to feel their lack of food, but also to use this time of tribulation as

motivation to rededicate themselves to worshiping and trusting in only Him. Thus, it makes sense that we have here a proper definition of biblical fasting which is far different from the modern-day advocates of spiritual disciplines. Fasting does not occur when we choose to go without food. Fasting occurs when God chooses for us to be deprived of food. And when He does, a proper spiritual response is to reconsider His goodness, mercy, and promises, especially the promise of eternal life for both Jews and Gentiles—even in the midst of a lack of food which appears contrary to God’s goodness, mercy, and promises of life.

God is also calling these Jews to gather together at the temple, which He is labeling here “the house of Yahweh” (cf. 1:9,13,16; 3:18). The first mention of a “house” with respect to God is in Genesis 28:10-22,

- Genesis 28:10** And Jacob departed from *BeayrShayva*, and he went towards *Charan*.  
**28:11** And he happened on a place, and he stayed there overnight, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of the place, and he set it under his head. And he lay down in that place.  
**28:12** And he dreamt. A flight of steps was made to stand on the land, and its top touched the heavens. And, behold, the angels of God were going up and down on it.  
**28:13** And, behold, Yahweh stood over it, and He said, I am Yahweh, the God of *Avraham*, your father, and the God of *Yitzhaq*. The land on which you are lying down I will give to you and to your seed.  
**28:14** And your seed will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out towards the sea, and eastward, and towards the north, and towards the south. And in you and in your seed all the families of the ground will be blessed.  
**28:15** And, behold, I am with you, and I will keep you wherever you go, and I will cause you to return to this ground, because I will not abandon you until I have done what I have said to you.  
**28:16** And Jacob awoke from his sleep, and he said, Surely, there is Yahweh in this place, and I did not know it.  
**28:17** And he was afraid, and he said, How this place is to be feared! This is nothing but the house of God (*bayth 'Eloheem*, בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים), and this is the gate of heaven (*sha'ar hashamayim*, שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם).  
**28:18** And Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone on which his head had been, and he set it up as a pillar. And he poured (*vayyitzoq*, וַיִּצְקֶה) oil on its top.  
**28:19** And he called the name of that place *Bayth'Ayl*, (בַּיִת-אֵל). However, the name of the city formerly was *Luz*.  
**28:20** And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me and keep me in this way, which I am going, and give to me bread to eat and clothes to wear,  
**28:21** and I return in *shalom* to the house of my father (*bayth 'avee*, בַּיִת אָבִי), then Yahweh is my God.  
**28:22** And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be the house of God (*bayth 'Eloheem*, בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים). And of everything which You give to me, I will certainly give a tenth to You.

On his way to Haran to obtain a wife from Laban’s daughters, Jacob lies down for the night to sleep, after taking a stone and placing it in position to be his pillow. He dreams of angels going up and down a flight of steps reaching to heaven with God standing at the top

of steps. God speaks to Jacob and repeats the Abrahamic promises to him of land, descendants, and his being the means so to speak of eternal life to the rest of the world, while also telling him that He is with him, meaning that Jacob has nothing to fear about completing his mission of obtaining a wife and being the next generation which is heading towards the fulfillment of the promises. Jacob awakes and declares that Yahweh is in this place. He takes his pillow stone, sets it up as a pillar, pours oil on it, and renames the place *Beth 'El*, house of God, also declaring that the place is the gate of heaven. In the morning, Jacob promises to give a tenth of his possessions to God and to set the pillar up as the house of God, if God will fulfill His promises to him. And now he calls the pillar *Beth 'Eloheem*, using the plural form of *'El*.

Thus, this story of Jacob reveals the Ancient Near Eastern belief among at least the Semites that Yahweh reveals Himself in a special way with respect to His Abrahamic promises, and that this place, whether there is a building or not, is the “house of God” and the “gate of heaven.” As a result, the “house of God,” *Beth 'El* or *Beth 'Eloheem*, is where God chooses to connect with and communicate the Abrahamic promises to His people on earth. For Jacob, this was somewhere out in the middle of nowhere in the land of Canaan as he traveled north from Beersheva to Haran. Later, according to the Mosaic Covenant, this was wherever the Israelites set up the portable tabernacle in the Sinai Desert, and then eventually in Jerusalem where the tabernacle found a permanent home as the temple which Solomon built, which the Jews restored after the Babylonian captivity, which Herod rebuilt around the time of the birth of Jesus and was destroyed 70 years later by the Romans, and which, according to Joel, if his events correspond to those of Revelation, the Jews will rebuild in the future.

We may wonder how the temple of the Mosaic Covenant, with its animal sacrifices and the threat of curses on the Jews, is an appropriate place of God’s connecting with the Jews in regard to the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis which initially did not contain such language as found in the Mosaic Covenant in Exodus through Deuteronomy. However, Deuteronomy 4:1 (cf. Deuteronomy 4:40; 6:18; 8:1; 9:5; 11:9,21; 30:20) provides us with good information in this regard,

**Deuteronomy 4:1** And now, Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to do, in order that you may live and enter and possess the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

This first verse of Deuteronomy 4 indicates that God saw the promises which He had made to the Jewish people through Abraham as conditioned on their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. As a national, ethnic group, the Jews are the only people on earth who are the “chosen people of God.” And they are the only people to whom God has promised to give the land of Israel. However, they are also the only people who have the responsibility to obey the Mosaic Covenant, which includes sacrifices to Him in the temple in Jerusalem, as an important and necessary condition for their possessing the land of Israel. And, looking ahead, the picture which we are watching Joel (along with the other prophets and Revelation) paint is that they will meet this condition while also fulfilling the even more important responsibility of embracing Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah and priest/advocate

for their obtaining eternal life, which responsibilities will both occur during the messianic and millennial kingdom when Jesus rules their nation from Jerusalem.

Indeed, in the gospel of John, Jesus identifies himself as the ultimate “house of God” and connection between God and the Jews (cf. John 1:51). But, if Joel is talking about future priests serving God in a future temple, this temple as a place of connection between God and the Jews will exist alongside Jesus as a place of connection between God and the Jews. Nevertheless, it is Jesus who will go on into eternity while the stone temple in Jerusalem will disappear along with the rest of the present creation. The stone temple will provide the Jews with an opportunity to demonstrate *bona fide* obedience (from circumcised hearts) to the Mosaic Covenant as an entire nation for the first time in human history.

It makes sense, then, that, in the book of Joel, God is addressing a Jewish audience who are living on the land of Israel and commanding them to gather together where He is among them—at the temple as their central place of worship (even if it may not exist, i.e., may not yet exist again, because it will soon be rebuilt). They also are to cry out to Him, which is to say, that they should appeal to Him for mercy and relenting of His judgment which is causing them so much suffering. In Joel 1:15, God also labels this event of His judgment on them as the **Day of Yahweh**. I have placed these last words in bold letters in my translation, because they are such an important expression and will appear four more times—in Joel 2:1,11,31; 3:14. In the meantime, we can define the **Day of Yahweh** as an enormous set of destructive acts brought about by God on the Jews because of their disobedience to Him and that result in incomparable suffering for them. Indeed, v. 15 says that this event comes from *Shaddai* (שַׁדַּי), the Hebrew word which most Bibles have translated “Almighty,” but whose meaning is quite uncertain. So I will leave it alone for the time being.

### **Joel 1:16-18**

The next three verses of Joel 1 read,

**Joel 1:16** Has not food been cut off in front of our eyes, joy and rejoicing from the house of our God?

**1:17** Seeds have shriveled under their clods. The storehouses have become desolate. The barns were destroyed because the grain has withered.

**1:18** How the beasts sigh. The herds of cattle are confused, because there is no pasture for them. In addition, the flocks of sheep are paying for the guilt.

There is not much new in these verses, except this is Joel who is speaking, because he says “our eyes” in v. 16. Does this mean that these events are taking place in Joel’s day? Not necessarily. Perhaps he is seeing a vision of these events just as Amos saw a vision of a locust attack and begged God for mercy, such that He relented of actually causing the locust attack to occur. In the next paragraph we will hear Joel “cry” to God, which is an appeal for mercy. And God will hear his cry, but not in order to call off the attacks by the locusts and the army.

These verses indicate that the plants and animals on the land of Israel are greatly reduced, so that the Jews are without food and the proper means to offer sacrifices to their God. The one new idea introduced in v. 18 is that the poor animals are having to pay for the guilt of

the Jews' disobedience to God. This statement is probably not unlike what the apostle Paul says in Romans 8 to the effect that the non-human part of the creation groans while it waits for God to complete His task of keeping this creation in a state of futility until He decides to destroy it and create a new realm which will not be subject to man's moral depravity and its effects. Certainly the sheep on the land of Israel during the time of God's judgment do not themselves deserve to suffer deprivation, but they are being required to do so by God, because they happen to inhabit the same space on earth as the Jews, who according to Deuteronomy 28 deserve His judgment and to suffer.

### **Joel 1:19,20**

The first chapter of Joel ends with these two verses,

**Joel 1:19** To you, Yahweh, I call, because fire has eaten the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.

**1:20** Also, the animals of the field long for You, because the rivers of water have dried up, and fire has eaten the pastures of the wilderness.

Joel takes a break from his "prophetic" job of communicating God's ideas to the Jews and turns his attention to God. He lists the various destructions which he has witnessed—at least in his mind's eye if this event of God's judgment does not take place in his own lifetime, which it is looking more and more like the case. Either with real fire created miraculously by God or metaphorically with the destructive effects of a huge swarm of locusts and/or an innumerable army of human soldiers, the pastures of edible grass for the animals and the trees which produce fruit for the people are no more. Nevertheless, we can definitely see a correspondence between this kind of destruction and the first *shophar* of Revelation 8:7, where hail, fire, and blood appear on the land of Israel, burning a third of the land and the trees, with also all of the grass being burned.

In addition, in Joel 1:20, there is a drought resulting in the animals' suffering great thirst, and Joel has properly concluded that all this is because of the judgment of God, who can reverse these effects just as easily as He brought them about. As a result, Joel appeals to God to reverse these effects. He appeals to God for mercy on behalf of His people, the Jews. Will God relent of His judgment? We will see.

### **Joel 2:1-10**

The next paragraph in Joel is the first ten verses of chapter 2,

**Joel 2:1** Blow a *shophar* in Zion, and cause a shout on the mountain of My being different. Let all those who are dwellers of the land tremble, because the **Day of Yahweh** is coming, because it is near—

**2:2** a day of darkness and gloom, a day of a cloud and thick darkness. As the dawn is being spread on the mountains, so also a multitude and mighty people are



spread like it. Nothing like it has happened in the distant past, and after it nothing will happen again into the years of generations and generations.

- 2:3** A fire consumes before them, and behind them a flame blazes. Like the Garden of Eden the land is in front of them, but behind them, it is a desolate wilderness. In addition, there is no escape from them.
- 2:4** Their appearance is like the appearance of horses. And like chariot horses, thus they run.
- 2:5** Like the sound of chariots, they dance on the tops of the mountains, like the sound of the flame of a fire which is consuming stubble, like a mighty people arranged for war.
- 2:6** Before them the peoples writhe in anguish. All faces grow pale.
- 2:7** Like mighty men they run. Like men of war they climb a wall. And a man in their way they walk, and they do not lose their paths.
- 2:8** And a man his brother they do not crowd. Each man walks in his path. And when through the weapons they fall, they do not break ranks.
- 2:9** Into the city they rush. On the wall they run. Into the houses they climb. Through the windows they enter like a thief.
- 2:10** Before them the land quakes. The heavens quake. The sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars gather their brightness.

So far in Joel, this is the most frightening of scenes. Like Joel 1:5-7, this paragraph describes the invasion of the land of Israel by a huge and devastating army, and it sounds a lot like the sixth *shophar* of Revelation 9:13ff., which describes “armies of cavalry” which are “twenty thousands of countless thousands.” In Joel 2:1ff., God is speaking again after Joel has appealed to Him for mercy on behalf of the Jews, and, clearly, there is no mercy here.

The first thing which God commands is that a *shophar* (שׁוֹפָר) be blown in Zion. A *shophar* is a ram’s horn which is used as a kind of trumpet and is very loud when it is sounded as such (as I have personally experienced). The first person in the Old Testament to blow a *shophar* was God. In Exodus 19, He caused the sound of a *shophar* to occur as part of His revealing Himself to the Israelites who were standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The sound was so loud, along with the sight of lightening and the other sound of thunder, that the Israelites trembled with great fear.

Another example is in Leviticus 25:9 where the *shophar* is to make it obvious to the Jews that they are appealing to their God for mercy,

- Leviticus 25:9** And you shall cause to happen the loud *shophar* in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month, on the day of propitiation. You shall cause to happen the *shophar* in all your land.

Later, in Jeremiah 4:5, the blowing of the *shophar* is meant to warn the people of Judah that an enemy is approaching. As also in Joshua 6 and Ezekiel 33, the sound of the *shophar* warns the people that they must prepare themselves for battle. However, just as here in Joel 2, there is no guarantee that they will win the battle. Indeed, the sound of the *shophar* in this passage is throughout Zion, i.e., the city of Jerusalem. This is based upon the first two uses of the word Zion in the Old Testament, which are in 2 Samuel 5:7, when king David captured Jerusalem, and in 1 Kings 8:1, when king Solomon brought the ark of the covenant from the city into the newly finished temple. Although, in this context of Joel 2, Zion may

be referring to all the land of Israel and all the Jews living on the land, just as Leviticus 25:9 requires that the Jews “cause to happen the *shophar* in all your land.”

The “mountain of God’s being different” in Joel 2:1 is also the raised portion of Jerusalem on which the temple was first built by Solomon. It includes the temple as the “house of Yahweh,” where, as we have seen from Genesis 28, God connects to the earth and His people, specifically the people of Israel, the Jews, regarding the Abrahamic Covenant with its promises. I am using the phrase “being different” where others might use the word “holy,” because I am trying to capture the sense of the very important Hebrew word *kodesh* (קֹדֶשׁ). Briefly, it refers to God’s being completely and utterly other than anyone or anything else. He is vastly different from anything in the creation, because He is the transcendent Creator of everything else that exists. If something is not the transcendent God, then it exists only because He causes it to exist. Thus, as its Creator, He is completely different from it.

Interestingly enough, the first mention of the expression “the mountain of God’s being different” is in Isaiah 11:9, and this expression is found only in the writings of the prophets. In fact, it shows up seven times in Isaiah, once in Jeremiah, twice in Ezekiel, twice in Joel, once in Obadiah, once in Zephaniah, and once in Zechariah. Isaiah 11:9 reads,

**Isaiah 11:9** They will not do evil, and they will not be destructive in all the mountain of My being different, because the land will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea.

In this verse in Isaiah, God forecasts a time when the Jews on the land of Israel will obey Him properly, including in Zion and on the raised area of Jerusalem, which has been the location of the temple. Instead of being ignorant of God because they have misunderstood the Old Testament as a result of their rebellion against Him, they will correctly know Him and worship Him. Indeed, their knowledge and understanding of God will spread throughout the land of Israel as water spreads throughout an ocean.

Thus, in Joel 2:1ff., God commands that a cry be raised on His behalf at the very place where He connects to the earth and the Jews—the temple mount in Jerusalem. But verse 1 of Joel 2 also indicates that the blowing of the *shophar* and the shouting on the temple mountain are not for happy reasons—yet. Instead, these are an alarm that judgment, suffering, and anguish are coming upon the Jewish people. God’s intention is for them to tremble in fear, because the **Day of Yahweh** is arriving in full effect. This is the second of four instances in Joel of the phrase **Day of Yahweh**. We have seen before that it is a time of destruction for the land of Israel and the Jews who are living on it (Joel 1:15). This mention of it in Joel 2:1ff. is communicating the same kind of thing.

As Joel 2:2 says, it includes darkness and gloom, like the fourth *shophar* of Revelation 8:12, where the light from the sun, moon, and stars becomes a third less bright. In Joel, it also involves a well-equipped army which spreads out onto the land of Israel the way the early morning sun appears and spreads on the tops of mountains—slowly, relentlessly, and inevitably. Nothing can stop this army from taking over the land of Israel. It is inevitable that it will occupy the whole land. And here, in verse 2 of chapter 2, we have another important clue as to the time in history when this event takes place. God tells the Jews, “Nothing like it has happened in the distant past, and after it nothing will happen again into the years of generations and generations.” In other words, this is the most massive and

horrible invasion and destruction of the land of Israel along with its people, the Jews, that ever takes place in history. Of all the human invasions listed above, the twenty-eight or so which have already occurred and the one of the book of Revelation which is still to happen in the future, it is this last one which fits the criteria mentioned in Joel 2:2. “Nothing like it [will have] happened in the distant past, and after it nothing will happen again into the years of generations and generations.” Why is this latter point true? Because the devastation of Israel brought about by the armies of the Man of Lawlessness will be the last time that God allows anyone to harm His chosen people, the Jews. In addition, the invasion and destruction by this army will be suddenly arrested by the appearance of the Messiah Jesus, who will crush the army and set up his Messianic Kingdom in Jerusalem, in order to rule over Israel during the millennial period.

The suddenness with which this army disappears is well described by Daniel 11:45 in reference to the “king of the North,” whom it makes sense to identify as the Man of Lawlessness,

**Daniel 11:45** And he will pitch the tents of his palace between the seas towards the mountain of the beauty of being set apart, and he will come to his end, and there will be no one who helps him.

In this verse in Daniel, the “mountain of the beauty of being set apart” is the temple mount, the Zion of Jerusalem, and the “mountain of My being different” of Joel 2:1 and Isaiah 11:9. The leader of the invading army, the Man of Lawlessness, will bivouac near Jerusalem, and then all of a sudden he will disappear—because the Messiah will return and destroy his army and him as God’s judgment turns away from the Jews and towards the Gentiles.

Nevertheless, Revelation 20:7-10 does mention one final attempt later by the Gentiles to destroy the Jews, with the specific intent of destroying Jesus,

**Revelation 20:7** And when the thousand years have come to their end, the Adversary will be released from his prison.  
**20:8** And he will come out to deceive the Gentiles, who are among the four corners of the land—Gog and Magog, to gather them for war, whose number is as the sand of the sea.  
**20:9** And they came up on the broad plain of the land, and they surrounded the encampment of those who are set apart and the much loved city. And fire came down on them and consumed them.  
**20:10** And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. And they will be tortured day and night into the ages of ages.

As seen in the passage above, this last attempt to attack the Jews, Jesus, and the land of Israel will be merely an attempt, because, different from the previous situation with the army of the Man of Lawlessness, God will crush these efforts and prevent them from even getting off the ground so to speak. As a result, the Jews who survive the first invasion will be the first generation of several who will live peacefully on the land of Israel under the rule of their

Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, so that no harm will ever come to them again, even when the Gentiles attempt one last time to destroy them and their king, Jesus.

Thus, we have in Joel 2:2 with the words “Nothing like it has happened in the distant past, and after it nothing will happen again into the years of generations and generation” the clincher clue for determining the time of the events discussed in Joel. It is the final judgment by God of the Jews as described by the seven *shophars* and the seven bowls of wrath in Revelation. No invasion of the land of Israel and no harm brought to the Jews on the land prior to this final judgment will have been as intense, dramatic, and painful. In addition, it will be the final judgment of the Jews on the land. After it, they will always live in peace with Jesus ruling over them as their king.

Getting back to Joel’s details of the invasion in chapter 2, verse 3 describes this army’s destructive power as turning the Garden of Eden into a desert where no plant grows or appears. Their effect is like a fire which consumes and destroys everything in its path, and nothing and no one escapes the output of their weapons and crushing effects of their march through the land of Israel. In verses 4 and 5 of Joel 2, God tells his readers that their appearance and sound is like that of chariots driven by horses, which is very similar to the fifth *shophar* of Revelation 9:ff. and the locusts who come out of the smoke which issues forth from the abyss. In other words, the scene is one that is loud and tumultuous, with dust being thrown in the air as this army advances over hill and over dale. No topography is an obstacle to their forward march. As flames crackle and consume stubble on the ground, this army’s weapons and equipment which they use for moving themselves clangs and reverberates off the ground and each other, because, indeed, they are a mighty army trained and focused on perpetrating war on the land of Israel. The similarity to the fifth *shophar* of Revelation 9 may simply mean that Joel is describing the same events, but in a slightly different manner. In other words, there are obviously more details and nuances presented in the book of Revelation, so that Joel is a sort of shorthand form of God’s final judgment of the Jews on the land of Israel.

In Joel 2:6, the effect on the Jews of such sights and sounds is to cause them practically to faint. The blood drains from their faces, and they can only rock back and forth, groaning as they await their own destruction by this army. In vs. 7 and 8, God states that this army will never have to break ranks as it marches inexorably to occupy Israel. Walls are no obstacle. They simply go over them with ease. In v. 9, as this army comes upon a city, they rush into it. And if the city has walls, they run along them to spread out and occupy it. Houses present no obstacle either. They are just material objects with windows and doors through which this army passes easily, covering the whole area of the city.

The pounding on the ground of their boots and their equipment causes the ground to shake, as though the very heavens above are shaking too. The sun, moon, and stars add to the dismal experience of the Jews by somehow becoming dark, leaving the fires which burn from the attack as the only light for illuminating this calamitous scene of the army and the Jews. We have here elements of this final judgment that are similar to the fourth, sixth, and seventh *shophars* of the book of Revelation, i.e., to the sun, moon, and stars losing their brightness (fourth *shophar*), to a countless army invading the land (sixth *shophar*), and to the detrimental effects of this invading army (seventh *shophar*, along with the seven bowls of wrath).

### **Joel 2:11**

Moving on in Joel, verse 11 of chapter 2 reads,

**Joel 2:11** And Yahweh gives His voice before His army, because very great is His camp, because mighty is the one who is doing His message, because great is the **Day of Yahweh** and much to be feared. And who will endure it?

Here it makes sense that we have an editorial comment by Joel to the effect that this invading army which is spreading itself over the whole of the land of Israel and creating such massive destruction is ultimately getting their marching orders from the Jews' God, Yahweh. Their huge encampments at night are His encampments. Yahweh is their general, and they are merely carrying out His designs and wishes on the Jews. They are a large and strong army, invincible before the Jews up to this point in time, because God has made them such. Therefore and for the third time, the book of Joel mentions this phrase, the **Day of Yahweh**. And it is not a pretty picture for the Jews. Indeed, they can only fear it to the extent that the answer to the rhetorical question, Who will endure it, is basically no one—at least no one whom God places in the sights of these soldiers, so that they merely mow down the Jews, as is also the case with the different aspects of God's judgment described in the book of Revelation.

### **Joel 2:12-14**

So is there no hope for the Jews? God goes on to say in Joel 2:12-14,

**Joel 2:12** And also now, declares Yahweh, return to Me with all your hearts and with fasting and with weeping and with wailing.

**2:13** And tear your hearts and not your garments, and return to Yahweh, your God, because He is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, great in loyal love, and forgiving of evil.

**2:14** Who knows? He may turn and forgive. And He may cause to remain after Him a blessing. A gift and drink offering to your God.

Yes, there is hope for the Jews. But it can come only if they repent of their evil, their disobedience, and their immorality. In v. 12 of Joel 2, Yahweh exhorts them to “return to Me.” The word “return” is a very important one in the Old Testament. It is the Hebrew *shoov* (שׁוּב), meaning turn, return, turn around, or turn back. God is calling the Jews to turn from their evil and turn to Him and authentic goodness. And He wants them to do this “with all your hearts,” i.e., from an inwardness which is biblically authentic and genuine, which grasps the profundity of their moral depravity and evil, so that the emotional and outward effect of facing into their sin will cause them to lose their appetites (fast), weep, and wail before Him—not just because they are suffering from the catastrophic invasion of God's huge, foreign army, but because they truly feel sorry for their disobedience and evil. This is

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what God meant originally in Deuteronomy 10 and 30 when He commanded the Israelites to circumcise their hearts and then stated that only He would be able to do so and will do so. First, Deuteronomy 10:16 reads,

**Deuteronomy 10:16** And circumcise your heart, and no longer cause the back of your neck to be stiff.

And Deuteronomy 30:1-7 reads,

**Deuteronomy 30:1** And it will happen that all these things will come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have presented before you, and you will turn (*vahashayvota*, וְהִשְׁבֹּתָ) with respect to your heart among all the nations where Yahweh your God has driven you away.

**30:2** And you will return (*veshavta*, וְשָׁבָתָה) to Yahweh your God, and you will obey His voice with all your heart and with all your being according to all which I am commanding you today, you and your sons,

**30:3** and Yahweh your God will restore your fortunes (*vshav...eth shevoothka*, וְשָׁב...אֶת־שְׁבוּתְךָ), and He will have compassion on you, and He will turn (*veshav*, וְשָׁב) and gather you from all the peoples where Yahweh your God scattered you.

**30:4** If there are those of you who were driven away to the end of the heavens, from there Yahweh your God will gather you, and from there He will take you.

**30:5** And Yahweh your God will cause you to come into the land which your fathers possessed, and you will possess it, and He will cause good to happen to you, and He will cause you to be more numerous than your fathers.

**30:6** And Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, in order to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your being, in order that you may live.

**30:7** And Yahweh your God will place all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you.

Down through the millennia, the Jews have torn their clothes as an outward gesture of their repentance and sadness for their evil. But, in Joel 2:13, God wants them now, as the army is crushing their land and them, to have biblical inwardness which can be described as “tearing your hearts.” Like Joel 2:12, this is actually the circumcision of their hearts of Deuteronomy 10 and Deuteronomy 30. Once again, He commands them to return (*shoov*, שׁוּב) to Him, in spite of the fact that they have been outwardly worshiping Him by their priests bringing offerings to Him in the temple (even if only metaphorically), and thinking that this was enough.

The ultimate basis in v. 13 for the Jews’ authentic repentance will not be anything of their own creation. It will be only God, their God, Yahweh, who brings this about, because He is “gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, great in loyal love, and forgiving of evil.” The Hebrew word for gracious is חַנּוּן (*channoon*), which, like both ἐλεῆμων and χάρις in the New Testament, refers to God’s making the independent choice to treat someone who

deserves His condemnation and destruction with kindness instead, so that He even forgives them for their immorality and supplies them with eternal life.

The Hebrew word for compassionate is רַחוּם (*rachoom*), which, like οἰκτίρμων in the New Testament, refers to God's willingness to feel the pain of someone's evil and its effects, so that He foregoes punishing the person for it and, instead, works to cause the person to experience goodness and its beneficial effects.

The Hebrew words for slow to anger are אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם, (*'erek 'appayim*) which, like the noun form of μακρόθυμος in the New Testament, refers to God's willingness to be patient with people who deserve to be destroyed right away because of their evil. Instead, God waits, and waits, and waits, so that, eventually, He does not destroy people. Rather, He forgives them and grants them eternal life.

The Hebrew word for loyal love is חֶסֶד (*chesed*), which, like ἔλεος in the New Testament, refers to God's faithfulness to keep His promises, especially those He made to Abraham, whereby He would provide him with land, descendants, their becoming a great nation, and the blessing of eternal life to him and to those who exhibit the same kind of authentic belief which Abraham has performed. In this case, God may keep His promise to grant the Jews greatness in the world and living on their land safely—if they will but repent of their immorality.

The Hebrew word for forgiving is נָחַם (*nacham*), which, like μετανοέω in the New Testament, refers to someone's changing their mind. When a human being exhibits μετανοέω, he is choosing to change his mind from embracing immorality as the best way to live his life to embracing moral goodness instead. When God exhibits נָחַם (*nacham*) and μετανοέω, He chooses to forego condemning and destroying an immoral person or persons and, instead, granting them forgiveness and existence. It is all these characteristics of God which He uses as a basis for exhorting the Jews to repent of their immorality.

Then God/Joel asks another rhetorical question in v. 14, Who knows? Who knows what? If God will forgive these Jews *after* they have repented of their evil. The reason why I say that this is a rhetorical question is that the obvious theological answer on the basis of God's promises to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 12:1-3 is a resounding YES!! Joel says that God may turn. This is to say that, after the Jews have acted out the meaning of the word *shoov* (שׁוּב) as this word pertains to them and other human beings, God also may act out the meaning of this word *shoov* (שׁוּב) with respect to Himself. Human beings *shoov* by repenting of their evil. God *shoovs* by changing His mind from condemning and destroying human beings to being merciful/forgiving towards them and preserving and extending their lives, ultimately for all of eternity, even though they deserve to be destroyed. And when God *shoovs*, He also forgives as the Hebrew word *nacham* (נָחַם) indicates, especially, as here, when it is used in the intensifying form of the piel (נָחַמְתִּי). The result will also be that God will grant a "blessing" (*beracah*, בְּרָכָה) to the Jews. Is Joel speaking of the fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 12:2 to Abraham and his descendants to make of them a "great nation" (*goy gadol*, גּוֹי גָּדוֹל) in this temporary realm? And are God and Joel suggesting that the **Day of Yahweh** includes forgiving the Jews and making them dwell on the land of Israel in security and safety? This seems quite reasonable in the light of the book of Revelation.

Finally, in v. 14 God through Joel further exhorts the Jews to repent authentically before God in order that they may once again bring gifts and offerings to Him as part of the

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blessing of great prosperity which He will grant them. As we are discovering, this blessing easily corresponds to the establishment of the messianic Kingdom of God in Jerusalem by Jesus when he returns along with there being a new temple on Zion—as mentioned very briefly in Revelation 19 and 20.

### **Joel 2:15-17**

Then, in the next paragraph of Joel 2:15-17, there is a second call to alert the people with the sound of the *shophar*, etc.,

- Joel 2:15** Blow a *shophar* in Zion. Set apart a fast. Call an assembly.  
**2:16** Gather the people. Set apart the congregation. Gather the old men. Gather the children and nursing infants. Let the bridegroom go out from his room and the bride from her chamber.  
**2:17** Between the porch and the altar, let the priests, those who are serving Yahweh, weep. And let them say, Take pity, Yahweh, on Your people, and do not make Your possession a reproach, a proverb among the Gentiles. Why should they say amongst the peoples, Where is their God?

However, this “alarm” with the *shophar* which is to be accompanied by fasting and gathering the people together, i.e., the whole congregation of the Jewish people on the land which includes the old men, the children and nursing infants (and their mothers I assume), along with any young man who is planning on getting married and his bride, does not sound so alarming as the previous paragraph of Joel 2:1-10 where God first called for the blowing of the *shophar*. This sounds more like vs. 12-14 as a call to repentance. Indeed, v. 17 exhorts the priests to appeal to God for mercy on behalf of the Jews, His people, who are His inheritance or possession (*nachalah*, נַחֲלָה). God’s “inheritance” or “possession” is first mentioned in the Old Testament in Exodus 15:17,

**Exodus 15:17** You will cause them to come, and You will plant them on the mountain of Your possession (*nachalateka*, נַחֲלַתְּךָ), the place, Yahweh, You have made for Your dwelling, the set apart place, *Adonai*, which Your hands established.

But this inheritance or possession of God in Exodus 15:17 is the “mountain” where Yahweh “has made His dwelling,” which eventually is Jerusalem and Zion, the temple mount. In contrast, the people of Israel are called God’s inheritance or possession in Deuteronomy 4:20,

**Deuteronomy 4:20** And Yahweh has taken you, and He has caused you to go out from the iron furnace, in order that you may be His people, His possession (*nachalah*, נַחֲלָה), as it is today.

Thus, in the light of what the priests are commanded to say in Joel 2:17 at the beginning of their statement, “Take pity, Yahweh, on Your people...,” it makes sense that the possession of God which they next mention is the people, too. The priests are to call upon



God to take away the shame which the Jews are feeling as they are being oppressed, crushed, and killed by the massive Gentile army. The Gentiles are delighted that they are exercising such controlling power over the Jews, and it is nothing short of embarrassing for the Jews, especially when they know that they are the chosen people of the one, true God, Yahweh. It is as though their God has disappeared, so that the Gentiles can legitimately ask in v. 17, Where is their [the Jews'] God? However, unbeknownst to the Gentiles, He is right there, orchestrating their attack on Israel and their partial destruction of the Jews—but only for His purposes ultimately and not theirs, because He is the God of the Jews who has promised not only to judge them in the present realm for their disobedience, but also to turn them into the greatest nation on earth during the messianic kingdom (cf. Genesis 12:1-3; Deuteronomy 28). And all this is also mentioned briefly in Revelation 19 and 20.

### **Joel 2:18-20**

The next paragraph of Joel 2:18-20 begins a section of encouragement and hope for the Jews,

- Joel 2:18** And Yahweh is jealous for His land, and He pities His people.  
**2:19** And Yahweh answered and said to His people, Behold, I am sending you grain, new wine, and oil. And you will be satisfied with them, and I will not give you again as a reproach among the Gentiles.  
**2:20** Now, as for My northerners, I will cause them to be far away from you. And I will drive them away to a dry and desolate land, their vanguard into the eastern sea, and their rear guard into the western sea. And their stench will go up, and their smell will go up, because they have done great things.

First, in v. 18, Joel states explicitly that God has great concern for the suffering of His chosen people, and He is jealous enough of their land and His that He is anxious to take it back from the invading Gentile army. Thus, we have a preface and prelude to the much more positive statements about the Jews which follow. The question, though, about v. 19 is whether God will answer His people with these encouraging words *if they repent*, or *because they will repent*. Is this section of hope for the Jews strictly conditional, and there is even the theological possibility that they will not repent? Or is this section indicative of exactly what is going to take place—because God will cause the Jews to repent? It makes sense, in the light of, for example, Deuteronomy 30 as mentioned above and God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2 to make of his descendants a great nation as also mentioned above, that v. 19 is not strictly conditional, but also very much indicative. This is to say that it is describing exactly what God is going to do, in spite of the "present" stubbornness and unbelief of the Jews. He will internally cause their hearts to soften, cause them to repent, and the result will be that He will rescue them from the invading Gentile army and provide them with an abundance of food afterwards. He will also ensure that they are never embarrassed again in the face of the rest of the Gentile nations by becoming subject to them or being harmed by them.

And when will this occur? Does this, too, fit with the events of Revelation as suggested above, so that there are Jews still living, even on the land, in the midst of and in spite of the huge invasion of a Gentile army which produces such a great loss of food and material on the land? Yes. In addition to God's acts of judgment on Israel in Revelation, there are also God's actions of mercy to Israel both during and after His judgment. Consequently, these remaining Jews are the 144,000 of Revelation 7:4-8 and the 144,000 who stand with the Lamb in Revelation 14:1-5. First, Revelation 7:4-8 reads,

- Revelation 7:4** And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.
- 7:5** From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand,
- 7:6** from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand,
- 7:7** from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand,
- 7:8** from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand. From the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

And Revelation 14:1-5 reads,

- Revelation 14:1** And I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with him were a hundred and forty-four thousand, who have his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads.
- 14:2** And I heard a sound from heaven, like the sound of many waters, like the sound of loud thunder, and the sound which I heard was like lyre players playing on their lyres.
- 14:3** And they were singing a new song in front of the throne, in front of the four living beings and the old men. And no one was able to learn the song, except the one hundred and forty-four thousand, who were bought from the land.
- 14:4** These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were bought from men as the first-fruits to God and the Lamb.
- 14:5** And no lie is found in their mouth. They are blameless.

Thus, these Jews in Revelation are the same ones who become blessed with grain, new wine, and oil in Joel 2:19. They also will never experience again the abuse and oppression from Gentiles, because Jesus the Messiah will set up his kingdom and guard them for the rest of their existence as a nation on the present earth, down through at least several generations. Revelation 14 does make them sound as though they are morally perfect. However, I think that this is simply this passage's way of saying that, in comparison to Jews who have heretofore disobeyed God by rejecting Jesus as their Messiah, these Jews are wonderfully moral, even though they are not morally perfect.

In v. 20 of Joel 2, God mentions His "northerners," whom He will distance from the Jews and even destroy. In this context, these are the soldiers of the Gentile army who have invaded the land and created so much havoc. God will destroy them in conjunction with the

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return of the Messiah as spoken of in both Daniel 11 and Revelation 19:11ff. Let me quote at least Revelation 19:11-21,

- Revelation 19:11** And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he who sat on it was named Faithful and True. And he judges and wages war in righteousness.
- 19:12** His eyes are like the flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written which no one knows except him.
- 19:13** And he has been clothed in a garment which has been dipped in blood. And his name has been called the Message of God.
- 19:14** And the armies in heaven are following him on white horses. They have been clothed in white, clean linen.
- 19:15** And from his mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it he may strike down the Gentiles, and he will shepherd them with an iron scepter. And he tramples the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of God the Almighty One.
- 19:16** And on his garment and on his thigh he has a name that has been written, The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.
- 19:17** And I saw one angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds who fly in mid-heaven, Come, gather for the great supper of God,
- 19:18** so that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of commanders, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of every kind of human being, of those who are free or slaves, and small and great.
- 19:19** And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered to make war with him who sits on the horse and with his army.
- 19:20** And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed signs in front of him, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire, which burns with sulphur.
- 19:21** And the rest were killed with the sword of the one who sits on the horse, which comes out of his mouth. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

This is obviously a very graphic description of Jesus' return and his destruction of the army which has invaded Israel. But this is the point. After the army acts as God's tool of judgment on the Jews, God will destroy the army for their hearts of evil and their inwardly opposing Him and His chosen people, the Jews. In other words, if God ever asks you to fight against the Jews and destroy them, just say No. Even though the army of Joel and Revelation is acting on behalf of God in order to carry out His strict orders of judging the Jews, nevertheless He will hold them accountable for their evil of opposing and injuring His chosen people. And the result will be that Jesus will squash them with his feet in the winepress of the judgment of God.

In addition to looking at Revelation 19, it is helpful to notice that the prophetic books of the Old Testament typically refer to Israel's enemies as coming from the north. A good example is Jeremiah 1:13-15 which reads,

- Jeremiah 1:13** And the message of Yahweh came to me a second time, saying, What are you seeing? And I said, I am seeing a flaming pot, and its face is from the face of the north.

- 1:14** And Yahweh said to me, From the north the evil will be opened on all those who are dwellers of the land,  
**1:15** because, behold, I am calling to all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares Yahweh, and they will come, and they will put a man, his throne, at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and on all the surrounding walls, and in all the cities of Judah.

Plus, we can add Ezekiel 38:14-16, which reads,

- Ezekiel 38:14** Therefore prophesy, son of man, and you shall say to Gog, Thus says Adonai Yahweh, Will you not know that day when My people Israel are dwelling securely?  
**38:15** And you will come from your place out of the extreme parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, mounted on horses, the whole great assembly and a mighty army.  
**38:16** And you will go up against My people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. It will be in the last days, and I will cause you to come against My land, in order that the Gentiles may know Me, when I am set apart because of you for their eyes, Gog.

Thus, we find in Jeremiah 1 and Ezekiel 38 corroboration with Revelation 9 and 19 that God is going to bring a vast army from the north into the land of Israel, and they will create such devastation that has not been seen before. However, Joel 2:20 and Revelation 19:15ff. also describe God's judgment and destruction of this Gentile army, in spite of the fact that they are correctly executing God's judgment on the Jews. They are doing the right thing by being an instrument of judgment in God's hand towards the Jews, but they are doing the wrong thing by opposing Him and His chosen people, especially in their hearts. The destruction of the Gentile invaders also corresponds to the fifth and seventh bowls of wrath of Revelation 16:10ff. when God turns from judging only the Jews to judging also the Gentiles who have devastated their land and them.<sup>6</sup>

### **Joel 2:21,22**

Going back to Joel 2, vs. 21 and 22 offer more encouraging words to the Jews who survive the onslaught of the northern army. These verses address the land, the animals on the land, and the plants,

- Joel 2:21** You will not fear, O land. Rejoice and be glad, because Yahweh has done great things.  
**2:22** You will not fear, beasts of the field, because the pastures of the wilderness have turned green, because the tree has born its fruit. The fig tree and the vine have given their strength.

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<sup>6</sup> Other passages worth considering in this respect are Jeremiah 4:6; 6:1,22; 25:9,26; 47:2; and 50:3.

As already mentioned in connection with Joel 1:18, the Bible sometimes personifies impersonal aspects of the creation and comments on the emotional strain which they are experiencing because of man's moral depravity. In this case, too, it is the land of Israel with its cattle that are feeling much better than when the northern army laid waste to most of it and them respectively. Yahweh "has done great things," meaning that He has decided to be merciful not only to the Jews and eradicate the foreign army from their land, so that they can thrive once again, but also to the land itself and its animals, by making them thrive again. In line with it making sense that all this will occur around the time of the return of the Messiah, the new and prosperous experience of the land and cattle will be a part of the millennial Kingdom of God with Jesus as its king. However, the book of Revelation does not describe as explicitly as Joel the prosperity and safety of the Jews during the millennial kingdom (cf. Revelation 20:1-6).

### **Joel 2:23,24**

Then, in vs. 23 and 24 of Joel 2, God speaks of the Jews themselves and the effect that bringing about the millennial kingdom will have on them,

**Joel 2:23** As for the sons of Zion, rejoice and be glad in Yahweh your God, because He has given you the early rain for righteousness, and He has caused to go down to you the early rain and the spring rains as in the beginning.

**2:24** And the threshing floors are filled with grain, and the wine-vats overflow with new wine and oil.

Joel calls the Jews "the sons of Zion," because they are God's children so to speak whose focus is intended to be on Him, the One who has chosen Jerusalem as the city where His "house" and temple are located. It is here that God connects to the earth and His people by virtue of requiring that they perform their offerings and sacrifices on Zion. Joel commands them on behalf of God to be joyful because of Yahweh and His decision to be forgiving and gracious towards them that results in their having sufficient water from the rains to grow enough food for all their needs. As a result, in v. 24, their threshing floors are not lacking for grain to thresh, and their wine-vats are not lacking for grapes and olives to press in order to make wine and olive oil respectively.

### **Joel 2:25-27**

God then describes in Joel 2:25-27 this blessing (*berecakh*, cf. Joel 2:14) which He will give them as a result of their repentance,

**Joel 2:25** And I will restore the years to you which the locust (#1) ate, the locust (#2), the locust (#3), and the caterpillar, My great army which I sent among you.

**2:26** And you will surely eat and be satisfied, and you will praise the name of Yahweh your God, who did with you to cause something wonderful. And My people will never be ashamed again.

**2:27** And you will know that in the midst of Israel I, and only I, am Yahweh your God. There is no other, and My people will never be ashamed again.

First, God reminds the Jews, as if they really need reminding, that His great “army” of locusts, whether actual or metaphorical (meaning human soldiers), had devastated their land and food supply for “years.” He is taking direct and personal responsibility for the horrible devastation which they have endured. It was His judgment in response to their disobedience and the threats which He made in the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy 28 which caused such havoc and heartache in their lives. However, He now guarantees, in line with His promise to Abraham, to make of them a “great nation.” This also is in line with what Revelation implies concerning the millennial kingdom of Jesus as the Jews’ king, that God will not only restore the land to its original condition of being a sufficient source of food for them, but also cause them to eat and eat and eat, so much so that they cannot help themselves but express their gratitude and admiration for God (v. 26). God also repeats the fact that the Jews will never again experience any embarrassment in the presence of their former enemies, i.e., any Gentiles who have wished them ill and have sought to destroy them, even coming close to doing so as in the case of the recent northern army.

God adds in v. 27 that all these great things which will happen to the Jews will cause them to grasp intellectually that He is present among them and that He is their sole Creator, Provider, and source of life and existence in this world (and in the next realm of the eternal Kingdom of God, because of their authentic inwardness and belief). Then, one more time, God declares that the Jews will never again experience feelings of shame from being attacked, oppressed, and defeated by Gentiles and their armies.

### **Joel 2:28-3:3**

The next paragraph in Joel is long, and the verse numbering in the English translations is different from the Hebrew text. Therefore, I list the English chapter and verse numbers first, and then the Hebrew chapter and verse numbers are on the right side of the / mark. I will refer to only the English chapter and verse designations. Thus, Joel 2:28-3:3 reads,

**Joel 2:28/3:1** And it shall come to pass after this, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. And your sons and your daughters will speak on behalf of God. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions.

**2:29/3:2** And also on your servants and your maidservants, in those days I will pour out My Spirit.

**2:30/3:3** And I will give signs in the heavens, and on the land blood, fire, and columns of smoke.

**2:31/3:4** The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, in the presence of the coming of the **Day of Yahweh**, the great and fearful One.

**2:32/3:5** And it will happen that all who call upon the name of Yahweh will escape to safety, because in the mountain of Zion and Jerusalem there will be someone who escapes to safety, just as Yahweh said, even among the survivors whom Yahweh is calling—

**3:1/4:1** because, behold, in those days and in that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,

**3:2/4:2** I will gather all the Gentiles. And I will cause them to go down to the Valley of Yahweh's Judgment, and I will judge them there concerning My people and My possession, Israel, whom they scattered among the nations. And My land they divided.

**3:3/4:3** And for My people they cast lots, and they gave a boy in the place of a prostitute, and they sold a girl for wine, and they drank.

Verse 28 is critical to understanding all of Joel, because, depending upon how we interpret the word which I have translated “flesh,” it will take us in either one direction or another. In 1611, the translators of the King James Version translated the Hebrew word *basar* (בָּשָׂר) as “flesh.” However, since then, the New American Standard in 1977 translated it “mankind,” the New International Version in 1984 translated it “people,” and even the Complete Jewish Bible translated it “humanity.” These last three translations take the reader in the direction of concluding that God is saying that He will pour out His Spirit on both Jews and Gentiles throughout the entire world. However, this does not make sense in the context, which has been referring to a new experience for the Jews living on the land of Israel after the attack and invasion of a Gentile army. Right within v. 28 where God speaks of pouring out His Spirit, four times He uses the personal possessive pronoun “your,” which logically refers to the same people, i.e., your sons, your daughters, your old men, your young men, on whom God has poured out His Spirit. Therefore, it makes sense that the Hebrew phrase *‘al kol basar* (עַל-כָּל-בָּשָׂר) is best translated “on all flesh” as referring to every Jew living on the land of Israel. This phrase could just as easily be translated “everyone,” i.e., everyone in this context who survives the huge, destroying, northern army of the Gentiles on the land of Israel, everyone who then repents before God, and, therefore, everyone who is a Jew in this specific area and country, not in the whole world.

God is saying that He is going to change every Jew of the land of Israel and make them *bona fide* believers in Yahweh, to the extent that older people and younger people will speak about God as if they were Old Testament prophets. Their knowledge, understanding, and grasp of God and His plans and purposes as expressed in the Old Testament (and also the New Testament by extrapolation) will be so good that people really should listen to what they have to say—for their own sakes.

In v. 29, God states that He will also cause this kind of change to occur for anyone who is serving the Jews in their households, meaning, I suppose, anyone who works for the Jews in the land of Israel, but who may not actually be a Jew. Thus, during the northern invasion, there may be Gentiles in the midst of the Jews who remain in the country, braving (or caught in) the onslaught of this army, and who afterwards become authentic believers like the Jews who survive.

In vs. 30 and 31, God mentions again obvious things which will occur in the realm of the “heavens,” i.e., where exist the sun and the moon. These latter astronomical objects will somehow lose their light. In addition, there will be blood, fire, and smoke on the land, this is to say on the land of Israel. And, for the third time in Joel, God calls this event the **Day of Yahweh**, which is a set of circumstances to be feared—for the Jews, so far. But we have already learned this from 2:1 and 2:11 and their surrounding context. Then why is God now calling this time the **Day of Yahweh** in the context of the wonderful and joyful news of

pouring out His Spirit and changing the hearts of the Jews and their workers? Because all of this constitutes the **Day of Yahweh**, both the negative and the positive aspects, both the suffering and the restoring, both the destruction and the reconstruction of the needed elements of the land of Israel and the culture and society of the Jews who live on this land which God promised them through Abraham.

As a result, God can go on to say in v. 32 that everyone (*col*, כָּל), which is to say every Jew, who genuinely and authentically appeals to Him for mercy in Israel, and who properly understands His connection with the Jews via the temple mount and His “house,” will escape the judgment and destruction of God which comes in the form of the invading army. God is stating that there will be surviving Jews, and He will “call” them to repent by changing them inwardly through the work of His Spirit.

Then, Joel 3:1-3 makes an important transition from the judgment and spiritual revival of the Jews to the judgment of the Gentiles who have harbored ill-will towards the Jews and even sought to destroy them. This is the third use of *shoov* (שׁוּב) (=turn, return, turn back, turn towards) in Joel. The Jews have returned to God, and God has turned from destroying them. These both constitute God’s turning the fortunes of the Jews from disaster to prosperity and security. The Hebrew word which I translate “fortunes” is very similar to *shoov*. It is *shevooth* (שְׁבוּתָהּ), and its exact meaning is difficult to discern. There is one clear instance in the book of Job, chapter 42, verse 10, where, in conjunction with *shoov*, it means the restoration of Job’s fortunes after he has lost everything—his family, his herds and flocks, etc. God returns his life to what it was before all his losses, and then even to more than what it was,

**Job 42:10** And Yahweh restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed on behalf of his friends, and Yahweh increased everything which belonged to Job by doubling it.

Therefore, I am fairly confident that God is talking about bringing about a new experience for the Jews after all the heartache which they went through, such that they will have all the food and necessities they could desire for living well on the land of Israel during Jesus’ messianic government which lasts for at least several generations. And God turns from judging the Jews to judging the Gentiles. In v. 2 of Joel 3, we learn that He gathers the Gentiles and leads them, whether they want to or not, into what He calls the Valley of Yahweh’s Judgment (*’el ’emeq yehoshophat*, אֶל-עֵמֶק יְהוֹשֻׁפָּט). This concerns the Gentiles who “scattered among the nations” the Jews, who occupied and divided up His land, the land of Israel, and who used Jewish children as bargaining chips for prostitutes and wine. This sounds again like the people who ultimately invade Israel under the leadership of the Man of Lawlessness and who wreak so much destruction of crops and people on the land. Their end will be God’s judging and destroying them. In the light of connecting the book of Joel to Revelation, this would also be at the pouring out the of the sixth bowl of wrath, when God gathers the Gentiles together for the Battle of *Har-Magedon* (Armageddon) in Revelation 16:16. It is also Jesus’ destruction of the invading armies as described in Revelation 19:11-21 above.



### **Joel 3:4-8**

In the next paragraph of Joel 3:4-7, God addresses Himself to three specific ancient peoples who interacted with Israel—Tyre, Sidon, and the Philistines,

- Joel 3:4/4:4** Also, what are you to Me, Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you completing a recompense on My behalf? And if you are paying Me back, swiftly and quickly I will return your payback on your head—
- 3:5/4:5** because you took My silver and gold, and you caused My good treasures to go into your temples.
- 3:6/4:6** In addition, you sold the sons of Judah and the sons of Jerusalem to the sons of the Javenites, in order to cause them to be far away from their border.
- 3:7/4:7** Behold, I am stirring them up from the place where you sold them, and I will cause to return your payback on your head.
- 3:8/4:8** And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a faraway nation, because Yahweh has spoken.

Tyre was well known in the Old Testament for its being the source of wood to build both the king's palace by David around 1000 B.C. and the temple in Jerusalem by Solomon soon afterwards (cf. 2 Samuel 5; 1 Kings 9). It was also a prosperous shipping port on the Mediterranean Sea north of Israel in what is now Lebanon. Sidon was likewise a prosperous shipping port on the Mediterranean Sea just north of Tyre. The Philistines are mentioned in the Old Testament as inhabitants of the land of Canaan when Abraham entered and settled in this land (cf. Genesis 21:32,34). Five hundred years later, they become Israel's enemy after they crossed the Jordan River into the land under Joshua's leadership (cf. Judges 3). Delilah, Samson's lover, was a member of the Philistine nation, and it was many of their leaders who died when Samson caused their temple of Dagon to collapse (cf. Judges 16:23ff.). Later, after defeating the Israelites in battle, the Philistines stole the ark of the covenant, which was soon returned during the time of Samuel (cf. 1 Samuel 4-6). Goliath was a Philistine (cf. 1 Samuel 17).

Why is God picking on these three groups of people in Joel, especially if they will probably not exist as the exact same people groups when the northern army invades the land of Israel immediately before the return of the Messiah, which is still future to us? Probably because they represent well all the different Gentile nations who have either ignored God and worshiped other gods with pride and arrogance, like Tyre and Sidon, or have both been the Jews' perennial and enduring enemy and ignored God while worshiping other gods, like the Philistines. They have demonstrated their rebellion against the one, true God of Israel, and, here in Joel, Yahweh is declaring that He will pay them back for their evil.

We can see that God also lumps these three peoples together in Jeremiah 47:1-4 as He predicts the Babylonian invasion of 605-586 B.C.,

- Jeremiah 47:1** The message, which came to Jeremiah the prophet for the Philistines, before Pharaoh killed 'Azzah (Gaza),
- 47:2** Thus says Yahweh, Behold, waters are rising up from the north, and they will be an overflowing torrent, and they will overflow the land and its fullness, the city and those who dwell in it. And the men will cry out, and they will wail, all those who are dwellers of the land,

- 47:3 because of the sound of the galloping hooves of its mighty ones, because of the quaking that belongs to its chariots, the sound of its wheels. The fathers did not turn towards their sons, because of the feebleness of their hands.
- 47:4 Concerning the day that is coming to destroy all the Philistines, to cut off Tyre and Sidon, all the survivors who are helping, because Yahweh is destroying the Philistines, the remnant of the coastland of *Caphtor*.

Then, in Joel 3:4, God asks the people of Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia if they are engaged in some kind of paying Him back. When Jesus returns, these people will have been long gone as strong and vibrant “nations.” However, they are good representatives of those who would want to return the favor to God, who destroyed the cities of Tyre and Sidon along with the Philistine people in ancient times, by being a part of the destruction of the land of Israel and the Jews which is described in Joel. God is asking them, as representatives of anyone who would seek to harm the Jews, if this is what they are doing. Are they thinking that they can pay God back for any harm He may have caused them in response to their harming the Jews? The perversity of human moral depravity is so deep that people believe that they can fight God, pay Him back for suffering which He has caused them, and get away with opposing Him. In the case of Israel’s ancient enemies or just plain pagan idolators, God will bring the hammer down on them and pay them back for either refusing to worship Him or seeking to harm His chosen people, or both. The transcendent, eternal God is obviously the stronger entity here, but people mistakenly think that they can outwit and outfight God. We really are stupid and evil creatures!

In v. 5 of Joel 3, God accuses the people of Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia of stealing His silver, gold, and the objects of His temple made with these valuable metals. Certainly, the Philistines had stolen the ark of the covenant and placed it in their temple to the fish-god Dagon (cf. Judges 16:23ff.). Tyre and Sidon are listed as people who would not be properly concerned if God’s valuable objects in His temple were stolen, because they worshiped other gods anyway.

In v. 6, God mentions the Jews’ being sold into slavery by these people to the Javenites. The problem is to figure out who are the Javenites, and it is not easy to do, because the evidence is scant. Some have suggested that they are the Greeks. But I am not sure. The one clue which we have in this verse to identify them is that their country or dwelling place is not close to Israel, because God describes the reason for the Jews being sold to them as “to cause them to be far away from their border,” from the land of Israel.

Verse 7 reveals that God will bring these Jews back to their land, so that they can pay back the people of Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia as representatives of their and God’s enemies. The result will be, as stated in v. 8, that these three peoples will be sold into slavery, first to the Jews and then by the Jews to the Sabeans, who also are “a faraway nation.” The Hebrew word Sabean is *sheva* (שֶׁבַע). The most famous Sabean in the Old Testament was the Queen of *Sheva* (מֶלֶכֶת שֶׁבַע) in 1 Kings 10 who heard about Solomon’s wisdom and was so intrigued that she traveled the long distance from southern Arabia (Saudi Arabia today) to visit him. Thus, *Sheva* is far from Israel, as would be the case according to v. 6 for the land of the Javenites, if we only knew exactly where these people lived (or will live). Therefore, God is saying that, just as Israel’s and His immoral and evil enemies, as represented by Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia, have treated the Jews like chattel, so will the Jews have the opportunity

basically to do the same, because God will defeat His enemies after they have wreaked havoc on the land of Israel just prior to the return of the Messiah. I would not expect the Jews to engage in human trafficking *per se* as Joel is describing, but that God is saying that He will deal with Israel's enemies in such a way that He pays them back for their treatment of His people. As a result, God will exile them from their homes and destroy them—as in the Valley of Yahweh's Judgment (cf. Joel 3:2).

It is also interesting that, in Matthew 11:21,22, Jesus speaks of the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon as being more open to his being the Messiah than the Jewish, Galilean cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida in his day,

**Matthew 11:21** Damn you, Chorazin! Damn you, Bethsaida! If the miracles which occurred in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

**22** Consequently, I say to you that it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

### **Joel 3:9-11**

The last four paragraphs of Joel are recapitulations of the major themes of the book –

1. God's calling an army from the north to invade Israel as judgment on the Jews
2. His judging and destroying these same people
3. His remaining faithful to His promise to rescue the Jews from their enemies
4. His remaining faithful to His promise to make of the Jews a great nation

The first of these paragraphs is Joel 3:9-11, which reads,

**Joel 3:9/4:9** Call this out among the Gentiles, Set apart a war. Stir up the mighty ones. Let them draw near. Let them go up, all the men of war.

**3:10/4:10** Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak person say, I am a mighty man.

**3:11/4:11** Hasten and come, all you surrounding Gentiles, and gather yourselves there. Cause to descend, Yahweh, Your mighty men.

Before or in the midst of God's commanding that the *shophar* be blown in Israel to alert the Jews that an army is about to invade them in the **Day of Yahweh** (cf. Joel 2:1-10), God also commands that the Gentiles of this northern army be alerted to ready themselves for war. Here in Joel 3:9, God wants those who exhibit great strength to travel towards the land of Israel and proceed "up" towards Jerusalem, because Jerusalem is always "up" in relation to other places in the world. The war preparations of these nations is spelled out in v. 10. They should take their agricultural tools and convert them to weapons of war, because this army will feed on the crops and herds of the Jews in the land of Israel. They will not need to bring their own food. In this manner, they will destroy the food supply of the Jews by not allowing them to have any of what they themselves have grown on the land of Israel. In addition, the "mighty ones" of v. 9 were originally "weak," perhaps in comparison to the Jews and their

military strength. However, God is encouraging the soldiers of this invading army to consider themselves strong, because it is ultimately He who will cause them to be victorious over the Jews.

In v. 11, God continues to encourage this vast Gentile army to hurry and muster on the land. Joel himself also speaks in this verse and encourages God to cause this army of weak but turned-strong men to descend from the north onto the land of Israel and complete its mission, especially because of what God has planned for the army once it has accomplished His purposes with respect to the Jews. As a man of authentic belief, Joel is sensing the rightness of what God is doing and expresses his agreement with God.

### **Joel 3:12-15**

God then continues with this last theme in Joel 3:12-15,

- Joel 3:12/4:12** Let the Gentiles be stirred up, and let them go up to the Valley of Yahweh's Judgment, because there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.  
**3:13/4:13** Send the sickle, because the harvest grows ripe. Come, tread, because the wine press is full. The wine vats overflow, because great is their evil.  
**3:14/4:14** Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of the Threshing Board, because the **Day of Yahweh** is drawing near in the Valley of the Threshing Board.  
**3:15/4:15** The sun and the moon have grown dark, and the stars have gathered their brightness.

In v. 12, we see that God wants the Gentiles not only to attack Israel, but also to gather together in one place where He will judge and destroy them. God calls this place the “Valley of Yahweh’s Judgment,” that is, the Valley of Jehoshaphat (*‘emeq yehoshaphat*, עֵמֶק יְהוֹשָׁפָט), the name which He has already used in Joel 3:2. He also says in v. 13 that it will be like cutting down grain stalks and squashing grapes in a winepress where the juice from the crushed grapes flows over the sides of the vat, probably referring to the amount of blood which will leave these soldiers’ bodies when God kills them for harming His people, even though they are properly His instruments of judging the nation of Israel. This sounds very much like Revelation 19:15 where the returning Messiah Jesus is described as the one who “tramples the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of God the Almighty One.”

Then, in v. 14, God calls this same place of judgment of the Gentile army the Valley of the Threshing Board (*‘emeq hecharootz*, עֵמֶק הַחַרְרוּץ). The Hebrew word *charootz* (חַרְרוּץ) has at least seven different meanings—gold, town-moat, incision, threshing board, mutilation, decision (?), and diligent. I wonder about the appropriateness of “decision” as a meaning, which is how the KJV, NIV, NAS95, and other English Bibles interpret it, when God has just used an agricultural metaphor to refer to the judgment of these Gentiles and when there does not seem to be much evidence otherwise for translating *charootz* this way. Therefore, in line with the metaphor in the context, it makes sense that God means “threshing board,” even though He is definitely making a very important decision about the Gentile army, i.e., to condemn and destroy them. But He will do so as if they are grain which is being threshed and crushed, and just as grapes are squashed and turned into juice. In conjunction with this

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judgment, the astronomical signs of the sun, the moon, and the stars losing their light are once again mentioned in v. 15 (cf. Joel 2:10,31). Thus, whether it is the judgment of Israel or the judgment of the Gentiles, the luminaries of the heavens somehow become greatly less luminous as their contribution to these events.

### **Joel 3:16**

We also notice that God refers to both the judgment of the Jews and the judgment of the Gentile army as the **Day of Yahweh**. In His mind, they go together. In addition, God must be lumping into the **Day of Yahweh** the revival and restoring of the Jews to a level of life and prosperity on the land which will also spell the end of any risk of being harmed by their enemies, because God mentions in the third of the last four restatement paragraphs, in Joel 3:16,

**Joel 3:16/4:16** As for Yahweh, from Zion He will roar, and from Jerusalem He will give His voice. And the heavens and the earth will tremble. But Yahweh is a refuge for His people and a stronghold for the sons of Israel.

Metaphorically, the creation will hear and respond with quaking to God's calling forth the Gentile army, their destruction of the land of Israel and the Jews, the judgment and destruction of the foreign army by God, and the revival and restoration of the Jewish nation, so that they become the Kingdom of God under the rule of their Messiah Jesus. This is all because God's ultimate plan, in the present realm, is to rescue and protect His chosen people, the Jews, from their enemies and for the rest of the existence of the Messiah's millennial kingdom. And the creation is so impressed with all this display of the Creator's own character, promises, and threats that it trembles at the sight, which is what human beings should do with authentic belief and genuine worship of God, if they know what is good for them.

It is helpful to notice that Amos mentions in verse 1 of chapter 1 of his book that he was speaking to the Jews two years before an earthquake. Could this be the earthquake to which Joel is referring in Joel 3:16? Certainly not if the rest of Joel indicates that the time period of his events are just before and during the return of Jesus the Messiah, which it seems very reasonable to conclude from our analysis. Therefore, it does not make sense that the earth/heaven quake of which God is speaking in Joel is the same as Amos 1:1, which reads,

**Amos 1:1** The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Also, the fact that Joel is talking about the judgment and revival of the Jews in conjunction with the return of Jesus the Messiah and not the earthquake in the book of Amos means that we cannot conclusively date Joel as having lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. when Amos lived. So the exact time period of Joel's life is still a mystery.

### **Joel 3:17-21**

The final paragraph of the book of Joel and that also recapitulates a previous theme is Joel 3:17-21, which reads,

- Joel 3:17/4:17** And you will know that I am Yahweh, your God, the One who dwells in Zion, the mountain of My being set apart. And Jerusalem will be set apart, and strangers will not cross over into it again.
- 3:18/4:18** And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains will drip sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah will flow with water, and a spring will go out from the house of Yahweh, and it will cause to drink the valley of *Shitteem*.
- 3:19/4:19** Egypt will become desolate, and Edom will be a desolate wilderness for the violence of the sons of Judah, who poured innocent blood on their land.
- 3:20/4:20** And Judah will dwell into perpetuity, and Jerusalem from generation to generation.
- 3:21/4:21** And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged. And Yahweh is dwelling in Zion.

Clearly addressing only the Jews, God begins this paragraph in v. 17 with the statement that all His judgment and revival activity will result in the Jews' finally understanding their God the way He has wanted them to understand Him for over 3,500 years, i.e., since He rescued them from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. In addition, He is the God who lives in Jerusalem and, specifically, on the rise in this city where His temple has been located and will be located—if we can now say with more confidence that there will be a rebuilt temple either during or after the time of the judgment by the northern army and Jesus' return.

As mentioned earlier, it is on the temple mount where, in addition to Jesus himself, God connects with His people and is present in the Ancient Near Eastern fashion of Genesis 28. Once the Jews have all reached this level of spirituality and become authentic, changed of heart believers, their capital city Jerusalem will contain only people who have been inwardly set apart like them. No one else will be tolerated there, or maybe it is simply that no one else will even want to go there, because unbelievers will remain fundamentally hostile to Jesus, his people the Jews, and the place where genuine worship of God is taking place.

According to v. 18, this time period, which we have identified from Revelation as the millennial kingdom of the Messiah, will be characterized by an abundance of food and water for the Jews, in contrast to the devastation brought about by the invading army when the Jews both starve and are killed by the army. Even a river of water will flow from the temple mount into the valley of *Shitteem* (שִׁטְיִם), which is located either in the Judean desert southeast of Jerusalem or near Jericho east of the capital city. It makes sense that the point of this detail is that God will supply all the Jews' needs, including their food and water, so that they never again lack these essentials during the rest of their existence in this temporary realm. God will always make sure that He causes life-providing resources to “flow” from His “house” and place of connection with the Jews.

In contrast to Israel, verse 19 of Joel 3 indicates that her enemies will suffer judgment and deprivation, specifically Egypt and Edom, who, similarly to the references to Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia above, may simply represent all the Gentile nations who have either worshiped other gods, even the modern god of nature, or been outspoken and active enemies of the Jews. Egypt had enslaved the Jews for 400 years before the time of Moses, and Edom, the descendants of Esau, had not permitted the Israelites to pass through their land on their way back to the land of Canaan from Egypt (cf. Numbers 20). Therefore, these people, and by implication any nation like them, who has mistreated the Jews during the course of their history, will discover themselves in a rather miserable situation after God has completed His judgment of the Jews in the present realm. If this is what happens to all the nations around the world, as it certainly seems that it will, then no wonder they later jump at the opportunity to fight against and destroy Jesus and his messianic government when Satan is released from his imprisonment as described already above in Revelation 20:7-10, which reads,

- Revelation 20:7** And when the thousand years have come to their end, the Adversary will be released from his prison.
- 20:8** And he will come out to deceive the Gentiles, which are among the four corners of the land—Gog and Magog, to gather them for war, whose number is as the sand of the sea.
- 20:9** And they came up on the broad plain of the land, and they surrounded the encampment of those who are set apart and the much loved city. And fire came down on them and consumed them.
- 20:10** And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet are also. And they will be tortured day and night into the ages of ages.

Nevertheless, the Jews, i.e., Judah and Jerusalem as said in Joel 3:20, will “dwell into perpetuity” (*le’olam taysbayv*, לְעוֹלָם תֵּשֶׁב) and “from generation to generation” (*ledor vador*, לְדוֹר וָדוֹר), meaning as long as the present realm exists, which will be until the end of Jesus’ Kingdom of God in Israel. Thus, while and because Jesus reigns over the Jews from Jerusalem, they will live in safety, security, and abundance with their hearts which have been changed by God so that they are worshiping Him and understanding Him properly.

With the final verse of the book, Joel 3:21, God again states categorically that He will make sure that the Gentiles who harm His chosen people, the Jews, will receive His judgment for such a vile act—even though God Himself orchestrates the destruction of the land of Israel and the Jews because of their own evil and rebellion against Him. And all this will be because Jerusalem and its surrounding area, comprising the entirety of the land of Israel, along with the Jews to whom He has given this land, belong to Him. Violating and failing to respect God’s belongings and possessions, His land and His people, will only get a person judgment and destruction from God Himself.

## **Conclusion**

So what is Joel talking about? He is talking about four things –

1. God's judgment of the Jews on the land of Israel just prior to the return of Jesus the Messiah.
2. God's raising up an army of Gentiles as the instrument of His judgment of the Jews. This army will invade the land of Israel, destroy its food supply, and kill many Jews.
3. God's judging the Gentile army for its evil act of seeking to harm His possessions, the Jews and their (His) land.
4. God's revival and restoring the Jews to authentic spiritual believers in Him, such that they will be the "great nation" and Kingdom of God which He promised in Genesis 12:2, living on His gift to them of the land of Israel with abundant food and in complete security.

However, there are not enough clues in Joel's book to date him personally. Judging by the fact that he mentions the land, the house of Yahweh, and priests, he very well could have lived anytime between the Jews' entering the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua around 1500 B.C. and Jesus' first appearance. But it also seems reasonable to assume that, as a member of the Old Testament prophetic books, this book of Joel came into existence during the same period of time as the other prophetic books of Isaiah through Malachi, meaning that Joel lived during the same time as these prophets, i.e., between about 900 B.C. and 400 B.C.

Our conclusion also is that the modern trend of viewing the Old Testament as sometimes wrong while the New Testament is always right fails to appreciate both the morally perfect character of God who makes promises which He will definitely keep and the significance of His promises which are foundational to the story of the Old and New Testaments, centered on the Messiah as the one whom God uses to fulfill His promises to the Jews and the Gentiles. This will become more obvious after we consider Jeremiah 23 in Addendum A and Acts in Addendum B.



## **Addendum A – Jeremiah 23 and the Davidic Shepherd**

It will be helpful to look briefly at another prophetic passage which explicitly mentions God's raising up a Davidic king to rule over Israel during the millennial kingdom of the Messiah, i.e., during the messianic government which Jesus will establish in Israel when he returns. This is a concept which appears in the prophetic books at least fourteen times, and Jeremiah 23 is one of the best passages to consider in this regard,

- Jeremiah 23:1** Damn you shepherds, who are destroying and scattering the flock of My pasture, declares Yahweh.
- 23:2** Therefore, thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who are shepherding My people, You are scattering My flock, and you have driven them away, and you have not visited them. Behold, I am visiting on you the evil of your deeds, declares Yahweh.
- 23:3** And I will gather the remnant of My flock from all the lands where I have driven them, and I will cause them to return to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and will be many.
- 23:4** And I will cause to arise over them shepherds, and they will shepherd them, and they will no longer be afraid, and they will not be dismayed, and they will not be visited, declares Yahweh.

In these first four verses of Jeremiah 23, God indicts the leaders of the Jews for doing a very poor job of leading, to the extent that they have driven God's people away into foreign lands, probably by precipitating His judgment on them by virtue of their disobedience of God. The Jews' enemies have not only invaded their land, but also have taken them into captivity. Of course, as with Joel, the question is, at what time during Israel's history are these leaders living? It could be just before the Babylonian invasion and captivity around 600 B.C., because this is when Jeremiah himself lived. Or it could be just before the invasion of the northern army described by Joel and which immediately precedes the return of the Messiah. However, because God mentions that these leaders have "driven away" the Jews into foreign lands, it is more likely that He is addressing Jewish leaders before the Babylonian invasion, because the army in the last days before the return of the Messiah does not seem to do any exiling of the Jews. Instead, they just make them miserable and even kill them on the land of Israel.

In any event, God also says in vs. 3 & 4 that He will not only bring His people back to their land, but He will also provide them with decent and helpful leaders. Thus, God jumps in time from the Babylonian invasion of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the end of the present realm when the Messiah returns. Therefore, we can assume that these leaders will be part of the complete spiritual revival of the Jews which God will bring about on the land of Israel—or both resurrected and "raptured" believing Jews and Gentiles who return with Jesus as he descends to destroy the invading army and set up his millennial kingdom (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20:4; 1 Corinthians 15).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I will wait until Addendum B to go into more detail on this subject from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 20:4-6, and 1 Corinthians 15 of Jews and Gentiles who are either resurrected from the dead or lifted off the earth to meet Jesus at his second coming and to participate in ruling the earthly Kingdom of Israel, i.e., the "great nation."

Next, there is the reference to the Davidic king in Jeremiah 23:5-8, which reads,

- Jeremiah 23:5** Behold, days are coming, declares Yahweh, and I will cause to arise a righteous branch belonging to David, and he will rule as king, and he will be wise, and he will perform justice and righteousness on the land.
- 23:6** In his days, Judah will be rescued, and Israel will dwell with security. This is his name by which he will call him, Yahweh our Righteousness/Justification.
- 23:7** Therefore, behold, days are coming, declares Yahweh, and they will not say again, As Yahweh lives who caused the sons of Israel to go up from the land of Egypt.
- 23:8** Instead, As Yahweh lives who caused them to go up, and who caused the seed of the house of Israel to come from the land of the north and from all the lands where I drove them away. And they will live on their ground.

When God provides the Jews with good leaders in the last days, He will also provide them with their long awaited king and Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. He will be the final Davidic king, who will not only set up his kingdom in Israel, with Jerusalem as his capital, but also create the first and only morally perfect government in Israel and in the world. Thus, “he will be wise” and “perform justice and righteousness” (v. 5). In addition, the Jews will never have to be concerned about any outside enemies causing them harm (v. 6), and this will be because their king’s name is basically “Yahweh,” and in particular “Yahweh our Righteousness and Justification.” God will finally be the Jews’ God, because He will have changed their hearts and provided them with His final proxy, the Davidic king and icon of God on earth, Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Colossians 1:15).

God also declares that the Jews will no longer remember Him mainly for having rescued them from slavery in Egypt around 1500 B.C. Instead, they will remember Him for having brought them back to the land of Israel after thousands of years of not having full control of the land. In connection with this, they will also remember Him for having caused them, from this point on, to live on their own land in complete safety under the rule of Jesus, the final Davidic king.

Finally, there is Jeremiah 23:9-40, which reads,

- Jeremiah 23:9** To the prophets, my heart in me is broken. All my bones tremble. I am like a drunk man, and like a man where wine has passed through, from the presence of Yahweh, and from the presence of the words of His being set apart.
- 23:10** Because the land is filled with those who commit adultery, because from the presence of the oath the land has dried up. The pastures of the wilderness have dried up. And their running is evil, and their strength is not honest,
- 23:11** because both prophet and priest are polluted. Also, I have found their evil in My house, declares Yahweh.
- 23:12** Therefore, their way will be like slippery paths. They will be driven into the darkness, and they will fall in it, because I will cause evil to come upon them, the year of their visitation, declares Yahweh.
- 23:13** And among the prophets of Samaria, I have seen their unseemliness. They prophesied by Baal, and they caused My people Israel to err.
- 23:14** And among the prophets of Jerusalem, I have seen a horrible thing—the committing of adultery and walking in lies. And they strengthen the hands of

those who do evil, so that no man turns from his evil. All of them have become to Me like *Sedom*, and those who dwell in it like *'Amorah*.

- 23:15** Therefore, thus says Yahweh of Hosts concerning the prophets, Behold, I am causing wormwood to eat them, and I will cause them to drink the waters of poison, because from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution goes out to all the land.
- 23:16** Thus says Yahweh of Hosts, You shall not listen to the words of the prophets, those who are prophesying to you. They are causing you to be empty. They speak a vision of their heart, not from the mouth of Yahweh.
- 23:17** They are really, really saying to those who despise Me, Yahweh has said, *Shalom* will be yours, and all those who are walking in the stubbornness of their heart have said, Evil will not come upon you.
- 23:18** But who has stood in the counsel of Yahweh and has seen and has listened to His message? Who has listened to My message and heard it?
- 23:19** Behold, the storm of Yahweh. Wrath has gone out, and a whirling storm will whirl down on the head of the wicked.
- 23:20** The anger of Yahweh will not turn until He has performed and caused to arise the purposes of His heart. In the last days (*be'achareeth hayameem*, תְּיָמַיִם, בְּאַחֲרֵי־יָמַיִם) you will understand it with understanding.
- 23:21** I did not send the prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied.
- 23:22** But if they stood in My counsel, and they caused My people to hear My messages, and they caused them to turn from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds...
- 23:23** Am I the God of nearness, declares Yahweh, and not the God of farness?
- 23:24** If a man hides in hiding places, do I not see him, declares Yahweh? Do I not fill the heavens and the earth, declares Yahweh?
- 23:25** I have heard what the prophets have said, those who prophesy a lie in My name, saying, I have a dream, I have a dream.
- 23:26** Until when is there in the hearts of the prophets the prophesying of the lie and the prophesying of the deceit that belongs to their heart,
- 23:27** the ones who intend to cause My people to forget My name by their dreams which a man relates to his friend just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal?
- 23:28** The prophet with whom is a dream relates the dream, and with whom is My message speaks My message of truth. What does straw have to do with grain, declares Yahweh?
- 23:29** Is not My message thus, like fire, declares Yahweh? And like a hammer which shatters rock?
- 23:30** Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares Yahweh, those who steal the words of a man from a friend.
- 23:31** Behold, I am against the prophets, declares Yahweh, those who take their tongue and they prophesy, He declares.
- 23:32** Behold, I am against the prophets of dreams of a lie, declares Yahweh, and they related them, and they caused My people to err by means of their lies and by means of their recklessnesses. And I did not send them, and I did not command them, and they certainly do not benefit the people, declares Yahweh.
- 23:33** And when this people or the prophet or the priest asks you, What is the load of Yahweh, you shall say to them, What load? And I have abandoned you, declares Yahweh.

- 23:34** And the prophet, priest, and the people who speaks the load of Yahweh, I will visit that man and his house.
- 23:35** Thus you will say, a man to his neighbor, and a man to his brother, What has Yahweh answered, and what has Yahweh said?
- 23:36** And you will not again remember the load of Yahweh, because the load of Yahweh is a man's message, and you pervert the messages of the living God, Yahweh of Hosts, our God.
- 23:37** Thus you shall say to the prophet, What has Yahweh answered you? What has Yahweh said?
- 23:38** And if you say a load of Yahweh, therefore, thus says Yahweh, because you spoke this message, the load of Yahweh. And I will send to you, saying, you shall not say, the load of Yahweh.
- 23:39** Therefore, behold, it is I, and I will forget you—to be in debt, and I will abandon you from My presence, and the city which I gave to you and to your fathers.
- 23:40** And I will set on you the reproach of perpetuity and the humiliation of perpetuity, which will not be forgotten.

I include this large section of Jeremiah 23:9-40 to point out that, in the midst of God's continuing to criticize and describe the poor leadership of the Jews around 600 B.C., along with the effects of this leadership whereby God will abandon the people and His city Jerusalem for a long time, there is a smidgen of hope which God gives to the people of Israel, and it is found at the end of v. 20, "In the last days you will understand it with understanding." God is telling the Jews that eventually they will grasp who He is and what He is about the way that they should. And this will be near the end of the present realm, which we now know because of both the Old Testament and the New Testament is not only future to us, but also involves the return of the Messiah and his establishing himself in Jerusalem as the only morally perfect ruler in human history.

Thus, taking into account the entire Bible, we can also say that the Kingdom of God comes about in three phases. The first phase was the first appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, whom God required to qualify for his role as king and advocate/priest by dying on the cross. The second phase will be the millennial, Davidic kingdom of Jeremiah 23 and Revelation 20 when the Jews will finally live on the land which God promised to Abraham in complete safety and security, and when they all will finally be circumcised of heart and authentic believers in not only Yahweh, but also Jesus of Nazareth.

The third phase of the Kingdom of God will come about after God brings the present realm with the millennial kingdom to an end, and He creates a new and eternal realm in which only immortal and morally perfect Jews and Gentiles will live under the leadership of Jesus as their king. This will be the final and permanent Davidic kingdom.

Between the first and second phases, we wait while God orchestrates history towards the final, intense judgment and restoration of the Jews on the land of Israel, and while He changes the hearts of both Jews and Gentiles so that they become believers in Jesus as the Messiah, who himself is waiting to complete his role as king and priest and finally institute the Kingdom of God on the land of Israel and in the future, eternal creation.

## **Addendum B – Acts 2 and the Hope of Israel**

For our understanding Joel, it will also be helpful to examine the apostle Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:14-40. Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 and says, "...this is that which was spoken through the prophet Joel." It certainly sounds as though Peter's claim is that Joel 2:28-32 is being fulfilled in its entirety right then and there on the Day of Pentecost, which contradicts my conclusion in this paper that these verses will not be fulfilled until Jesus returns future to us. But, is it possible that Peter is saying that "this" on the Day of Pentecost is *like* what Joel is predicting in regard to the return of Jesus? Or, that "this" on the Day of Pentecost is *the beginning* of what Joel predicts will happen in its fullness much later? Or, that "this" on the Day of Pentecost is something other than these two possibilities? I think that he is saying that the events of Pentecost are in line with Joel's prediction, but that they are not the complete fulfillment, which will occur at Jesus' return. In other words, the reality of God's changing the hearts of all the Jews on the land of Israel when Jesus returns is at play on the Day of Pentecost when God causes the apostles and other disciples of Jesus to speak about Him with languages that are unknown to them. In order for me to demonstrate how I draw this conclusion, it will be necessary to examine many passages in the book of Acts as the appropriate context of Peter's speech.

The Feast of Pentecost in Acts 2 takes place only fifty days or so after Jesus' death and resurrection during the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But our journey to understanding Peter's speech in Acts 2 will pass through twelve different passages in the book of Acts, starting at the end of the book and moving towards the beginning. In each of these passages, someone, e.g., Peter, Paul, or James, says something about how the apostles or Jews in Jesus' day understood the relationship between the Old Testament promises of God and the Jews in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., as well as the relationship between the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah and the Jews in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. These two Old Testament subjects, God's promises and the messianic predictions, are the key to understanding His relationship to the Jews in any time period, including both that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and that during Jesus' future return.

All this boils down to Joel's (with the other Old Testament prophets') and Acts' saying that God will fulfill His promises to the Jews when Jesus returns by using Jesus as the Messiah as His primary tool or instrument to do so. In other words, God's promise of Genesis 12:2 to mold the Jews into the greatest nation on earth in human history will be fulfilled when Jesus returns. God changes the Jews' hearts so that they become authentic believers in their Messiah, and Jesus establishes his messianic, millennial kingdom on the land of Israel with its capital in Jerusalem. In addition, this involves the Jews' finally obeying the Mosaic Covenant in the manner in which He always wanted—with circumcised hearts (cf. Deuteronomy 10:16;29,30). It also makes sense to view all the prophets and even Acts as indicating that the Jews' millennial obedience to the Mosaic Covenant will include offering its prescribed sacrifices in a rebuilt temple in the midst of submitting to and worshipping Jesus as their God and King—and as the ultimate temple of God. The inference obviously is that the animal sacrifices are merely symbolic of Jesus' sacrifice and its unique effect of providing the Jews (and Gentiles also) with God's eternal mercy. But this has been the significance of

the Mosaic Covenant's offerings from their inception. God never provided a Old Testament Jewish believer with mercy on the basis of his animal sacrifice in the temple. He did so only on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice, and the biblical authors—from Moses to Malachi—understood and wrote about this. However, many, if not most of the Jews throughout history, have misunderstood the concepts which the Old Testament authors communicated regarding this central idea in the Bible. Therefore, as we will see in Acts, Jesus never clarifies the Old Testament by correcting it *per se*. He (and his apostles in the New Testament) clarifies it by correcting his contemporary Jews' interpretation of it. For example, the message of the book of Hebrews is that mercy from God to any Jew comes through Jesus' sacrifice, even while Jews offer their stipulated animal sacrifices—regardless of the time period in history. Jesus' sacrifice does not replace the Jews' animal sacrifices. They and he demonstrate that God always intended to communicate through all the biblical authors that divine mercy and forgiveness always comes through him—only.

There is also at least one passages in Acts where a speaker comments on the relationship between the Old Testament promises of God and the Gentiles of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Consequently, by studying all the relevant passages in Acts, including Peter's quote of Joel 2:28-32 in his speech on Pentecost, we can add our understanding of them to the conclusions we have drawn from the whole book of Joel, parts of Revelation, etc. In order to save time and space, I will assume that my interpretations of Joel and other Old Testament and New Testament passages as stated in the body of this paper are correct. Therefore, I encourage the reader to keep in mind what we have already learned from the Bible while we explore the book of Acts.

### **Acts 28:16-30**

We begin at the end with Acts 28:16-30,

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**Acts 28:16** When he entered Rome, Paul was permitted to stay by himself with a soldier guarding him. **28:17** And after three days, he called together those who were leaders of the Jews. And when they gathered together, he said to them,

Men, brothers, even though I had done nothing wrong to the people or with respect to the traditions of the fathers, I was handed over as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. **28:18** When they had examined me, they were willing to release me, because there was no cause in me to put me to death. **28:19** But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that my nation had anything with which to accuse me. **28:20** For this reason, I have requested to see you and speak to you—because I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.

**28:21** They said to him,

We have received no letters concerning you from Judea. Nor have any of the brothers come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. **28:22** And we would count it an honor to hear from you what you think, because it has become known to us concerning this sect that it is spoken against everywhere.

**28:23** When they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers. He explained to them by carefully bearing witness to the Kingdom of God, persuading them about Jesus from the instruction of Moses and the prophets, from morning to evening. **28:24** Some were persuaded by the things being said, but some did not believe. **28:25** And after they did not agree with one another, they left after Paul made one more statement,

The Holy Spirit correctly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

**28:26** Go to this people and say, You will keep on hearing, but you will not understand. You will keep on seeing, but you will not see. **28:27** For the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they barely hear, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they see with their eyes, they hear with their ears, they understand with their heart, and they turn, so that I heal them <Isaiah 6:9,10>.

**28:28** Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. They will indeed listen.

**28:30** And he stayed for a full two years in his own rented quarters, and he received all those who came to him, **28:31** proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching with all boldness and unhindered the things about the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

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For time's and space's sake, just as I will not repeat everything we learned from Joel, Revelation, and the other parts of the Bible, I also will not examine every detail of these passages in Acts. But I will consider the salient points, especially for our goal of understanding Peter's use of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2. The first question we can ask of these very last verses of Acts is, Why did Luke choose to end his story of the actions, travels, speeches, and effects of the apostles after Jesus' ascension with this event in Rome that took place around A.D. 62? If Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven sometime between A.D. 30 and 33, and Luke's story of the apostles ranges from Jerusalem to Rome, with many places in Turkey and Greece in between, why did Luke decide that A.D. 62 and Rome were the best time and location to end his story? In addition, Paul must have interacted with many Gentiles in Rome in addition to Jews during his two year imprisonment there around A.D. 62. Why would Luke end Acts with a conversation between Paul and the Jews which does not actually go so well, when it comes to his trying to convince the Jews in Rome that Jesus is the Messiah?

We know also from Acts 9 that God had specifically given to Paul alone the responsibility of being the apostle *to the Gentiles*. This being the case, why does Luke end the book of Acts with a conversation between him *and Jews*? Is it to demonstrate that 1) God is now more interested in drawing Gentiles than Jews into the community of believers (because of how poorly the conversation goes and what Paul says at the end), 2) God still considers the Jews to be "first in line" so to speak for the good news of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, in spite of their resistance to this message, or 3) God is still mostly interested in Jews' becoming believers, while He also is very interested in Gentiles' becoming believers, especially through Paul, the unique apostle to the Gentiles? I think that the answer is #3, but we will need the rest of Acts, along with our previous conclusions about Joel, Revelation, etc. to arrive here.

In addition, our analysis of Acts 28:16-31 will properly set the stage for our understanding the rest of the passages in Acts which we will examine.

We should also note that, if Paul had been arrested and sent to Rome between A.D. 49 and 54, this conversation could not have taken place, because Emperor Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 on account of violent arguments which were taking place among them about whether or not Jesus is the Messiah. These arguments spilled into the streets of the capital city and disrupted life to the extent that Claudius felt it necessary to ban all Jews from Rome before they tore his city apart. In A.D. 54, Claudius died, which, according to Roman law, provided the Jews with the opportunity to return to Rome. In fact, this is exactly what some of the Christians mentioned in chapter 16 of Paul's letter to the Roman *Gentile* Christians are doing. Thus, eight years later, in A.D. 62, there is certainly an enclave of Jews living in Rome who have heard about Jesus as the Messiah but have not had a proper and complete explanation of him to be able to believe. Paul provides them with this kind of explanation in Acts 28:16-31.

Paul first tells his Jewish visitors that he “had done nothing wrong to the people or with respect to the traditions of the fathers.” The “people” are the Jews in Jerusalem, and, by extrapolation, Jews everywhere, because they are all members of the divinely important ethnic group to whom God made His promises through Abraham and to whom He gave instructions, the Mosaic Covenant, for how they were to live life as His people. The “traditions of the fathers” is potentially ambiguous. When it comes to talking about the Old Testament, Bible students in our day sometimes refer to *how the Jews understood it*. Other times, they refer to *what the Old Testament authors meant*. Because of our interest in the truth of the Bible, we are concerned about discovering in its documents what the authors meant, while we also may find it helpful to know how the Jews understood it. However, it is only the author's intent which is inerrant truth, because the Jews obviously misunderstood the Old Testament, which resulted in their crucifying their own Messiah.

To which is Paul referring here in Acts 28:17? Is he saying that he “had done nothing wrong with respect to” the current Jewish understanding of the Old Testament, which is clearly incorrect, because they not only misperceived Jesus' identity as the Messiah, but also rejected the apostles' explanation of Jesus. Or is he saying that he “had done nothing wrong with respect to” the original authors' inerrant intent in the Old Testament? Like Jesus, Paul has no interest in following erroneous ideas. He is all about the truth. Therefore, it makes sense that Paul is saying that, in the story of Acts 21 when he was arrested, he had done nothing wrong with respect to what God intended in His instructions in the Old Testament and the Mosaic Covenant specifically. Consequently, there were two possibilities for what the Jews in Jerusalem were doing. Either they were misunderstanding the Old Testament themselves and, thereby, falsely accusing Paul. Or they made up a false charge against him when it was clear, even to them, that he was not violating the Mosaic Covenant. From the story, we will see that it is the latter—that the Jews falsely charged Paul with violating the Mosaic Covenant. However, Paul would not deny that the Jews mostly held a very incorrect perspective on the Old Testament, as signified by their rejection of not only Jesus as the Messiah, but also Paul as an apostle of the Messiah.

Then, in the midst of describing to the Jewish guests “in his own rented quarters” that he got to Rome by being arrested in Jerusalem on false charges, Paul tells them that his



imprisonment, which will lead to an audience with Caesar Nero, is “for the sake of the hope of Israel,” a phrase that is certainly important for our understanding even Peter’s perspective on Joel and its relationship to Pentecost in Acts 2 (cf. Acts 28:30,20 respectively), because we assume that the apostle Peter’s understanding of the Old Testament is the same as the apostle Paul’s. What does Paul mean by the “hope of Israel?” First, the name Israel originally applied to Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, and to the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, i.e., the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Genesis 32:28; Exodus 3:16; 4:22). These are the Jews. And Paul is speaking in the midst of Jews, so that it does not make sense to change the meaning of Israel to some other group—for example, Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus as their Messiah. For one thing, these Jews are not yet believers. Some of them become such a little while later in the midst of Paul’s explaining Jesus as their Messiah (cf. v 24).

Second, for what could they be hoping? While the tendency within the modern, Gentile church is to say, eternal life, if we put together the clues from our study of Joel, Revelation, and consider the inerrancy of the Bible along with God’s character of being faithful to all His promises, the better answer is the fulfillment of the promises which God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, as mentioned already in this paper –

1. the land of Canaan/Israel as a gift to Abraham’s physical descendants
2. physical descendants (the Jews)
3. eventually turning these physical descendants into a “great nation”
4. eternal life
5. using Abraham and his physical descendants as a means for Gentiles to obtain eternal life

Another answer to what “Israel” could be hoping for is to change the meaning of Israel so that it refers to the collection of human beings who believe in Jesus of Nazareth as their king and priest for the sake of obtaining only God’s gift of eternal mercy and life. This collection, therefore, includes both Jews and Gentiles. But this answer also implies that God’s promises to Abraham of a physical land and turning his physical descendants into a great nation either have reached their fulfillment at some time in the past, or have been dropped by God—probably because the Jews have demonstrated such consistent and persistent disobedience to Him down through history that He has decided to forego these promises and concentrate solely on granting eternal life to both Jews and Gentiles with authentic belief in Jesus as their king and priest.

Which option makes more sense in this context where Paul is speaking to only Jews? Is he referring to God’s still being intent on fulfilling all His Abrahamic promises to the Jews, or is he referring to God’s fulfilling only the one Abrahamic promise of eternal life to both Jews and Gentiles? Paul is speaking to Jews who have not yet learned to connect Jesus with God’s promises. Therefore, these Jews are most likely still looking forward to His granting their nation both the land and greatness among all the nations on earth. Luke does not say that Paul refutes these expectations of his Jewish guests. Indeed, we will see that every time Paul talks about the Jews in Acts, he very much joins with them in their identity, purpose, and expectations as the chosen people of God on earth. He has no intent to change anything

about the Jews except their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah (and their understanding of God's grace, which must be included in their belief in Jesus).

In addition, it certainly does not make sense to interpret God as a promise-breaker. That He would assure Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, guarantee Abraham that He will follow through on His assurances and promise in Genesis 15, and swear an oath in Genesis 21 that He will keep His promises which He has guaranteed, and then not transform the physical descendants of Abraham into the greatest nation in history is nonsense. It turns God into a liar and makes Him as evil, if not more so because He is a transcendent liar, than human beings.

We can also ask if Paul uses the word "hope" to refer to expectations that the Jews have that are less than absolutely certain? We say sometimes that we hope that something in our lives changes, but we may not be able to think that it is beyond doubt that it will. In fact, most of the time we use the word "hope," we do not mean that we are guaranteed that what we hope will indeed occur. However, Paul says in Romans 5:2 that "we boast in waiting expectantly [the same word as 'hope' in Acts 28:20] for the glory of God," meaning that we Christians hope for the time when God will transform us into morally perfect beings in eternity. And Paul also makes it clear in Romans that God has promised and guaranteed that those whom He has changed inwardly, so that they exhibit genuine belief in Jesus as the Messiah, will obtain moral perfection and eternal life. This is predicated, of course, on God's not being a liar, on His speaking the truth when He promises something to someone. If Paul uses "hope" to refer to God's following through on His promise to grant eternal life to Christians, does it make sense that he would say to the Jews in Rome that God's promise to transform them into a great nation is a lie, while using the same word "hope"? Absolutely not, unless we are prepared to impugn God's character and call Him a liar. But then what hope does any of us have in gaining eternal life? None, because a God who promises one thing and lies about it cannot promise another thing and be thought of definitely keeping the promise. Either God keeps all His promises of Genesis 12:1-3, or He is in jeopardy of keeping none of them—so that Paul also is a liar. But the best way to interpret Paul in both Acts and Romans is to mean that God always speaks the truth, and if His statements include promises that He is making, then He will definitely and with 100% certainty keep the promises.

Thus, Luke as the author of Acts is showing in chapter 28 that Paul is granting these expectations of God's fulfilling all His promises to the Jews and explaining how they will be met only by means of Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. Consequently, by the phrase "the hope of Israel," Paul means all the promises which God made to Abraham and his physical descendants, the Jews, and which include land, descendants, their becoming a great nation, eternal life, and their being God's instrument to bring eternal life to the Gentiles (with the main Jewish instrument obviously being Jesus of Nazareth).

We also notice that Paul's Jewish visitors have heard that there is a lot of opposition to Christianity in the Roman world (v. 22). Are they referring to Jewish opposition only, or to Gentile opposition only, or to both? Probably the last option, to both, because there certainly has been a plethora of both (cf. Acts 16-21 and the disturbances in Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Jerusalem; and there is also Rome, from which the Jews were banned for fighting over the truth of Jesus). Certainly over the years, between A.D. 33 and 62, many people have had the opportunity to hear about various responses and reactions

to the presentation by Paul and others of the New Testament message to those living throughout Asia (Turkey), Greece, and even Jerusalem/Judea. Now these Roman Jews, who had probably either originally lived in Rome during the Jewish riots over Jesus, or lived in one of these other areas of the Roman Empire, or lived in both will hear the message straight from the apostle of the Gentiles, Paul.

Luke goes on to call this the message of the “Kingdom of God,” and Paul’s basis for explaining it is “the instruction of Moses and the prophets” (ἀπό τε τοῦ νόμου Μωϋσέως καὶ τῶν προφητῶν) (v. 23). “Moses’ instructions and the prophets” refer to the Old Testament. Thus, we see that Paul does not use the New Testament and the written message of Jesus (it does not yet exist) in order to explain the Kingdom of God. He uses the Old Testament to do so. This logically implies that the Old Testament is sufficient to explain God’s plans and purposes with respect to the Messiah and the Kingdom of God in order to have an accurate (but not complete) understanding of them. The only things which the Old Testament is missing are the actual details of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension. These are the details which we find in the four gospel accounts and the beginning of the book of Acts. Luke is telling us that Paul does not use Jesus to explain the Old Testament. He uses the Old Testament to explain Jesus, which implies that the Old Testament is accurate, inerrant, and adequate to learn all the salient ideas a Jew (or Gentile) needs in order to decide to embrace Jesus as the Messiah.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, there is a trend within modern Christianity which considers the Old Testament to be not only lacking specific details of Jesus’ life, but also incorrect in its meaning when it was first written. For example, the passages which explain the temple of the Mosaic Covenant, where the Jews present their offerings of animal sacrifices, grain, etc. to God, supposedly state that it is a permanent and adequate place for obtaining God’s mercy. However, this modern trend claims that Jesus comes along and clarifies Moses’ original meaning in Exodus-Deuteronomy to indicate that Moses was wrong to say that the temple is permanent, because Jesus replaces the Mosaic Covenant temple. Therefore, when the Old Testament prophets refer to the rebuilding of the temple, they are also wrong, because Jesus clarifies that he is the temple. In effect, this trend within Christianity is claiming that we need to use the New Testament, i.e., Jesus, to explain the Old Testament. However, Luke is telling the reader of Acts 28:23 that Paul, in his conversation with these Jews in Rome, is using the Old Testament to explain Jesus. By extrapolation, when the New Testament authors quote the Old Testament, it is not to say that the latter is wrong and they are now showing their readers how to change its meaning and understand it better. Instead, they are showing their readers how the Old Testament provides an accurate and inerrant foundation for understanding their documents which end up comprising the New Testament.

Therefore, it does not make sense to say that the Old Testament means something which needs clarifying, i.e., correcting, by the New Testament. The Old Testament does not provide the reader with a partial and, therefore, erroneous picture of the Kingdom of God. It provides a partial and yet adequate and inerrant picture of the Kingdom of God. All the Old Testament lacks are the details of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension as presented by the four gospels and Acts. This also implies that the New Testament does not change any of the ideas which the Old Testament authors presented in their writings. It clarifies what

they wrote only in the sense that it is adding more details, not changing the meaning. Thus, if the New Testament is clarifying the Old, it in no way is saying that the latter is inadequate or wrong in the ideas which it presents. Indeed, it is saying that the Old Testament authors were completely correct in that which they intended to communicate to their readers. Consequently, we have here at the end of the book of Acts verification that Jesus does not radicalize the message of the Old Testament by revealing that it is somehow wrong or inadequate in what it communicates. Instead, the Old Testament is very adequate for the apostle Paul to communicate Jesus to his Jewish listeners and persuade them to become believers in their Messiah.

Nevertheless, we should ask the question here, What exactly does Luke, and therefore Paul, mean by the “Kingdom of God.” I will list five options below, but they will require explaining from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 20:4-6, and 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, which I will quote and briefly analyze afterwards. Therefore, I encourage the reader to look through the following options and then reread them more carefully after I have discussed these other three passages. We want to know, Is Paul referring to the Kingdom of God –

- 1) to which only the Jews could look forward *on earth*, i.e., being a “great nation” as mortal, changed of heart, authentically believing, and yet morally depraved Jews on the land of Israel as promised in Genesis 12:2, or
- 2) to which only the Jews could look forward *on earth* AND *in heaven*, i.e., a “great nation” as mortal, changed of heart, authentically believing, and yet morally depraved Jews on the land of Israel as promised in Genesis 12:2, AND eternal life as immortal, morally perfect Jews, which is the same eternal life as expressed by Jesus and the New Testament authors (cf. Matthew 19:16; John 3:16; Romans 6:23, etc.), or
- 3) to which both Jews and Gentiles could look forward *on earth*, i.e., a “great nation” comprised of both mortal Jews and mortal Gentiles on the land of Israel as in #2 above, or
- 4) to which both Jews and Gentiles could look forward *in heaven*, i.e., eternal life as immortal beings as in #2 above, or
- 5) to which both Jews and Gentiles could look forward *on earth* AND *in heaven*, i.e., a “great nation” of mortal Jews as in #2 above, ruled by Jesus and immortal, morally perfect Jews and Gentiles, AND eternal life as in #2 above, ruled by Jesus in a kingdom comprised of immortal, morally perfect Jews and Gentiles?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 20:4-6, and 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 & 50-53 are necessary to explain why I am emphasizing the words mortal and immortal in these five options. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 reads,

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**1 Thessalonians 4:13** On another subject, we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are dead, so that you do not grieve as do, indeed, the rest, who have no hope. **4:14** Because we believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead, it is just as certain that God also will bring with him those who died in the light of Jesus.

**4:15** This we say to you by means of the message of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain until the coming of the Lord, will definitely not precede those who have died, **4:16** because the Lord

himself, when the command is given by means of the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in the Messiah will themselves rise up first. 4:17 Then we, who are alive and who remain, will be snatched away together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. 4:18 Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

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Between A.D. 50-54, the apostle Paul traveled from Antioch on the Orontes in northwest Syria to Greece and back, the story of which is covered in Acts 15:40-18:22. Thessalonica, in the northern area of Greece called Macedonia, was one of the cities he visited, and Acts 17:1-10 describes the hostile reaction he received from the Jews in this city, to the extent that Paul had to flee for his life. Probably about six months later, during his year and a half stay in Corinth, south of Thessalonica, Paul writes 1 Thessalonians in order to encourage the newly converted Thessalonian Christians in their faith, for which they are continuing to experience persecution, just as Paul had. Timothy, Paul's co-worker, did revisit Thessalonica and has returned to Corinth and reported on the Thessalonians' condition. One issue that is confusing them is what will happen to their fellow Christians who have died within the last six months and who have not survived until the actual second coming of Jesus. Paul writes the above section of chapter 4 to encourage them that they have nothing to worry about.

He is speaking specifically of Jesus' second coming, and he says that two kinds of people will join Jesus "in the air" above the earth when he comes. The first are "those who died in the light of Jesus," i.e., those who had gained authentic, biblical belief during their lives on earth and yet died before Jesus' return. These will include not only New Testament Christians but also Old Testament believers such as Abraham, Moses, David, and others, whose death was just as much "in the light of Jesus" as that of New Testament believers. The reason is that the means by which both Old Testament believers and New Testament believers obtain God's eternal mercy is having Jesus as their advocate before Yahweh at their resurrection. Thus, the first people to experience Jesus' advocacy will be all the believers in all of history who have died prior to his return and for whom Jesus appeals to the Father for mercy when He resurrects them from the dead while he is descending to earth to establish his millennial kingdom (cf. Revelation 20:4-6 below).

The second kind of people who join Jesus "in the air" are those "who are alive and who remain." These are authentic believers living at the very moment when Jesus returns, who will be lifted off the earth and meet both Jesus and those who are resurrected because of their previous genuine belief. Now, the question is, Where will both these kinds of people "always be with the Lord?" And the answer is in Revelation 20:4-6,

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**Revelation 20:4** I saw thrones, and they sat on them. And judgment was given to them. And I saw those persons who had been beheaded on account of their bearing witness to Jesus and on account of God's message, indeed who had not worshiped the beast or his image. Nor did they receive the mark on their forehead and their hand. And they came to life and reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years.

**20:5** The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. **20:6** Happy and set apart is he who has a part in the first resurrection. The second

death has no authority over these. Instead, they will be priests of God and the Messiah, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

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First, we should note that verses 5 & 6 indicate that there will be two resurrections of the dead. The first resurrection involves those who are deemed “happy and set apart,” because they will be “priests of God and the Messiah,” who will rule over the millennial kingdom with Jesus. These are authentic believers who have died prior to Jesus’ return and are brought back to life to participate with him in his temporary reign on earth. It is possible to construe the language here as referring to the resurrection of each believer immediately after he has died, like the popular perspective among Christians and other people today. However, it makes more sense in line with the whole context to hear John saying that this is a group resurrection that takes place at the same time as Jesus’ return, while the second resurrection will also be a group one at the end of the millennial kingdom and will involve unbelievers who have died prior to it. These latter people will encounter God’s final judgment and destruction, what John calls “the second death.” This interpretation of two group resurrections, the first at the second coming of Jesus and the second at the end of his messianic kingdom on the land of Israel, also correlates with Paul’s statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 above to the effect that “the dead in the Messiah will themselves rise up first.” It is not all the dead who are raised at Jesus’ second coming. It is only those who have had authentic, biblical belief before they died.

It is also interesting that verse 4 mentions only those who have died as a result of the world’s hostility towards them, because they were committed followers of Jesus as the Messiah. However, this could be simply those whom the book of Revelation wishes to highlight, who had authentic belief during their lives, suffered for their belief, and died prior to the return of the Messiah. Therefore, while this verse means Christian martyrs, its relevance extends to all authentic believers who have died in history, going back even to Abraham, who did not die a violent death for his faith in Jesus, but who died peacefully with his faith in Yahweh, the Father of Jesus, the Son of God and Messiah. The result of the resurrection of all these people is that they rule over the Jews on the land of Israel with Jesus, the supreme ruler, during his millennial kingdom. Also, the relevance of this verse extends to genuine Christians who are living at the exact moment of Jesus’ second coming, who are lifted off the earth to join Jesus and the resurrected believers (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 above). Therefore, they, too, rule over the Jews on the land of Israel during the millennial kingdom.

But another question is, What kind of bodies are the resurrected believers given when God brings them back from the dead? The answer is in 1 Corinthians 15, which is a long chapter and corroborates what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4. I will quote the entire chapter here, but we will focus on vs. 42-44 & 50-53,

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*1 Corinthians 15:1* Now, I make known to you, brothers, the good news that I proclaimed to you, that you also received, on the basis of which you also stand, *15:2* through which you also are being saved, if you hold firmly to that message which I proclaimed to you, unless you believed in vain. *15:3* I delivered to you of first importance what I in turn had received, that the Messiah died for our sins according to the scriptures, *15:4* that he was buried, and that he was raised from the dead on the third day according to the scriptures, *15:5* and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve. *15:6*

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Then he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at one time, of whom many are still alive, but some have died. 15:7 Then he appeared to Jacob, then to all the apostles, 15:8 and last of all, as though to an abortion, he appeared even to me. 15:9 For I am the last of the apostles, who is not worthy to call himself an apostle, because I persecuted the gathering of God. 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace towards me has not been worthless. Instead, I have toiled more than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God with me. 15:11 Therefore, whether I or those others, thus we proclaim, and thus you believed.

15:12 If the Messiah is being proclaimed as having been raised from the dead, how are some of you saying that there is no resurrection of the dead? 15:13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even the Messiah was raised from the dead. 15:14 And if the Messiah was not raised from the dead, then our proclaiming it is vacuous, and your belief is vacuous. 15:15 In addition, we are found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised from the dead the Messiah, whom He did not raise, if it is true that the dead are not raised. 15:16 If the dead are not raised, not even the Messiah has been raised. 15:17 And if the Messiah has not been raised, your belief is useless; you are still in your sins. 15:18 Therefore, indeed, those who have fallen asleep because of the Messiah are lost forever. 15:19 If we have hoped in the Messiah in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

15:20 However, the Messiah was raised from the dead—the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 15:21 After death resulted from one man’s actions, indeed, resurrection from the dead resulted from one man’s actions. 15:22 For just as all men die in the footsteps of Adam, thus also all men will be made alive in the footsteps of the Messiah, 15:23 and each in his own turn—the first fruits, i.e., the Messiah, then those who belong to the Messiah at his grand appearance.

15:24 Then comes the end when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when He abolishes every rule, and every authority and power. 15:25 For He must reign until He places all of his enemies under his feet.

15:26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

15:27 For he has put all things in subjection under his feet <Psalm 8:6>.

When it says, “All things have been put in subjection,” it is evident that this means except the One who puts all things in subjection to him. 15:28 And when all things have been put in subjection to him, then also the Son himself will be in subjection to Him who put all things in subjection to him, in order that God may be all in all.

15:29 Otherwise, what will those who were baptized because of the dead do? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized because of them?<sup>8</sup> 15:30 Why then are we in danger every hour? 15:31 On the basis of the boasting that I do in you, which I have in the Messiah Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 15:32 If from strictly human motives I fought with wild beasts in Ephesus, what did that profit

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<sup>8</sup> ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν; εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν – It makes more sense to translate the ὑπὲρ as “because of.” Baptism was a common religious practice in that area in that day, and people thus expressed their belief in Jesus as the Messiah who rescued them from the death that the dead had already died in order to gain eternal life. Why make such an expression of belief if resurrection and eternal life are not a reality? Therefore, what Paul means is that people were baptized because they wanted to identify not only with the Messiah, who died on their behalf and who demonstrated that they deserved eternal death for their moral depravity, but also to identify with those who had already died and yet would be raised from the dead to gain eternal life because of their authentic belief. In other words, Paul and his fellow 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians realized that the Messiah could return within their lifetimes, which is the correct manner for all Christians down through history to live.

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me? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” 15:33 Don’t be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” 15:34 Sober up for uprightness’ sake, and do not commit immorality.

Some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame, 15:35 because someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they appear?” 15:36 Fool, that which you sow does not bring about life unless it dies. 15:37 And that which you sow, you do not sow the “body” that it will become, but bare grain, perhaps of wheat or something else. 15:38 And God gives to it a “body” just as He desired, and to each of the seeds its own “body.”

15:39 Not all organic material with blood flow is the same organic material, but there is one organic material of men, another of animals, another of birds, and another of fish. 15:40 There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. Nevertheless, on the one hand, the greatness of the heavenly bodies is one level of greatness, and, on the other hand, the greatness of the earthly bodies is another level of greatness. 15:41 The brightness of the sun is one level of brightness, the brightness of the moon is another level of brightness, and the brightness of stars is even a third level of brightness, even while one star differs from another star in brightness.

15:42 Thus, also, is the resurrection of the dead. Their bodies are sown in a state of decaying. Their bodies are raised in a state of not decaying. 15:43 Their bodies are sown in a state of lack of acclaim. Their bodies are raised in a state of acclaim. Their bodies are sown in a state of weakness. Their bodies are raised in a state of power. 15:44 A physical body is sown. A spiritual body is raised. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

15:45 Thus, it is also written,

The first man, Adam, became a living being <Genesis 2:7>.

The last Adam became a life-producing spirit.

15:46 Nevertheless, the spiritual is not first, but the physical. Then comes the spiritual. 15:47 The first man was out of the earth for the earth. The second man was out of heaven for heaven. 15:48 As was he who was earthy, so also are those who are earthy. And as is he who is heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 15:49 And just as we have born the image of him who was earthy, we also will bear the image of him who is heavenly.

15:50 This I say, brothers, that flesh and blood are not able to inherit the Kingdom of God, and that which can be destroyed does not inherit immortality. 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all be put to sleep, but we shall all be changed 15:52 in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised immortal, and we shall be changed. 15:53 This is because it is necessary for this destructibility to put on indestructibility and this mortality to put on immortality.

15:54 When this destructibility has put on indestructibility and this mortality has put on immortality, then will come about the statement that has been written,

Death was swallowed up in victory <Isaiah 25:8>.

15:55 Death, where is your victory? Death where is your goad <Hosea 13:14>?



15:56 The goad of death is moral depravity, and the power of moral depravity is the Torah.

15:57 But thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus the Messiah. 15:58 Therefore, my brothers whom I love, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the message of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

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Fortunately for us, about two years after Paul has spent 18 months in Corinth, the Corinthian Christians need a lot of help being regrounded in their understanding of the message of Jesus as the Messiah, so that Paul writes four letters to them from Ephesus around A.D. 56. 1 Corinthians is actually his second letter. We have lost his 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> letters, so that 2 Corinthians is his fourth letter to this rather confused group of Christians. There is much in 1 Corinthians 15 that commends itself to our discussion. This chapter begins with Paul's restating the basics of the gospel—the Messiah Jesus died, was raised from the dead, appeared to his disciples and apostles, and became the very means to escape God's eternal condemnation that would naturally result from our being evil human beings.

In the rest of chapter 15, Paul argues that it does not make sense that some of the Corinthian Christians are claiming that there is no resurrection from the dead (one of their many misguided beliefs to which Paul responds in this long letter). They believe either that there is no eternal life at all, or that a Christian must survive on earth until the return of the Messiah in order to gain eternal life. In any case, Paul demonstrates that, if there is absolutely no resurrection from the dead, then not even Jesus is currently alive, which nullifies anyone's hope to be rescued from God's eternal condemnation and gain eternal life. This means that our contemporary human existence is all that a person experiences, making all of us creatures who can only be pitied. Paul's declaration here is an apt response to thoroughgoing atheistic naturalists in our modern world. What could possibly be the point of enduring human existence in the present realm if there is no such thing as eternal life after death? The answer to this question is simply, None, which is a thoroughgoing nauseating answer.

But Paul states unequivocally that the Messiah Jesus was made alive by God after his crucifixion, death, and burial, so that he is the first of human beings to undergo this powerful work of God and will be followed in this resurrection experience by "those who belong to the Messiah at his coming" (v., 23). Paul is referring to authentic believers who have died in history prior to Jesus' return—both Old Testament and New Testament believers, which coincides with the 1 Thessalonians 4 passage.

If we skip down to v. 34, we see that Paul challenges the Corinthian Christians who might still be skeptical of the concept of resurrection, and he asks what kind of body will God cause the resurrected believers to have. His argument is—if God can cause a seed to "die" in the ground and "rise from the dead" to grow into a plant, if God can create different kinds of organic beings such as human beings, animals, and birds, and if God can create objects above the earth which exhibit different levels of light, e.g., the sun, the moon, and the stars, then certainly God can take a mortal human body which has died and make it alive again with an immortal body (vs. 34-44). Therefore, Paul is saying in these verses that God will give immortal and morally perfect bodies to those whom He resurrects from the dead at Jesus' second coming.

He goes on to say in vs. 50-53 that God will also transform and change the bodies of authentic believers who are alive when Jesus returns and whom God lifts off the earth to “meet him in the air” as stated in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. And the transformation will be that from mortal and morally depraved bodies to immortal and morally perfect bodies, just like those of the resurrected believers. At the final moment of Jesus’ return, “the dead will be raised immortal, and we [who are alive at this moment] shall be changed..., because it is necessary for this destructibility to put on indestructibility and this mortality to put on immortality” (cf. vs. 52 & 53).

Putting together the ideas from 1 Thessalonians 4, Revelation 20, and 1 Corinthians 15, the five options above for what Paul means by the Kingdom of God in Acts 28 include these newly resurrected and transformed believers, both Jews and Gentiles, both of Old Testament times and New Testament times, who are all immortal and morally perfect. They will exist with the mortal inhabitants on the land of Israel during Jesus’ millennial kingdom and will also be the immortal inhabitants of the eternal Kingdom of God of the future realm, along with the mortal inhabitants on the land of Israel who themselves are eventually transformed into immortal beings.

Once we look at all the relevant passages in Acts, we will see that option #1 does not make any sense. Paul has dedicated the previous twenty years or so trying to persuade Jews and Gentiles to believe that Jesus is God’s means to their obtaining eternal life. Therefore, to think that, in this context, he is referring to only the Jews’ hope of an earthly kingdom is incorrect. Paul could be narrowing his meaning as in option #2 to include only Jews in the temporary and eternal Kingdom of God, because he is talking to only Jews. Plus, he has mentioned the “hope of Israel,” which fits nicely with this interpretation. However, we will see in v. 28 that his idea of the Kingdom of God extends beyond the Jews to the Gentiles. Option #3 does not make any sense also in the light of Paul’s duty of announcing eternal life through Jesus to the Gentiles. For Paul, even when talking to Jews who are the recipients of God’s promises through Abraham, the Kingdom of God cannot be only a temporary, earthly kingdom. Option #4 is popular in the Gentile Christian community today, so that the New Testament is viewed as radicalizing the Old Testament in such a way that Jesus and the mostly Gentile church with its heavenly destiny has completely replaced the nation of Israel with its earthly destiny. As a result, the Old Testament is interesting in its presentation of God’s promises to the Jews and their history, but it is instructive only because Jesus has fulfilled God’s promises in a more expansive and eternally significant way, rendering His earthly promises somewhat wrong and much less important to the point of being irrelevant.

If I am correct about the book of Joel and my conclusions from the book of Acts, Paul in his discussions with these Jews in Rome in A.D. 62 is referring to option #5. He is concentrating on helping them grasp the fact that Jesus as the Messiah is God’s major means to fulfilling all His promises to Abraham’s physical descendants—both of making them a great nation on the land of Israel and of granting them eternal life in a future realm, while also informing the Jews that God is bringing Gentiles into the community of believers in Jesus for the sake of their eternal salvation and life.

Let me state here a fundamental, implicit issue to which we will return later in our journey through all the relevant passages in Acts. This is that “forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ” (as we Christians like to talk about it) is necessary not only for anyone’s

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obtaining eternal life “in heaven,” but also for any future, mortal Jew’s obtaining existence in the earthly messianic kingdom when Jesus returns. As a result, Paul is legitimately urging his Jewish listeners to embrace Jesus as their Messiah not only for the sake of the hope of Israel that God will grant people eternal life, but also for the sake of the hope of Israel that God will make of them a great nation. The ramifications of this is that forgiveness of sins through Jesus is not only an eternal and “heavenly” issue. It is also a temporary and earthly issue—*for the mortal Jews living on the land of Israel* when Jesus returns and sets up his messianic kingdom in Jerusalem. Just as someone cannot gain eternal life without God’s forgiveness through Jesus, so also a mortal Jew cannot gain earthly existence in Jesus’ millennial kingdom without God’s forgiveness through Jesus. We will talk about this more later.

In the meantime, we also see that Paul has some sharp words for the Jews who are rejecting Jesus. In Acts 28:25-27, he quotes Isaiah 6:9,10, the Hebrew of which reads,

**Isaiah 6:9** And He said, Go and say to this people, Listen intently, but you will not understand. Look carefully, but you will not know.

**6:10** Cause the hearts of this people to be insensitive. Cause their ears to be unresponsive. And cause their eyes to be blind, lest they see with their eyes, they hear with their ears, they understand with their hearts, they turn, and they heal with it.

The Hebrew is very close to what Paul says in Greek by quoting mostly from the LXX,

**Acts 28:26** Go to this people and say, You will keep on hearing, but you will not understand. You will keep on seeing, but you will not see. **28:27** For the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they barely hear, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they see with their eyes, they hear with their ears, they understand with their heart, and they turn, so that I heal them <Isaiah 6:9,10>.

Briefly, in Isaiah 6 God looks for someone to speak to the Jews living in the southern Kingdom of Judah around 740 B.C. He wants to indict them for their hardheartedness and warn them of His impending judgment which will result in the destruction of their cities and their being scattered into Gentile lands. If this is what Isaiah 6:9,10 means, how can Paul legitimately use these verses to refer to Jews in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.? He can by reminding his Jewish guests that “their fathers,” the Jews of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., were hardhearted, and that they are simply following in their footsteps, thus implying that they are not obeying or heeding the warning of Isaiah 6. They should embrace the message of Jesus as the Messiah as their “fathers” should have embraced God’s message in Old Testament times, but they are not. Indeed, Paul’s presentation of God’s plan to use Jesus to fulfill the whole “hope of Israel” is a legitimate litmus test of these Jews’ hearts. Do they have changed hearts which lead not only to recognizing biblical truth, but also to believing this truth? Or are their hearts hard, like the Jews’ of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.? Paul, of course, is telling the unbelieving Jews that it is the latter, which becomes an important example of how the New Testament authors/speakers refer to the Old Testament while applying its meaning and relevance in a New Testament context. God spoke to and about these Roman Jews’ “fathers” (ancestors) in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., but “this” rejection of God by the Roman Jews in Paul’s day can be said to be “that which was spoken of through the prophet” Isaiah—to use the same wording which we will see that Peter uses in Acts 2. The hardheartedness of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Jews

is at play in Paul's Jewish contemporaries, just as the Spirit of God's work in the Jews when Jesus returns is at play in his disciples and apostles on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Paul finishes his instructing the Jews in Acts 28 by stating that the same message which they are rejecting, this message of "salvation," has already gone out to the Gentiles, and their response has been and will continue to be a positive one. The Gentiles are embracing the Jewish Messiah as king and priest, while many of the Jews present in the room with Paul are rejecting their own Messiah.

As a result, we have another clue as to why Luke ends the story of Acts in this manner. He is showing that Paul's first conversation in Rome is with Jews, not only because they are the chosen people of God as Abraham's physical descendants, but also because they are hoping that God will make of them a great nation on the land of Israel, as well as grant them eternal life. In other words, the Jews are in a position of priority when it comes to the biblical message, including the New Testament message—in comparison to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, the Gentiles may (or even do) respond more positively than the Jews to the good news of the *Jewish* Messiah. But perhaps this is only for a while (indeed, a long while since we are now almost 2000 years down the road since Jesus' first coming), as I think Joel is saying. We will look at the other relevant passages in Acts to see if this conclusion bears out.

### **Acts 26:1-32**

Moving on, or back, there were two events in Paul's life which resulted in his being sent to Rome by the governing authorities to have a chat with Emperor Nero. The first was his arrest in Jerusalem in Acts 21 for purportedly breaking Jewish law. The second was his incarceration in Caesarea Maritima and conversations with Felix and Agrippa in Acts 24 and 26 respectively. We will first look at Paul's defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26. This man's full name was Marcus Julius Agrippa II, and he was the great-grandson of Herod the Great, the first man to be granted by the Roman Senate the title King as the vassal ruler of the land of Israel around 59 B.C. After Herod the Great's death near A.D. 4, his "kingdom" was divided into four parts among his sons. King Agrippa succeeded Herod Antipas, Herod's son who executed John the Baptist and played a significant role with Pontius Pilate in the crucifixion of Jesus. Agrippa is ruling over one of the more northerly parts of Herod the Great's kingdom near the Sea of Galilee. Here in Acts 26 he has come to pay his respects to the governor Festus of the southerly portion called Judea. Festus has replaced Felix, who will be Paul's interlocutor in the next passage we examine in Acts 24. In a separate conversation, Festus has asked Paul if he is willing to return to Jerusalem to stand trial there. Paul refuses and appeals to Caesar, meaning that, as a Roman citizen, he demands the right to be tried by the supreme ruler of the Roman Empire. Festus is legally obligated to comply with Paul's request. But before he sends him to Rome, he gives Paul the opportunity to explain his case to King Agrippa, who is visiting Festus. Thus Acts 26:1-32 reads,

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**Acts 26:1** And Agrippa said to Paul,

You are permitted to speak for yourself.

Then, Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense,

**26:2** Concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to make my defense before you today, **26:3** especially because you are one who knows all the traditions and questions in accordance with Jewishness. Therefore, I ask you to listen to me patiently. **26:4** All the Jews have known my way of life from my youth, that which took place from the beginning among my people and in Jerusalem (**26:5** since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to bear witness), that I have lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest faction of our religion. **26:6** And now I stand to be judged for waiting expectantly for the promise made by God to the fathers. **26:7** This is the promise which our twelve tribes are waiting expectantly to arrive, while serving earnestly night and day. Concerning this hope, King, I am being accused by the Jews. **26:8** Why is it considered unbelievable among you if God raises the dead?

**26:9** Therefore, I thought to myself that I must do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, **26:10** which I did in Jerusalem. After receiving authority from the chief priests, I locked up in prison many of those who had been set apart. And when they were being killed, I cast my vote. **26:11** Plus, when I often punished people in all the synagogues, I forced them to blaspheme. And all the more being enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities. **26:12** In the midst of these things, I was going to Damascus with the authority and decision of the chief priests. **26:13** At midday, King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, and shining all around me and those who were traveling with me. **26:14** After we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew language,

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard to kick against the goads.

**26:15** And I said, Who are you, Sir? And the Lord said,

I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **26:16** But get up and stand on your feet. For this purpose, I have appeared to you, to appoint you a servant and witness of the things which you have seen, namely, me, and of the things in which I will appear to you, **26:17** when I rescue you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, **26:18** to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the authority of Satan to God, so that they receive forgiveness of their evil actions and an inheritance among those who have been set apart by belief in me.

**26:19** Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not become disobedient to the heavenly vision, **26:20** and I continued declaring to those in Damascus first, to those in Jerusalem, throughout the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, to repent and turn to God, performing actions worthy of repentance. **26:21** Because of these things, the Jews seized me while I was in the temple and attempted to kill me. **26:22** Therefore, having obtained help from God, I stand this day bearing witness to the small and to the great, saying nothing outside the things of which the prophets and Moses said regarding things that were going to happen, **26:23** that there would be a suffering Messiah, that by virtue of the resurrection from the dead, he would be the first to proclaim light to the people and to the Gentiles.

**26:24** After he said these things in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice,

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Paul, you are insane. The many writings are driving you into insanity.

26:25 But Paul said,

I am not insane, most excellent Festus. But I am speaking words of truth and good sense, 26:26 because the king knows about these things. And I am speaking to him with boldness, since I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him, for this has not been done in a corner. 26:27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe them.

26:28 Agrippa replied to Paul,

In a short time, you will persuade me to make of myself a Christian.

26:29 And Paul said,

I would pray to God, in a short and in a long time, not only you, but also all who are listening to me today, would become such as I am, except for these chains.

26:30 The king stood up, along with the governor, Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, 26:31 and after they had left, they were saying to one another,

This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.

26:32 And Agrippa said to Festus,

This man could be released if he had not appealed to Caesar.

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The conversation begins with Agrippa's granting permission to Paul to make his defense before him. Paul first comments that Agrippa understands well the present day Judaism. He then says that all the Jews know him, Paul, well, because he was a member of the strictest sect of Judaism, the Pharisees. Paul's next statement is important to our discussion, in that Paul says that his trial concerns his "waiting expectantly for the promise made by God to the fathers" (26:6). The "fathers" are specifically Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are Paul's and the other Jews' original ancestors. To each of them God stated that He would give them the land of Israel and descendants, make them a great nation on this land, and use their descendants to bless themselves and the rest of the world with eternal life (cf. Genesis 12:1-3 regarding Abraham; 26:2-5 regarding Isaac; 28:13-15 regarding Jacob).

We should notice, though, that, in both vs. 6 & 7, Paul uses the singular "promise" and not the plural "promises." Is he saying that God intended only one of the above mentioned promises ultimately to be fulfilled with respect to the Jews, the promise of eternal life? Or is he saying that the Jews interpreted God's promises to Abraham as boiling down to only one, that of eternal life, while He wanted them to interpret His promise as involving all of them? Or, in line with what God wanted as stated in the previous sentence, is Paul using the singular word as a collective noun, so that promise actually means promises and incorporates the earthly land, descendants, and nation of Israel, as well as the eternal kingdom of a new creation?

We should also notice that, in the next verse, Paul asks the question, Why is it considered unbelievable among you if God raises the dead? In this context of Acts 25 and 26, the “you” to whom Paul is referring are the Gentile rulers, Festus and Agrippa, along with their Gentile entourage who surround them in the throne room of the Roman government’s palace at Caesarea Maritima. It may seem that Paul is reducing God’s Abrahamic promises to one, that of eternal life, but this would be because he is speaking to Gentiles, whose participation in God’s promises involves only this one of eternal life. Therefore, it is more likely that Paul is using promise as a collective noun to refer to all those which God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that Paul wants to emphasize eternal life for the sake of his Gentile audience.

By saying that the twelve tribes of Israel and he are waiting for God’s promises, Paul means that He has not yet fulfilled His promises, so that it makes sense for him to be waiting for Him to do so. It is worth repeating that the question before us is basically whether Paul is waiting 1) for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham and the Jews to place them securely on their own land and to make them the greatest nation on earth in this temporary realm, or 2) for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham, the Jews, and the Gentiles to place them securely in the eternal Kingdom of God, or 3) for God to do both #1 and #2.<sup>9</sup>

Paul goes on to explain in v. 7 that “this is the promise which our twelve tribes are waiting expectantly to arrive, while serving earnestly night and day.” Here Paul indicates that this promise involves at least the Jews, “our twelve tribes.” In the light of his saying in the previous verse that he is on trial for “waiting expectantly for the promise made by God to the fathers,” Paul is not criticizing the Jews for still looking for God to fulfill His promises to them, even though Jesus the Messiah has come. For Paul, it is perfectly legitimate for the Jews, and indeed even for him, to be in a state of waiting for what God has promised them. What concerns him now is that people recognize and embrace Jesus as the person through whom God is going to complete the fulfillment of His promises to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Paul also refers to the Jews’ “serving [God] earnestly night and day.” This they do by performing all the instructions that God gave them through the Mosaic Covenant of Exodus through Deuteronomy. These instructions require that they pay attention to such things as their bringing offerings to God on a continual basis on the land of Israel and in the temple in Jerusalem. In other words, Paul, like his fellow Jews, is connecting the Abrahamic promise of God to the Mosaic Covenant without apology and without criticizing the Jews for pursuing obedience to the latter. Consequently, this is a very Jewish defense by Paul of his work and his appearance at the temple in Jerusalem in Acts 21 when he was arrested. And because it is a very Jewish defense, it makes sense that at least a portion of #2 above is correct, that Paul is waiting for God to place the Jews securely in the eternal Kingdom of God. But why would #1 not make sense also, that Paul is waiting for God to place the Jews securely on their land and to make them the greatest nation on earth in this temporary realm—especially if not only the prophets and the book of Revelation corroborate this promise being fulfilled eventually, but also Paul is stating clearly that he and his fellow Jews are still waiting for God to fulfill His promises specifically to them? It would certainly seem that we can go in this

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<sup>9</sup> This is a shortened form of the five options for the “Kingdom of God” listed in the previous section where we considered Acts 28:16-30.

direction, that this is the same as “the hope of Israel” in Acts 28:20. And we will see if the rest of the evidence in Acts supports this conclusion.

Paul then relates to Agrippa his conversion from a Jesus-hater to a Jesus-follower and that it involved an encounter with the eternal Jesus on the road to Damascus where Paul was traveling to arrest his followers and bring them back to Jerusalem to put them on trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Paul’s new assignment from God through Jesus himself is to proclaim the message of Jesus as the Messiah to both Jews and Gentiles, but mainly to Gentiles. Because Jesus includes the Gentiles, who have no part as mortal beings in the earthly promises by God of living on the land of Israel and being a great nation there, he is referring to the fact that people who hear Paul will switch their allegiance from Satan to God and receive from God not only eternal mercy, but also the “inheritance” or possession of the *eternal* Kingdom of God because of their authentic belief in him. This allows us to say that Jesus was indicating that at least #2 above is correct, so that Paul and his fellow believers in Jesus the Messiah, both Jewish believers and Gentile believers, are waiting for the eternal Kingdom of God. But, again, because Paul speaks of the promise that his fellow Jews are anticipating being fulfilled, #3 with both the mortal Jews’ living on the land of Israel and the Jews’ and Gentiles’ entering into an immortal state of existence makes sense also.

Paul then says that his encounter with Jesus resulted in his declaring to people in Damascus, Jerusalem, and Judea the truth about Jesus. He also went on to proclaim this message, he says, to Gentiles. And it was especially because of this last part that the Jews in Jerusalem wanted to kill him, purportedly for going outside the boundaries of Moses’ instructions to the Jews in the Old Testament. However, Paul affirms that both the prophets and Moses teach unequivocally that the Messiah would suffer and that, after his resurrection from the dead, he would be the first to announce his messianic role to both Jews and Gentiles. We will revisit this last important idea, the explicit proclamation to the Gentiles of the ideas concerning the Jewish Messiah, when we look at Acts 21 when Paul is arrested.

Next, Festus blurts out that he thinks that Paul’s study of the Old Testament has made him insane. Paul’s rebuttal is that he is being as explicit as possible, because he is persuaded that King Agrippa believes the Old Testament prophets to be true. And the conversation ends with the king’s saying that he just might become a Christian if he gives Paul more time to talk, and Paul hopes this is the case for not only the king but also anyone present in the room who is listening to his defense. After Festus and Agrippa leave the room with their entourage, they all agree that Paul is guilty of no crime, should be released, but still must be sent to Rome because he appealed to Caesar.

Thus, this passage confirms that Jesus’ role in human history is very Jewishcentric, so that it makes sense that Paul and the Jews are looking forward to God’s fulfilling all His promises to Abraham of land, descendants, and eternal life, and which include mortal Jews’ becoming a great and powerful nation on earth with their Messiah as their king.

### **Acts 24:10-22**

Our next passage is Acts 24:10-22, which contains Paul’s first defense before only Felix, prior to Festus’ succeeding him as governor of Judea, and a full two years before the events of



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Acts 26. This conversation also takes place in Caesarea Maritima on the coast of Israel, and the passage reads,

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Acts 24:10 When the governor [Felix] motioned for him to speak, Paul responded,

Knowing that for many years you have been a judge for this nation, I cheerfully make my defense, 24:11 because it is possible for you to note that it was not more than twelve days ago that I went up to Jerusalem to worship, 24:12 and neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city did they find me discussing with anyone or causing a disturbance. 24:13 Nor is it possible for them to present to you evidence of that which they now accuse me. 24:14 But I admit to you that according to the Way, which they call heresy, I thus serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that was written in the Torah and the Prophets, 24:15 having the hope in God for which these men are waiting, that there will be a future resurrection of both the justified and the unjustified.

24:16 Because of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless understanding towards God and man. 24:17 And after several years, I came to make gifts to my people and to bring offerings. 24:18 They found me engaged in these in the temple, having been purified, with neither a crowd nor a disturbance. 24:19 However, there were some Jews from Asia, who ought to be present before you and to make their accusation, if they actually have anything against me. 24:20 Or let these men themselves state what crime they found when I stood before the Sanhedrin, 24:21 except for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, I am on trial before you today for the resurrection of the dead.

24:22 But Felix, because he understood more precisely the things concerning the Way, put them off by saying,

When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.

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In this defense of his actions in Jerusalem, Paul claims that he serves the same God as the rest of the Jews, but that he is doing so by means of another method, which he calls the Way, because the unbelieving Jews have labelled Christianity with this word. Paul also indicates that he subscribes to the same scriptures as the rest of the Jews, the “Torah and the Prophets,” i.e., the Old Testament. However, by saying that he “believes everything that was written in” it, he is implying that their interpretation of the Old Testament is not only different from his, but also erroneous. Otherwise, they would not only understand biblical theology the same as he does, but also consider his actions in Jerusalem and in the temple to be right in line with the instructions in the Mosaic Covenant, instead of accusing him of “causing a disturbance.” Therefore, Paul is implying that Jewish adherence to exactly what all the Old Testament teaches is good and right—both for the Jews who are still unbelievers in Jesus as the Messiah and for him who is a believer in Jesus. The logical inference also is that Paul assumes the Old Testament is inerrant and does not need correcting by Jesus and the New Testament. If, in response to the claims of the new trend in Christianity, Jesus clarifies the Old Testament, he does so only by adding more details, not by changing its meaning.

Despite the difference in interpretations of the Old Testament between Paul and the Jews who wanted to kill him, there is one concept on which they agree that the Old

Testament teaches. Paul calls this the “future resurrection of both the justified and the unjustified,” and he also says that this is “the hope in God for which these men are waiting.” Thus, we see that here Paul narrows the meaning of Jewish expectation to simply a future resurrection which will result in eternal life for those who qualify for it. In other words, he does not mention explicitly that the Jews are anticipating God’s establishing them on their land as a great nation, which is what we have been assuming that Paul includes as “the hope of Israel” in both Acts 26 and Acts 28.

Does this mean that we are wrong about Acts 26 and Acts 28? I do not think so, because of all the other clues we have examined in these last two passages—as well as because of Joel, Revelation, etc. But why would Paul list in this conversation in Acts 24 only the resurrection of the dead leading to eternal life as Israel’s hope? Probably because he is speaking with Felix, whom he identifies as “a judge for this nation,” i.e., for the Jews. Felix of necessity is familiar with the Old Testament in order to adjudicate the Jews’ cases in regard to Roman law, so that he must appreciate the nuances of God’s promises to them. Therefore, Paul cuts to the chase for Felix’s sake, that, as a Gentile, he needs to consider the significance of Jesus the Messiah for him—that it is to obtain God’s mercy and *eternal* life. Paul is not concerned with talking to Felix about participating in the future “great nation” of Israel, and, in this way, he is being the consummate apostle to the Gentiles in the presence of a Gentile ruler.

We notice also that the “hope” to which Paul is referring is the “future resurrection of both the justified *and the unjustified* (emphasis mine).” Therefore, the concept of hope in this context has both a positive and a negative connotation, because this is the same event which Jesus calls the “day of judgment” when he references it in regard to the Gentiles who lived in the city of Sodom (cf. Matthew 11:24) and which Revelation 20 describes as a two resurrection judgment. At this judgment, it is possible either that a person receives eternal mercy and life from God (if he is justified so that he participates in the first resurrection of Revelation 20), or that a person receives eternal condemnation and destruction from God (if he is unjustified and participates in the second resurrection of Revelation 20). Paul refers to this event in Romans 2:5 as “the day of wrath and revealing of the righteous judgment of God” and in Romans 14:10 when he says, “And we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.” In his speech to the Athenians, Paul comments in Acts 17:13 that God “has set a day in which He will judge the world with righteousness by means of a man whom he has appointed, after having presented proof to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

Therefore, we discover in Paul’s defense before Felix that the Jews had learned from the Old Testament that God will eventually call all human beings to account at some time in the future, so that it will be necessary to raise from the dead those who have already died. It is possible that the Jews of Paul’s day were thinking that it would be only Jews who would be judged. However, if we take into account their critical attitude towards Gentiles, as for example in Acts 21 when Paul provokes them to try to kill him, it makes more sense to conclude that they believed that God will judge both the Jews and the Gentiles. Indeed, they probably believed that God would be even more judgmental toward the Gentiles, because they are not the chosen people of God.

A question that we should ask is, Where in the Old Testament could the Jews have drawn the conclusion that there will be “a future resurrection of both the justified and the

unjustified”? There is at least one passage. It is Daniel 12:1,2, where a man in a vision, which Daniel has been seeing since Daniel 10:4, makes the statement,

**Daniel 12:1** At that time, Michael, the great prince, who stands over the sons of your people, will stand. And there will be a time of distress which has not been made to occur from there being a nation to that time. And at that time your people will be rescued, all who are found written in the book. **12:2** Many of those who are sleeping in the ground of dust will wake up—these to life into perpetuity, and these to shame and loathing into perpetuity.

As the context bears out, the man of Daniel’s vision is speaking of the nation of Israel, the Jews, and he is referring to the same time as Joel’s events, when the Jews will experience God’s judgment in the most intense manner of all history prior to the return of Jesus the Messiah. Nevertheless, God will rescue from this “time of distress” Daniel’s people, the Jews, and specifically those “who are found written in the book,” which means that certain Jews have been chosen by God for temporary salvation from His judgment that is being dispensed on those living on the land of Israel. In this way, Daniel is referring to the “144,000” of the book of Revelation, who are saved from God’s earthly judgment and who also gain eternal salvation from His condemnation.

The man in Daniel 12 goes on to comment that this whole event includes God’s raising from the dead two different kinds of people. There will be those who are raised “to life,” meaning eternal life, and those who are raised “to shame and loathing,” to their feeling the shame of their rebellion against God and to God’s loathing them for having been such. However, in the context, it makes sense that this man in Daniel is speaking about Jews only. Nevertheless, based upon other clues in the Old Testament, such as the fact that God is the Creator of both Jews and Gentiles, the complete significance of such a resurrection of the Jews is that it will also involve the Gentiles.

Consequently, Paul in his defense to Felix is saying that both the unbelieving Jews, who are there in the audience accusing him of a great crime, and he understand that the Old Testament teaches eternal mercy from God, as spoken by the man of Daniel’s vision in Daniel 12:2, and they are both waiting for this. But would it not also make sense that the unbelieving Jews and Paul understand that Daniel 12:1 teaches that God will bring a great time of distress upon the Jews, along with their rescue from judgment both in the temporary realm and in the eternal realm? In line with this, as spoken of in Jeremiah 23, the Messiah will defeat the Jews’ earthly and human enemies as part of his saving certain ones from God’s judgment, and he defeats the Jews’ greatest enemy, God’s eternal condemnation, when he saves them from it. This is to say that the Jews and Paul are both looking to the Messiah, whoever he might be, to be the one who brings about the earthly Kingdom of God in Israel and the heavenly Kingdom of God in eternity—exactly that which the Old Testament predicts. Consequently, Paul is here talking about the same thing as “the hope of Israel” of Acts 28:20, while focusing on eternal life for Felix’s sake as a Gentile.

He continues and ends his defense by describing his innocent actions in Jerusalem and his shouting out before the court of the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, that ultimately he was on trial for believing in the resurrection of the dead. This presents us with another good reason why Paul narrows “the hope of Israel” to just the future resurrection in his speech to Felix. As he did when he stood before the Sanhedrin of the Jewish leadership, he wants to foment division among his accusers who are both Pharisees and Sadducees, the former who

believe there will be a resurrection and the latter who deny it (cf. Acts 23:6-10). In this way, Paul is pointing Felix to the specific aspect of God's promises which concerns him as a Gentile, and he is keeping his Jewish accusers off balance by making it difficult for them to agree with one another before Felix.

### **Acts 21:40-22:22**

Next, we should look at Paul's speech before the Jews at the temple when they almost tear him limb from limb, because they believe that he has desecrated the temple by bringing Gentiles into it. This, in turn, led to his arrest and appearance before Felix. My purpose in bringing this passage into our discussion is not because of what Paul says, but because of how the Jews react to what he says, which will be instructive for us. Thus, Acts 21:40-22:22 reads,

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**Acts 21:40** When [Lysias the Roman commander] gave him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned with his hand to [the Jews who were accusing him of desecrating the temple], and after a great silence had fallen on them, he said in the Hebrew language,

**22:1** Men, brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense to you.

**22:2** When they heard that he was speaking to them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said,

**22:3** I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but educated in this city, instructed at the feet of Gamaliel, from the precise instruction of the Torah of our fathers, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. **22:4** I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering over to the prisons both men and women, **22:5** as also the high priest and the body of old men will bear witness concerning me. From them I also received letters to the brothers when I went to Damascus, in order to lead those who were there bound to Jerusalem, so that they may be punished.

**22:6** But while I was on my journey and approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed around me, **22:7** and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying,

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

**22:8** I answered, Who are you, Sir? And he said to me,

I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.

**22:9** Those who were with me saw the light, but they did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. **22:10** And I said, What should I do, Sir? And the man said to me,

Get up and go to Damascus, and there it will be told to you all that has been appointed for you to do.

**22:11** And because I could not see on account of the intensity of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and I came to Damascus. **22:12** A certain Ananias, a man well-

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committed according to the Torah and well-spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 22:13 came to me and stood by me, saying,

Brother Saul, receive your sight.

At that very moment, I saw again towards him. 22:14 And he said,

The God of our fathers has handpicked you to know His will, to see the one who is righteous, and to hear the sound from his mouth, 22:15 because you will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 22:16 And now, what will you do? Rise up, be baptized, and wash away your immoral actions, while calling on his name.

22:17 And when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance. 22:18 And I saw him saying to me,

Hurry, and leave Jerusalem quickly, because they will not embrace your testimony concerning me.

22:19 And I said, Lord, they themselves understand that I was the one imprisoning and beating in the synagogues those who believe in you. 22:20 And when the blood of your witness Stephen was being poured out, I was the one standing by them and approving, while I guarded the cloaks of those who were killing him. 22:21 And he said to me,

Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

22:22 They listened to him until this statement, and then they raised their voices and said,

Away with such a man from the land, because it is not lawful for him to live.

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A few comments on Paul's speech before we consider the people's reaction to it. Paul identifies himself as a well-taught Jew. With such words as "strictly according to the law of our fathers," some translations make it sound as though Gamaliel and others taught Paul the correct interpretation of the Old Testament. However, this does not make sense, because it would have led to Paul's embracing Jesus as the Messiah, not rejecting him (albeit only if God changed his heart). Therefore, it is better to translate the Greek text as I did, "from the precise instruction of the Torah of our fathers." Paul is not saying that Gamaliel and other Jewish teachers provided him with a precise understanding of the Torah. He is saying that the Torah is precise, whether or not its students are interpreting it correctly. And obviously Paul's audience (and Paul before Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus and started him down the path of restudying the Old Testament) have not taken the precise instruction of the Torah and successfully studied it. Otherwise, they would not be so hostile towards Paul and his message of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

Paul also says that he was "zealous for God" before becoming a Christian and that his Jewish audience are the same. And he says this without criticizing the Jews for being such, even though they are misguided in their thoughts by opposing him. This tells us that Paul does not consider following the Mosaic Covenant an inappropriate way of obeying God. It is

the good and right thing to do for Jews. What was missing for him, and what is missing for these Jews listening to him is a correct interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant, whereby they could naturally and easily segue (with changed hearts) to embracing Jesus as the Messiah.

And why are the Jews “zealous for God?” Is it simply because pursuing morality according to God’s instructions in the Old Testament is a good thing to do? Or could it also be because there is something in it for the Jews? Indeed, as we saw in the main part of this paper, God’s fulfilling His promises to the Jews comes in the midst of their fulfilling their obligation to obey the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, we have here another and an indirect reference to “the hope of Israel” of Acts 28:20 which includes all that God said He was going to do for the Jews—give them land, descendants, a great nation, and eternal life, while also using them as His means to grant eternal life to Gentiles. In this way, Paul continues to affirm the Jewishness of the message which he has been assigned by God to present to the Gentiles, so that it does not make sense that God would fulfill His promise to the Gentiles to give them eternal life without His making good on all His earthly promises to the Jews of land, descendants, and transforming them into a strong and powerful nation.

Moving on in Paul’s speech, when Jesus confronts him, he states that he is persecuting him, in spite of the fact that Paul is persecuting believers in Jesus, not Jesus himself. Thus, Jesus identifies intimately with his followers, so that any hostility and ill-treatment of them constitutes the same towards him. We never find out in the New Testament exactly Paul’s whereabouts during the crucifixion of Jesus, but here Jesus is saying indirectly that Paul is guilty of nailing him to the cross, just as much as the Jewish leaders and Romans who commanded and performed it.

Paul then describes Ananias, the man sent by God to explain his new role to him, as “a man well-committed according to the Torah.” As in the case of Paul, was Ananias “zealous for God” before he became a Christian, but he lacked correct understanding of the Old Testament? Probably. Therefore, also like Paul, Ananias has become fully committed to God and obeying the teachings of the Old Testament in the midst of believing in Jesus as his Messiah. This transition from a misguided follower of the Mosaic Covenant to one who correctly understands it has not made Ananias any less committed to the Torah. Instead, He is practicing the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant with equal fervor and better knowledge. This is why Paul can also describe Ananias as “a man...well-spoken of by all the Jews” of Damascus. It is logical to think that the Jews who spoke well of Ananias included those who were still rejecting Jesus as their Messiah, because God had not changed their hearts. Therefore, these particular Jews would speak well of Ananias only because he carefully and outwardly followed the Mosaic Covenant, as they themselves were doing. Thus, we see that believing Jews of Paul’s day, such as Ananias, considered their Jewishness according to the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants to be of utmost importance, even while they believed in the Jewish Messiah. Paul even demonstrated this genuine and proper concern for his Old Testament heritage when he came to Jerusalem and worshiped God in the temple according to the practices prescribed in the Jewish Torah—as he explains to Felix (cf. Acts 24:17, “I came [to Jerusalem] to make gifts to my people and to bring offerings [to God]”).

Paul goes on to say here to the Jews in Jerusalem that Jesus himself appeared to him as he was praying in the temple years ago after he had returned from Damascus. Thus, Jesus urges him to leave the city immediately, because the Jews are hostile towards him and his being

convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus also says that after he leaves the city, he should go far away to the Gentiles to fulfill his responsibility of announcing him as the Jewish Messiah who rescues both Jews and Gentiles from God's condemnation. It is this last statement that triggers an apoplectic attack by his Jewish audience to the extent that they believe that he deserves to die. But why would this statement upset them so? After all, even their own scriptures indicate that Gentiles have been authentic followers of Yahweh and will be even to the end of history when God raises the dead to judge them. But this is probably the clue to answering our question. As an example of the Old Testament passages which speak directly of Gentiles' obeying Yahweh, notice how Isaiah puts it in Isaiah 2:2-4,

- Isaiah 2:2** And it will happen in the last days that the mountain of the house of Yahweh will become established, with its being the chief of the mountains. And it will be raised above the hills, and all the Gentiles will stream to it.
- 2:3** And many nations will go, and they will say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob. And He will teach us from His way, that we may walk in His paths, because Torah goes out from Zion, and the message of God from Jerusalem.
- 2:4** And He will judge between the Gentiles, and He will decide for many peoples. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up a sword against a nation. And they will never again learn war.

Because of the Jews' study of such passages as Isaiah 2:2-4 above, it is reasonable to assume that those who are listening to Paul react the way they do as if they are saying, "Paul, you idiot! The Old Testament does not say that God is going to send us, or even you, to the Gentiles. Instead, it says that God is going to send the Gentiles to us! Jerusalem is the center of not only the worship of God, but also the learning of God. The Gentiles will finally become peaceful towards each other and even us when they *come here to us* to be taught the Torah. Therefore, you are lying and violating the Torah, and it clearly states that those who violate it by rejecting God's clear teaching deserve to die." In this manner, the Jews honestly and sincerely believe that they are defending properly their God-given scriptures. Just as they feel it necessary to guard the divine religious scruples of eating only food that is kosher (as we will see in Acts 10), they also feel it necessary to guard the divine center of worshiping God, the land of Israel, and most specifically Jerusalem. God surely would not permit a Jew to eat food that is not kosher—according to them. God also surely would not send someone out of the land of Israel to encourage others to worship Him properly. However, both of these are true according to the Old Testament and the New Testament. The problem is not what the two testaments are saying. The problem is the Jews' interpretation of either one.

I also suspect that the last statement by Paul in this speech is not the only one to which they are reacting negatively, but it is the straw which broke the camel's back. When Paul explains that he was baptized in Jesus' name and received forgiveness for his immoral actions in Damascus, this did not probably sit too well with the Jews in Jerusalem for whom the temple was the only place where a good Jew could receive forgiveness from God.

Thus, we find that in all three defenses which Paul makes (to the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 21, to Felix the governor in Acts 24, and to King Agrippa in Acts 26), he affirms the Old Testament's promises and commandments to the Jews along with the inerrant precision with which it makes these promises and issues these commandments, thus marking the Jewish people as playing a vital role throughout all human history from the time of Abraham

until God destroys the present, temporary realm and constructs a new, eternal one. Paul does not clarify and change the Old Testament by explaining how Jesus does so. He clarifies Jesus by using the accurate message of the Old Testament. The “hope of Israel” as presented in the Old Testament, including in the Mosaic Covenant, is exactly the same as the “hope of Israel” in the New Testament. If there is any change that has to take place, it is *the Jews’ understanding of the Old Testament*, not the original authors’ meaning in the Old Testament. And if there is any clarification that has to take place, it is that *of Jesus by the Old Testament because its passages are foundational to understanding the Messiah*, not that of the Old Testament by Jesus by correcting it. Thus, the additional details gleaned from the four gospel accounts regarding Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection make it obvious that Old Testament passages which could be interpreted as referring to people or events other than Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection are, in fact, referring to only him. And, to be explicit, the original authors meant to refer to the Messiah’s life, death, and resurrection, so that the New Testament is not correcting their meanings, but making it even more obvious that these were their meanings.

In the same manner that he affirms God’s Old Testament promises to the Jews, Paul affirms His promises to the Gentiles. The Jews are slated to experience the Kingdom of God on earth as mortal, morally depraved authentic believers in the land of Israel or as immortal, morally perfect beings who are either resurrected and transformed or immediately transformed. Then, both kinds of Jews will enter into the eternal Kingdom of God as immortal and morally perfect beings. The Gentiles will experience both kingdoms as immortal, morally perfect beings, ruling with Jesus during the millennial, earthly kingdom and living with immortal Jews in the eternal kingdom. Does the rest of the book of Acts bear this out? Let us continue our journey backwards through it and see, finally arriving at Acts 2 where Peter quotes Joel.

### **Acts 17:1-9**

Our next passage in Acts is in chapter 17, the first eight verses. This event takes place during Paul’s second missionary journey around A.D. 51,52. As with his other trips, he set off from Antioch on the Orontes in modern day Syria. For this journey, he left in A.D. 50, passed through Kilikia (Cilicia in our English Bibles), Lystra (where he picks up Timothy as an apostolic co-worker), the Phrygian and Galatian regions (but is forbidden by God from entering Asia, i.e., Ephesus), Mysia, Troas (where Luke uses the first person plural pronoun “we” for the first time in his account of Acts), Samothrace, Neopolis, and Philippi (where he spends a night in jail). Then, as Acts 17:1-8 tells it,

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**Acts 17:1** When they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a gathering of the Jews. **17:2** And, according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and, for three Sabbaths, he reasoned with them from the scriptures. **17:3** He explained and gave evidence that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, and

This is the Messiah Jesus, whom I am proclaiming to you.



17:4 Some of them were persuaded and joined up with Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the Greeks who were committed to God, and a number of the leading women. 17:5 But the Jews became jealous and, taking along some of the evil men from the market place, they formed a mob and stirred up the city. They even attacked the house of Jason and were seeking to bring them before the people. 17:6 When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city rulers, shouting,

These men, who are subverting the world, have come here also. 17:7 Jason has welcomed them, and they are all acting contrary to the judgments of Caesar, saying that there is a different king, Jesus.

17:8 They stirred up the crowd and the city rulers, who heard these things, 17:9 and when they had received an assurance from Jason and the rest, they released them.

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Thessalonica is in northern Greece, in the area called Macedonia, where Alexander the Great had grown up. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., it was a retirement community for Roman soldiers, but, as Luke informs us, it contained a good size Jewish population, probably as a result of the Assyrian exile in 722 B.C. as the Jews eventually spread west into the Indo-European region north of the Mediterranean Sea. While Paul ran into resistance to his message of Jesus as the Messiah from Gentiles a short time before in Philippi and spends a night in jail, in Thessalonica the opposition comes from the Jews.

We saw in his speech to King Agrippa in Acts 26 that he claimed that he never spoke of things which could not be confirmed by “Moses and the prophets,” i.e., by the Old Testament, and that one of the most important ideas to be found in the Old Testament was the necessity for the Messiah to suffer death, so that after rising from the dead he could be the first person to proclaim to both Jews and Gentiles all the ramifications of this major event. Here, in Acts 17, Luke tells us that Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (as we learned from his speeches to the Jews in Jerusalem, to Felix, and to King Agrippa), first goes to the Jews living in Thessalonica to teach them about Jesus, the suffering and resurrected Messiah. And we also find out that he spends three whole Sabbaths arguing from their scriptures that this is exactly the kind of Messiah that the Old Testament clearly and accurately presents and predicts, even though the Jews have misinterpreted the salient passages.

What is the Jews’ response? The same that Paul will later encounter in Rome as Luke ends Acts with his conversation with Jews. Some of the Jews believe the truth of the Old Testament which Paul demonstrates to them. Some do not. However, unlike in Rome, the Thessalonian Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah become so angry with Paul that they conspire to convince the Roman authorities to execute him as a traitor, because he is “acting contrary to the judgments of Caesar, saying that there is a different king, Jesus.”

But the Jews cannot actually be upset that Paul is proclaiming “a different king,” because they themselves would have had messianic expectations from their study of the Old Testament. Therefore, they are in their own minds and hearts just as guilty as Paul of being traitors to the Roman Caesar. The problem is that Paul is proclaiming a suffering Jewish king, as clearly indicated by Luke’s comments that Paul spent three Bible study sessions with them trying to convince them that their king, who would crush their enemies, would first have to be crushed by their enemies in order to qualify for his role of returning the favor.

For our purposes here with respect to Joel, we see that Paul believes that Moses and the prophets provided clear and irrefutable evidence as divine scriptures to the effect that the Messiah would have to die in order to bring life to others, and that he would have to be seen as a criminal by both the Jews and the Gentiles in order to become their king. As we asked when we were looking at Paul's speech to Agrippa in Acts 26, is Paul communicating to the Jews in their Sabbath exploration of the Old Testament that Jesus suffered 1) in order to play his part in God's placing the Jews securely on the land of Israel in this temporary realm, or 2) in order to play his part in leading them and believing Gentiles into the eternal Kingdom of God, or 3) both?<sup>10</sup> From this passage, we cannot tell. All we can conclude is that the Old Testament is clear enough and complete enough in its inerrant presentation of ideas for Paul to argue convincingly that Jesus the Messiah had to die in order to be the Messiah. Thus, Paul uses the Old Testament to clarify Jesus, not Jesus to correct the Old Testament. The accounts of Jesus certainly clarify the Old Testament by explicitly demonstrating that the various passages which refer to the living, human, suffering, resurrected Messiah who sits at God's right hand are true of him and him alone. But they do not correct these or other passages, and Paul in no way changes the meaning of the Old Testament in order to show that it is teaching about Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

### **Acts 15:1-21**

Moving back a couple of chapters to Acts 15, we next consider Paul and Barnabas' behavior, Peter's comments regarding Cornelius and his family (cf. Acts 10), and James observations with respect to the Old Testament, as all these pertain to the question of whether or not God is requiring Gentiles to obey the Mosaic Covenant in order to be *bona fide* followers of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Acts 15:1-22 reads,

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**Acts 15:1** Some men who had come down from Judea were teaching the brothers,

Unless you are circumcised according to the ethics of Moses, you cannot be rescued.

**15:2** And after there ensued no small argument and debate between Paul and Barnabas and them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, along with some of the others of them, should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and old men concerning this question. **15:3** Having been sent on their way by the gathering, they were passing through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they were bringing great joy to all the brothers. **15:4** When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the gathering, the apostles, and the old men. And they recounted all that God had done with them.

**15:5** But some from the faction of the Pharisees stood and said,

It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the Torah of Moses.

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<sup>10</sup> Again, this is a shortened form of the above list of five options for the "Kingdom of God" in Acts 28 involving mortal and immortal Jews, as well as immortal Gentiles.

15:6 And the apostles and the old men came together to look into this matter. 15:7 After a lot of debate had occurred, Peter stood up and said to them,

Men, brothers, from the old days God selected among you for the Gentiles to hear by my mouth the message of the good news and to believe. 15:8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness when He gave them the Holy Spirit just as He had given us. 15:9 Thus, He made no distinction between us and them, when He cleansed their hearts with belief. 15:10 Therefore, why are you now testing God by laying a yoke on the necks of the disciples, a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 15:11 Instead, we believe that we are rescued through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way that they also are.

15:12 The whole multitude were silent. In addition, they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they explained what signs and testifying signals God performed among the Gentiles through them. 15:13 After they became silent, James responded,

Men, brothers, listen to me. 15:14 Simeon has explained how God first concerned Himself with taking from the Gentiles a people for His name. 15:15 And with respect to this, the messages of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

15:16 After these things, I will return, and I will rebuild the fallen tent of David. And I will rebuild its ruins and restore it. 15:17 in order that the rest of men may seek Yahweh, and all the Gentiles among them who call on My name among them, says Yahweh, who is doing these things, 15:18 which have been known from the age <Amos 9:11,12>.

15:19 Therefore, it is my judgment that we not add extra trouble to those who are turning to God from the Gentiles, 15:20 but that we write them to distance themselves from the polluted things of idols, from immorality, from that which has been strangled, and from blood. 15:21 For Moses, because of ancient generations, has those who proclaim him in a city, because he is read in synagogues every Sabbath.

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We see that the moral obligations of a Gentile who becomes an authentic believer in the Jewish Messiah first becomes a hotly contested subject at the beginning of Acts 15 when some Jewish believers travel to Antioch on the Orontes in Syria (in contrast to Psidian Antioch in central Turkey) and are teaching the Gentile Christians that God requires them to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Covenant in order to obtain eternal salvation from God's condemnation. These Jewish Christians are convinced that the only legitimate way for Gentile Christians to follow Jesus is by becoming as Jewish in their behavior as they are.

Paul and Barnabas disagree with them, and it sounds as though words are flowing fast and furious in the conversation (argument) which ensues. A good question for us to ask is, How have these Jewish Christians in Jerusalem come to the conclusion that Gentile believers in their Messiah should also live according to the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant which are spelled out in Exodus through Deuteronomy and which imply obedience to the 1 commandment to Abraham in Genesis 17 to be circumcised? Without including a complete study of Genesis 12-21 (the Abrahamic Covenant), Exodus-Deuteronomy (the Mosaic Covenant), and 1 Samuel-Malachi (the history of the Jews' obedience, or lack thereof, to both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, along with God's

responses through the prophets), I will hazard a guess that it is because the Jews interpreted God as saying that not only are they as His chosen people intended to be one, large physical sign of God, His character, and His purposes to the rest of the world, but also, that the rest of the world must join them completely in their outward sign-ness if they want God to love, forgive, and grant them His gifts, especially the gift of eternal life.

As a result, these Christian Jews cannot fathom a human being's becoming acceptable to God simply on the basis of his heart and fundamental desire to love and obey God in the midst of believing in Jesus. In contrast to these Jews, Paul and Barnabas can. And so can Peter and James. And so can the rest of the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem—as far as we can tell from the rest of story in Acts 15 which I do not actually quote here.

Thus, Peter recounts to the group his experience in Acts 10 of watching God cause the Roman centurion Cornelius and his family speak about Him in foreign languages that were unknown to these Gentiles, just as God had caused the apostles and their fellow followers of Jesus to do so on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter claims that, without anything else happening in these Gentiles' lives, such as being circumcised or explicitly following any of the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, God was declaring them loved, justified, and forgiven, so that He would grant them eternal mercy in the eternal Kingdom of God. This is both huge and tricky. On the one hand, Peter is proving that both Gentiles *and Jews* are declared loved, justified, and eternally forgiven by means of ONLY their inward belief in the Jewish Messiah. On the other hand, he is pointing to a miraculous experience of God's causing people to speak about Him using languages previously unknown to them, in order to demonstrate His acceptance of them. This is huge, because God is making it very obvious that He is moving in people's hearts and causing them to become *bona fide* believers in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. This is tricky, because we have to ask the question, Should this miraculous experience of speaking in unknown, foreign languages be considered the norm and necessary for all Christians down through history?

We will continue to consider this question as we move backwards in Acts. For the time being, we also notice that Peter refers to the Torah of Moses as a humanly unbearable yoke. Why? Peter provides the clue when he ends his comments with, "Instead, we believe that we [Jews] are rescued through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way that they [Gentiles] also are." If we assume that God gave the Mosaic Covenant to the Jews as that which they should obey in order to obtain at least the earthly promises which God made to them through Abraham, then Paul cannot mean that the covenant itself is bad. As he explains in Romans 7, the Mosaic Covenant is good, while he, a morally depraved human being, is bad. Thus, the unbearable yoke which the Jewish Christians are trying to lay on the shoulders of the Gentiles is not just the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant. It is the attitude that, through obedience to the covenant, a human being makes himself worthy of God's mercy, even His mercy through the Messiah Jesus. Therefore, there are really two issues in question in Acts 15. One is whether or not the Gentile Christians have any moral obligation to keep the Mosaic Covenant. The other is whether the proper avenue to obtain God's mercy is by earning it—through obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and circumcision.

Regarding this second issue, we have explored in this paper Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:1-7, where we discovered that the Mosaic Covenant requires an inward change of heart which human beings cannot produce, while God has promised the Jews that He Himself will

create this change in them. And Peter is pointing to the fact that even certain Jews among the Christians in Jerusalem believe that they in and of themselves can change their hearts in order to obey sufficiently the Mosaic Covenant and God so as to obtain His mercy. He is also implying that they believe that they make themselves worthy of His mercy when they do so. However, since encountering the Messiah Jesus and understanding the truth of the Old Testament correctly, Peter and all the apostles now know that human beings “are rescued through the grace of the Lord Jesus.” This is to say that not only must God independently initiate and produce inward belief and worship of Him in order for this belief and worship to be biblically authentic, but also, when He does, the human being in whom He has produced these is eternally acceptable and loved by Him. This is what Peter means when he says that God has given the Gentiles “the Holy Spirit just as He had given us,” referring to the apostles’ experience of speaking in unknown, foreign languages at Pentecost, which we will consider when we look at Acts 2. With this common experience which God has given the Jews and the Gentiles, He has “made no distinction between” them. In other words, the method which God employs for transforming a morally depraved Jew into a person who stands to gain God’s mercy through Jesus is exactly the same as that which He employs for a Gentile. Peter refers to it as God’s having “cleansed their hearts with belief,” which is the same as saying that God has circumcised their hearts as mentioned in Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:1-7. The result for the apostles, Cornelius and his family, and the Gentile Christians in Antioch is that they perform genuine, biblical belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

In addition, Peter must be implying that the covenant which God explicitly declared through Moses in Exodus through Deuteronomy is for only Jews. While Gentiles are inside the Abrahamic Covenant and its promise of eternal life to anyone who mimics Abraham’s belief (cf. Genesis 12:1-3), they are outside the Mosaic Covenant and any moral obligation to it. James says as much when he states, “It is my judgment that we add no extra trouble to those who are turning to God from the Gentiles.” The trouble is not only trying to earn God’s mercy, but also doing so with obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. James also quotes Amos 9:11,12 to the effect that, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., God declares that His purpose for injecting into the creation the final Davidic king, who we now know is Jesus, will be to draw Gentiles to Himself.

But we also see that God through Amos says that He will “rebuild and restore” the Davidic kingdom. As we have considered above in the other passages which we have explored in Acts, there are three options for what God means in Amos. Either 1) He means only that He will bring back the Jewish kingdom in the land of Israel with Jesus as their king. Or 2) God means only that He will bring back the Davidic kingdom in eternity for both Jews and Gentiles. Or 3) He means that He will do both. I suggest that, in Amos, God means both, because He has in mind that He will fulfill His promise through Abraham to turn the Jews into a great nation on earth, and He has in mind that He will fulfill His promise through Abraham to turn the Jews and Gentiles into an eternally acceptable people who will be granted eternal life. This is to say also that anytime God comments on His fulfilling one of the Abrahamic promises, it implies that He will fulfill all of them. In Acts 15, James understands this and quotes Amos to the effect that God has all along planned to include the Gentiles in His fulfilling His promises to Abraham and the Jews. However, because mortal Gentiles do not officially participate in the earthly Jewish kingdom which will still involve

obeying the Mosaic Covenant as part of the Jews' historical obligation to God, James can say that it is important not to bother the Gentiles with this same obligation. The Gentiles are free to wait for their immortal bodies at Jesus' return and later the eternal Kingdom of God in nothing but a moral context outside the Mosaic Covenant instead of in a moral, religious, and ceremonial context, this latter being what is true for the Jews because of the Mosaic Covenant.

For our purposes, these apostles, Paul, Peter, and James, are convinced of the precise teaching of the Old Testament in regard to both the Jews and the Gentiles, even if some of their Jewish brethren have misinterpreted this teaching. And this teaching pertains both to the Jewish obligation to God within the context of the earthly kingdom of the Jews and to the Jewish and Gentile obligation to God within the context of the heavenly eternal kingdom, thus implying that the Jewish Messiah's initial life, death, and resurrection is vital to God's realizing both kingdoms, a concept to which we will return as we also go back further in the book of Acts.

### **Acts 13:16-52**

We now move to Acts 13. Paul has left Antioch on the Orontes with Barnabas for his first missionary journey, which lasts from A.D. 47-48. They arrive in Psidian Antioch in central Turkey, where "on the Sabbath day they entered into the synagogue and sat down." The Jews ask them if they want to say anything, and vs. 16-52 read,

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**Acts 13:16** Paul stood up, motioned with his hand, and said,

Men, Israelites and those who fear God, listen. **13:17** The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and He lifted up the people in their stay in Egypt. And with an uplifted arm, He led them out from it. **13:18** Then, for forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. **13:19** After He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He divided up their land—**13:20** for four hundred and fifty years. Then, after these things, He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. **13:21** And they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man from the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. **13:22** And when He removed him, He raised up David to be their king, with respect to whom He also said and bore witness,

I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My wishes  
<Psalm 89:20; 1 Samuel 13:14>.

**13:23** From the seed of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus, **13:24** after John had proclaimed before the appearance of his entrance a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. **13:25** And as John was finishing his course, he kept saying,

Who do you suppose that I am? I am not he. But, watch, there is one coming after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.

13:26 Men, brothers, sons of the offspring of Abraham (υἱοὶ γένους Ἀβραάμ), and those who fear God among you, the message of salvation was sent forth to us. 13:27 Now, those who live in Jerusalem, because they ignored him and what is said by the prophets which is read each Sabbath, fulfilled it by condemning him. 13:28 And, even though they found no cause to put him to death, they asked Pilate that he be executed. 13:29 When they finished all that had been written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. 13:30 But God raised him from the dead. 13:31 He appeared for many days with those who traveled up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who now are his witnesses to the people. 13:32 And we are proclaiming to you the good news of the promise that was made to the fathers, 13:33 that God has carried out this promise to their children, to us, when He raised up Jesus, as it was also written in the second Psalm,

You are My son. Today, I have given birth to you <Psalm 2:7>.

13:34 And because He raised him from the dead, no longer to be about to return to decay, thus He has spoken,

I will give you the divinely vital and trustworthy things of David <Isaiah 55:3>.

13:35 Therefore, He also says in a different Psalm,

You will not grant to Your set apart one to see decay <Psalm 16:10>.

13:36 For David, after he had served the purpose of God with respect to his own generation, died, was laid among his fathers, and he saw decay. 13:37 But the one whom God raised, he did not see decay. 13:38 Therefore, let it be known to you, Men, brothers, that forgiveness of sins and all which you are not able to be justified by means of the instruction of Moses, is being declared to you through this man. 13:39 By means of this man, everyone who believes is justified. 13:40 Therefore, be careful that that which was spoken by the prophets does not happen,

13: 41 Behold, you who mock, be amazed and be destroyed, because I am performing an action in your days, an action which you would not believe, even if someone were to state it plainly to you <Habakkuk 1:5>.

13:42 While they were going out, they were urging them to speak to them of these matters on the next Sabbath. 13:43 After the synagogue let out, many of the Jews and the worshiping converts from paganism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were persuading them to continue in the grace of God.

13:44 When the Sabbath arrived, almost the whole city gathered to hear the message of the Lord. 13:45 But, when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with envy and, by blaspheming, were contradicting the things spoken by Paul. 13:46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out with bold openness and said,

It was necessary that the message of God be spoken to you first. Because you have rejected it and judge yourselves not to be worthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

13:47 Because it is thus that the Lord has commanded us,

I have appointed you as a light for the Gentiles, in order that you may exist for salvation to the end of the earth <Isaiah 42:6;49:6>.

13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced, glorified the message of the Lord, and believed it, as many as had been appointed to eternal life. 13:49 And the message of the Lord was spread throughout the whole region. 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the worshiping women of prominence and the leaders of the city. Thus, they instigated a persecution against of Paul and Barnabas, and they drove them out of their district. 13:51 And they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and they went to Iconium. 13:52 Meanwhile, the students were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

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We see from the second sentence in Paul's speech that he is affirming what we learned from Genesis 12:1-3. Paul refers to "the God of this people Israel." He also says that God "chose our fathers." Paul is standing in a Jewish synagogue in Psidian Antioch, and he is addressing his listeners as "Israelites and those who fear God," the former being Jews and the latter being Gentiles who have converted from pagan idolatry to Judaism. It therefore makes sense to interpret "this people Israel" as Jews, the physical descendants of Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, and who was Abraham's grandson through the child whom God promised to him, Isaac. Thus, God "chose [Paul's and the Jews'] fathers," Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the three great patriarchs of the Jews, so that they all are God's people. For God to "choose" the first male heads of the Jews is the same as God's promising the Jewish people certain things in order to do something significant with them in human history, which also requires that they behave in a particular way which reveals that they truly are His people. Thus, around 2000 B.C., God selected Abraham out of all the Semitic people living in Ur of the Chaldees and promised that he would have descendants who would live on a land which God would give them, that he would obtain eternal life and be the paradigm of all human beings who obtain it, and that God would eventually mold Abraham's descendants into the greatest nation in history. Later, God reaffirmed this promise to Abraham's son Isaac and then to his grandson Jacob. Five hundred years after Abraham, God gave his descendants the Mosaic Covenant, which taught them how they should live in a manner that demonstrates to the Gentiles their identity as His people.

Then, Paul recounts more of Israel's story—their temporary stay in Egypt, their journey in the Sinai desert on their way home to the land of Canaan, God's leading them into this land, His conquering the Canaanites and dividing the land into specific portions for each tribe of Israel, His giving them rulers called judges ending with Samuel, who was also a prophet, an authorized spokesman on behalf of God, and His providing them with their first king, Saul, and then their second king, David. Paul uses a quote from Psalm 89:20 to indicate that David was a special person in God's mind, because He chose the line of David to be that from which He "has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus."

Paul could be describing all this Jewish history only to demonstrate that the Jews' and Gentiles' savior from God's judgment and for the sake of the eternal Kingdom of God arrived through the exact process which God prescribed in the Old Testament. Or he could be offering this history to demonstrate his own agreement with the Jews in the Psidian Antioch synagogue that they and he are part of an important historical experiment and purpose which God is seeing through to the end of the present realm by using Jesus as the



Jews' savior from God's judgment and all their enemies when he sets up his kingdom in Jerusalem. Or he could have had both in mind with an emphasis on the fact that Jesus' saviorhood begins with the Jews, both in this realm and for the sake of the next, and moves on to the Gentiles for the sake of their immortal participation in the present and next realm. Our study of Joel and related passages in Revelation, etc. certainly allows for this third option to be a strong contender for being the correct interpretation of this speech by Paul. This third option also correlates with what we have learned so far in Acts.

In the next part of his speech, Paul once again distinguishes between the Jews, the "sons of the [physical] offspring of Abraham," and the Gentiles who have embraced the Judaism of their day, "those who fear God among you." This ethnic difference is important to Paul, because we are seeing him in Acts connect the Gentile hope of eternal life to the Jewish hope of all the promises of God to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. He then briefly describes how it came about that Jesus died on a cross as a common criminal in the minds of the Jews. First, Paul implies that the Old Testament clearly reveals the truth that the Messiah must die in order to fulfill his responsibility by stating that the Jews "in Jerusalem...ignored...what is said by the prophets which is read every Sabbath." He is indicating that the prophets speak inerrant truth with respect to Jesus' suffering death on the cross. Does it make sense to think that they do not speak inerrant truth with respect to other aspects of God's plans and purpose, e.g., His restoring the Kingdom of Israel and creating a new realm for the eternal Kingdom of God, so that neither of Jesus' kingdoms actually exists yet? No, it does not. Jesus is definitely the one and only king of both kingdoms, but he presently is a king without a kingdom. Yet they both are coming!!! Plus, Paul states that God raised Jesus from the dead, and, after this event with multiple appearances to his apostles and students, Paul can now say that "God has carried out this promise [which was made to the Jewish ancestors]" to give them a king, so that Jesus' resurrection was equivalent to Solomon's being crowned king as his father David describes in Psalm 2:7 when God says, "Today I have given birth to you."

God had guaranteed to David that his son Solomon would be His son (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14). As a result, David uses a birth metaphor in Psalm 2:7 to refer to Solomon's coronation. As soon as the crown was placed on Solomon's head around 900 B.C. and they poured oil over it as a symbol of his being the Messiah and King, David says that God "gave birth to him" as His son. Similarly, after Jesus' death, God "gave birth to him" as Israel's Messiah and King when He raised him from the dead, thus indicating that Jesus had qualified for his role of ruling over the Jews (and Gentile believers, too).

Then Paul quotes Isaiah 55:3. The translation of this verse into Greek by the LXX and quoted by Paul uses two interesting words to refer to that which the Hebrew text is saying that God is giving the Jews. The Hebrew phrase is **הַסְּגֵרִי הַיָּאֲמִנִים**, which is easily translated, "the loyal loving things and trustworthy things of David," referring first to the quality of God's promises to make David's descendant king forever, i.e., that God really will fulfill His promises because of His "loyal loving things," and second to the quality of the things that constitute the fulfillment of the promises, i.e., that David's descendant will be a great king of a great kingdom because he will constitute "trustworthy things" given by God to the Jewish people. Consequently, because the great king comes from God's constant and abundant loyal love towards David and is a trustworthy gift, he himself has a wonderful quality. The Greek phrase in the LXX, which Paul quotes, is τὰ ὄσια Δαυιδ τὰ πιστά. The

first two words denote things which are necessary to a proper relationship between God and His people, which is why I have translated it “the divinely vital” things. The last two words refer to things for which God can be trusted and are wonderful to experience, which is why I have translated it “the trustworthy things.” And God through Isaiah and Paul are saying that these things pertain to David. They are connected to David and, therefore, to the kingdom of Israel, because the Davidic Covenant states that David is the first of a long line of kings of the Jews, such that the final king will never cease his responsibilities. The question for us is, When in human history does the final kingdom of Israel endure without ever coming to an end? The answer involves two stages of the kingdom. When Jesus returns, the prophets and Revelation indicate that his ruling over the Jews from Jerusalem will endure until God destroys the present realm and creates a new one, so that the latter goes on into eternity. Jesus’ ruling the Jews from Jerusalem is the first stage of the final kingdom of Israel, because this will be God’s fulfillment of His promise to Abraham to mold his descendants into the greatest nation on earth. His ruling both Jews and Gentiles in the new eternal creation is the second stage of the final kingdom of Israel, because this will be God’s fulfillment of His promise to Abraham to grant eternal life to him and all those in history who mimic his authentic belief.

This quote from Isaiah 55 and all the history of the Jews which Paul has recounted in this speech easily lead to our concluding that Paul is referring to the vital nature of the death, resurrection, and coronation of the Davidic descendant Jesus for the sake of his becoming the Jews’ king on earth temporarily at the end of history, as well as his becoming the king of the eternal kingdom. As a result, Jesus’ first coming was just as necessary and effective for God’s fulfilling His promise to Abraham to make his descendants, the Jews, eventually into a “great nation,” as it was for God’s fulfilling His promise to grant Abraham (and all human beings who demonstrate similar belief) citizenship in the eternal Kingdom of God (cf. Genesis 12:2,3).

Paul then goes on to remind his Jewish and Gentile listeners in the Psidian Antioch synagogue that David’s body deteriorated and now cannot be found. However, he states categorically that Jesus’ body never experienced decay and is alive and well after God raised him from the dead. And Paul quotes David in Psalm 16:10 to the effect that God would not allow Jesus’ body to undergo decay. When we get to Peter’s speech in Acts 2, we will see that he explicitly declares that David was writing about the future and final Messiah and not about himself. Thus, in Psalm 16, David was looking forward and predicting the resurrection of his Messiah, similarly to how he looked forward in Psalm 110 to this same Messiah, his Lord (*’Adonai*), “sitting at the right hand of God.” David knew that there would be one final descendant of his who would die and be raised from the dead before his body had any opportunity to endure natural deterioration, and that this same unique King of Israel would also be his king and priest (taking into account even Psalm 110:4, “Yahweh has sworn and will not change His mind, you [David’s Lord of v. 1] are a priest into perpetuity according to the order of Melchizedek” (cf. Hebrews 7-10), thus implying that he, David, would be raised from the dead to experience the eternal kingship and advocate responsibilities of this final king.

Paul also connects Jesus’ death and resurrection to the ability of immoral human beings, and specifically the Jews and Gentiles in the Psidian Antioch synagogue, to receive God’s

forgiveness. But here is the catch and the idea to which I said in our discussion of Acts 28 we would return. Because Paul is highlighting Jesus' role in Israel's history which will culminate in the Jews' being made a "great nation" under his leadership on earth in Jerusalem, then he is also indicating that "forgiveness of immoral actions" is necessary for just the Jews in order for God to make them a "great nation." We can think of it this way. The initial Kingdom of Israel, which comprises only mortal Jews and is equivalent to their being a "great nation," requires not only that they have a king from God, but also that they all have complete forgiveness from God. This is to say that Jesus plays the double role for only mortal Jews on earth of being their final king and their ultimate advocate before God in order that they may live as authentic believers under Jesus' leadership on the land of Israel during the millennial kingdom. This is how God fulfills His promise to Abraham to transform his descendants into the greatest nation in all human history.

Thus, even if eternal life were not an option for either Jews or Gentiles, God's promise in Genesis 12 to cause the Jews to be a "great nation" requires the same role and experience for Jesus that we normally attribute to how people gain life after death in heaven. The method which God uses to provide all people with eternal life is the same one that God uses to provide the Jews with the millennial kingdom of Revelation. On the basis of his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus rescues mortal Jews living in the land of Israel not only from their earthly enemies, but also from God's eternal judgment and condemnation. In this way, Jesus' death on the cross is vital to the Jews' becoming a kingdom during the time of the millennial period as described in Revelation 20 and Old Testament passages such as Jeremiah 23 (cf. Addendum A above). Therefore, on the one hand, Jesus' death on the cross is necessary to provide forgiveness, so that both Jews and Gentiles can escape God's condemnation and enter into the eternal Kingdom of God. On the other hand, Jesus' death on the cross is necessary to provide forgiveness, so that only mortal Jews can escape God's condemnation and enter into the temporary Kingdom of Israel during the millennial period of Jeremiah 23 and Revelation 20. As God declares in Deuteronomy 30, He will circumcise the hearts of all the mortal Jews on the land of Israel when Jesus returns, so that they will genuinely believe in Jesus and become forgiven in order that they live appropriately in the earthly millennial kingdom.

Paul goes on to say that the Mosaic Covenant cannot produce forgiveness for the Jews. Only Jesus can, meaning that God has required a crucified and resurrected human being to be their advocate, regardless of their obeying the Mosaic Covenant with their animal offerings of mercy to God. In other words, even if a Jew has a circumcised heart and is thereby genuinely following the ceremonial and sacrificial commandments of the covenant, he does not obtain God's forgiveness through these actions. He obtains it through Jesus' actions and his belief in Jesus as his priest. This is the same message of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. God's forgiveness of the Jews is never on the basis of their obeying the Mosaic Covenant, even if He has changed their inwardness by the work of His Holy Spirit, and even if they are performing animal sacrifices appropriately, as I believe the Bible is saying that they will during the millennial kingdom of Jesus. God's forgiveness of the Jews is always on the basis of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, by which he qualified to be their high priest.

This actually was also the case during Old Testament times. True Jewish believers in Yahweh who brought their animal sacrifices to the tabernacle or temple did not obtain God's mercy because the animal's death, but on the basis of Jesus' future death. Moses was never wrong in his declaring to the Jews that they should offer animals to God in order to obtain His mercy. But he knew and meant all along, in spite of the Jews' moral obligation to follow the Mosaic Covenant down through history, that God, through another Jew, would do something greater than what Moses had done in mediating the Mosaic Covenant to the Jews, which is why he told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 18:15-22,

- Deuteronomy 18:15** Yahweh your God will raise up a prophet from among your midst, from your brothers like me. You shall listen to him,  
**18:16** according to all which you asked from Yahweh your God at Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of Yahweh my God. Let me not see anymore this great fire, or I will die.  
**18:17** Yahweh said to me, They have done well in what they have said.  
**18:18** I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he will speak to them everything that I command him.  
**18:19** And it will come about that everyone who does not listen to My words, which he will speak in My name, I will seek from him.  
**18:20** Nevertheless, the prophet who acts presumptuously to speak a message in My name, which I did not command him to speak, which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet will die.  
**18:21** And if you say in your hearts, How do we know the message which Yahweh speaks?  
**18:22** That which the prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, and the message is not, that is the message which Yahweh did not speak. The prophet has spoken it with pride. You shall not fear on the basis of him.

In the midst of restating the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy around 1500 B.C., Moses informs the Israelites, who are poised on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, ready to cross it and take possession of the land of Canaan which God has promised them through Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, that God spoke to him at Mt. Horeb forty years earlier to the effect that He will provide them with another leader like him. The implication, however, is that this future leader not only will speak God's truth as Moses has, but also will be greater than Moses and will provide the Jews with more than Moses can with the Mosaic Covenant. Thus it will be incumbent on them to watch carefully as other Jews attempt to be a spokesmen to them at the level of this final prophet and to wait for him only. But if this future leader is greater than Moses, then his leadership involves something greater than even the animal sacrifices prescribed by the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, the offerings of animals in the tabernacle (and future temple) by even Jews with authentic belief never obtains God's mercy to the extent that they need in order to acquire all the promises God made to Abraham. Instead, it will be what this future, greater leader provides that does. As a result, Paul can say to the Jews and Gentiles in the Psidian Antioch synagogue, "all which you are not able to be justified by means of the instruction of Moses is being declared to you through this man," the final prophet predicted by the Mosaic Covenant, Jesus the Messiah.

Paul ends his speech by warning his listeners in the synagogue not to follow in the footsteps of the Jews in Habakkuk's day who ignored God's warning around 610 B.C. of the impending destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah. Is Paul implying that there is still more earthly, divine judgment to come on the Jews who inhabit the land of Israel? Most

likely, because he certainly would have been aware of Jesus' prediction which we find, for example, in Matthew 24 of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Many of the Jews and Gentiles in his audience are heeding the warning and believing Paul so that they urge him to return to the synagogue on the next Sabbath and continue the discussion. Paul agrees, but the following week there is a large group of Jews who are adamantly hostile to his message and argue publicly that he is wrong. Luke describes what these Jews are doing as "blaspheming," because they are "contradicting the things spoken by Paul." To blaspheme is to state confidently and unwaveringly that something is true when it is false. Paul is presenting solid, biblical truth to his listeners. The unbelieving Jews are presenting solid, unbiblical falsehood to the same audience. Consequently, Luke describes the Jews as "blaspheming," whether they are consciously aware that they are contradicting their own Bible or they are confident that their interpretation of the Bible is true, while it obviously is false.

Paul's response to these Jews is, first, to state that he had a moral obligation to present the message of Jesus to them before he presented it to the Gentiles—even though he is the appointed apostle to the Gentiles. On what basis is Paul saying this? It is that which we have been seeing in all the speeches we have been examining in Acts, that God has made certain promises to Abraham and his Jewish descendants that place them in a position of priority within human history. They are His chosen people whom He is using to reveal Himself and His purposes to all the rest of the nations on earth. In addition, Jesus is Jewish and, therefore, first and foremost the Messiah of the Jews, while also being the Messiah of the Gentiles. Certainly, in the final analysis, Jesus becomes the Messiah of Jews and Gentiles equally, because it is through him that they both acquire eternal life. But, as Paul says in Romans 1:14-17,

**Romans 1:14** I am obligated to both the Greeks and the barbarians, and to both the intelligent and the unintelligent. **1:15** Thus also my eagerness to proclaim the good news to you who are in Rome. **1:16** For I am not ashamed of the good news, because it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes—for the Jew *first* and *also* for the Greek. **1:17** For in it the justification from God is by virtue of belief for the sake of belief, just as it has been written,

But the one who is justified by belief shall live <Habakkuk 2:4>.

Secondly, because these Jews in Psidian Antioch are refusing to take advantage of their position of priority and believe in their own king and priest, Jesus of Nazareth, Paul indicts them for being unworthy of eternal life and warns them that he will now turn to the Gentiles as his main audience. Paul also quotes Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 that God has intended that the ideas regarding the Jewish Messiah be presented to the Gentiles so that Jesus' saviorship extend "to the end of the earth." Does this mean that God is turning away permanently from the Jews, so that the emphasis in history will be on Gentiles' becoming believers in Jesus for the sake of their eternal salvation? The evidence which Paul presented in his speech the week before in Psidian Antioch indicates not. Certainly, the story of Jesus' first coming and its benefit for all people, Jews and Gentiles, to gain eternal life as promised to Abraham is God's

ultimate goal. However, He does not accomplish this without first granting forgiveness and life in the temporary Kingdom of Israel to Jews through Jesus' death and resurrection.<sup>11</sup>

### **Acts 10:34-11:26**

The Gentiles are ecstatic that Paul will concentrate on teaching them about Jesus, while the Psidian Antioch Jews drive Paul and Barnabas out of their city, so that they move on to Iconium. However, we will continue our backward journey through Acts to chapters 10 and 11 where we find Peter visiting a Gentile's house in order to present his family with the news of Jesus' Messiahship. We will also consider how his fellow Jews initially and eventually responded to this important step by God. The passage of Acts 10:34-11:25 starts with Peter's speaking to Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and his family, and ends with Paul and Barnabas in Antioch where they teach Gentile Christians for a year,

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Acts 10:34 Opening his mouth, Peter said,

On the basis of truth, I have reached the conclusion that God does not show favoritism. 10:35 Instead, the one who fears Him and performs righteousness in every nation is acceptable to Him. 10:36 He sent the message to the sons of Israel, proclaiming the good news of shalom by means of Jesus the Messiah. This one is Lord of all. 10:37 You know that which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 10:38 You know about Jesus from Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with authority. He went about performing good works and healing all those who were oppressed by the adversary, because God was with him.

10:39 And we are witnesses of all the things he did in the region of the Jews and Jerusalem, whom they also killed by hanging him on a cross. 10:40 God raised him on the third day and granted him to become visible, 10:41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, namely us, who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead.

10:42 And he commanded us to proclaim to the people and to bear witness solemnly that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. 10:43 All the prophets bear witness to him, that everyone who believes in him obtains forgiveness for their evil actions.

10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who were listening to the message, 10:45 and the believers from the circumcision, as many as had come with Peter, were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had also been poured out on the Gentiles. 10:46 For they were hearing them speaking with languages and extolling God. Then, Peter responded,

10:47 Certainly no can withhold water from these so that they are not baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we also did.

10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Then, they asked them to stay with them for a few days. 11:1 The apostles and the brothers who were in Judea heard

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<sup>11</sup> And, of course, God grants forgiveness to both resurrected and "raptured" Jews and Gentiles who participate in the earthly kingdom of Israel as immortal and morally perfect beings, like their king Jesus.

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that, indeed, the Gentiles had embraced the message of God. 11:2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those from the circumcision were at odds with him, 11:3 saying

You entered in with uncircumcised men and ate with them.

11:4 But Peter began explaining to them in an orderly fashion,

I was praying in the city of Joppa, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain object coming down, like a large cloth, being let down from the sky by its four corners. And it came to me. 11:6 I observed it, looking steadfastly at it, and I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the sky. 11:7 I also heard a voice saying to me,

Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.

11:8 But I said,

By no means, Lord, because nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.

11:9 And the voice from heaven answered a second time,

The things which God has cleansed, you should not consider common.

11:10 And this happened three times, and everything was pulled up again into heaven. 11:11 Behold, immediately three men arrived at the house in which we were staying. They had been sent from Caesarea to me. 11:12 The Spirit told me to go with them without thinking twice. So, these six brothers went with me, and we entered into the man's house. 11:13 He reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying,

Send to Joppa, and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here. 11:14 He will speak words to you, by which you will be saved, along with all your household.

11:15 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as He did on us at the beginning. 11:16 And I remembered the message of the Lord, when he said,

John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Spirit who is different.

11:17 Therefore, if God gave to them the same gift as He did to us who believe in the Lord Jesus the Messiah, who am I that I have the power to hinder God?

11:18 When they heard these things, they quieted down and glorified God, saying,

In which case, God has given repentance to the Gentiles for the purpose of life.

11:19 Then, those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen, traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews alone. 11:20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch, speaking also to the Greeks and proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. 11:21 The hand of Yahweh was with them, and a large number who believed turn to Yahweh. 11:22 And the story was heard in the ears of the assembly in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

11:23 When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain resolute in heart with respect to the Lord, 11:24 because he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of belief. And a great crowd were added to the Lord. 11:25 He then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, 11:26 and, when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. It then happened that they brought them together in an assembly for a whole year and taught the large crowd. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

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Peter begins his explanation to these Gentiles by stating that he is convinced that God does not prefer Jews over Gentiles to be His people. This sounds contradictory to the whole notion that the Jews are God's chosen people, and we will come back to it in a moment when we look at Peter's defense to his fellow Jewish Christians for why he visited Cornelius. Peter describes the kind of human being who is acceptable to God as someone who "fears Him and performs righteousness in every nation." We have already seen in Acts 15 that the apostles decide that the performing of righteousness for Gentiles does not include obeying the Mosaic Covenant. Instead, it involves belief in Jesus as the Messiah and avoiding the immoral behavior that is typical among unbelievers. This, then, is how a Gentile mimics Abraham's faith and, along with him, becomes blessed with eternal life according to God's promise in Genesis 12:3, "And in you [Abraham] all the families of the ground will be blessed."

Peter also comments that God sent this message of belief and morality first to the Jews, that by means of Jesus of Nazareth a person acquires shalom, God's mercy and the promise of living well eventually in the eternal Kingdom of God. The Jews were also the first to hear that Jesus is everybody's Lord. He is the future ruler of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul also assumes that Cornelius and his family have heard about Jesus and his miracles, explaining that he performed them because God had "anointed him with the Spirit who is different." The Greek word for anoint is basically the same as that for Christ. Consequently, Peter is claiming that the transcendent Creator was working within the creation through His Spirit to make Jesus the final Christ and Messiah, because Messiah is the English form of the Hebrew *Mashiach*, which also means anointed.

Peter then relates Jesus' experience of death by crucifixion and resurrection by God, culminating in his appearing, eating, and drinking with those who had witnessed all this. As a result, Peter and the rest of the apostles, along with Jesus' other disciples and students, received explicit instructions from Jesus to announce to the Jews that he is the means to either death or life by virtue of his being God's judge of everyone, either who is currently living or who has already died, i.e., living or dead at the time Jesus returns and establishes his millennial kingdom which will also result in the final judgment of all human beings before God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4; Revelation 20; 1 Corinthians 15). Peter ends his speech by referencing the Old Testament prophets, to the effect that they spoke of the Messiah and his being the means to God's forgiveness (cf. Isaiah 53).

And then the truly remarkable happens. Cornelius and his family begin speaking in languages previously unknown to them, and the content of their words is about God and His majesty. Peter immediately recognizes that God is acting towards these Gentiles in the same manner that He had towards the Jews in Acts 2, which is coming later in our backward study



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of Acts. He says specifically that Cornelius' family "have received the Spirit who is different *just as we also did* (emphasis mine)." Certainly, now God has doubly confirmed for Peter that He "does not show favoritism" (cf. v. 34). If God causes Gentile believers to speak in unknown foreign languages just as he caused Jesus' Jewish apostles and disciples to do so, then what difference, spiritually speaking, is there between Gentile believers outside the nation of Israel, God's chosen people in history, and Jewish believers, members of the physical descendants of Abraham, who are obligated within history to follow the Mosaic Covenant in order to demonstrate their obedience to God to the rest of the world? None, zippo, nada, nyet!!! Through belief in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, both Jews and Gentiles receive God's fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises—as those who have the right to live on the land of Israel under Jesus' monarchical government as either mortal Jews or immortal Jews and Gentiles, *and* as those who have the right to live in the eternal Kingdom of God under his reign as immortal Jews and Gentiles.

Cornelius and his believing family are then baptized in water, and Peter and his Jewish associates stay with them for a few days before heading back to Jerusalem. However, when they do reach Jerusalem, some of the believing Jews are upset with them for what they consider to be a violation of the Mosaic Covenant. Peter and his Jewish associates have entered a Gentile's house and actually stayed with him and his family—in apparent violation of the Mosaic Covenant, because they have eaten food prepared by Gentiles, food which is most likely not kosher, and associated with people who are also eating this food that is not kosher, making all these people unclean with respect to the covenant. This is what Peter means when he says in a previous verse,

**Acts 10:28** And he said to them [Cornelius' Gentile family and friends],

You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to become intimately involved with or come to a foreigner. But God has shown me not to call any man common or unclean.

It sounds as though Peter is saying that it is a violation of the Mosaic Covenant if he is even in the presence of a Gentile, or at least in his house with him. But this cannot be what he means, because when the Gentiles, two household slaves and a soldier, who were sent by Cornelius to Joppa to find him, Peter invited them into the house where he was staying and provided them with food and lodging, as verse 23 states,

**Acts 10:23** Therefore, he invited them in and gave them lodging. And on the next day, he rose up and went with them [to Cornelius' house]. And some of the brothers from Joppa went with him.

Consequently, the objection of the Jews in Jerusalem is that Peter and his six fellow Jewish believers partook of food which they was most likely not kosher, because it was prepared by the Gentile Cornelius and his family, thus disobeying God's explicit instructions in the Mosaic Covenant. So Peter lays out the whole story for them. First, he was in Joppa near the modern city of Tel Aviv in Israel. He was praying to God and fell into a trance, where he saw a large cloth descending from heaven with all sorts of creatures on it. God commands him to kill the creatures and eat them, but they are clearly animals listed in the Mosaic Covenant that are forbidden for Jews to eat. Peter refuses God's command, because

he does not want to violate the Mosaic Covenant. God responds that it is now ok to do so, because He has declared these animals no longer unclean but clean. And the scene and the conversation repeat twice more.

Immediately afterwards, three men arrive at the house in Joppa from Cornelius who lives in Caesarea Maritima up the coast, and God, either with just the dream or with it and additional words to Peter, communicates to him that he should accompany these men to Cornelius' house. So Peter and his six Jewish traveling companions do so. Cornelius welcomes them, explains to Peter that God had directed him to send his three men to him at Joppa to invite him to his house, and Peter begins talking.

The next thing Peter knows, as he is explaining to the Jews in Jerusalem, God causes these Gentiles to do exactly what He had caused the Jewish apostles and disciples to do on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2—speak about God's magnificence using languages previously unknown to them. Peter tells his Jerusalem audience that this reminded him of Jesus' words regarding God's baptizing people with His Spirit in contrast to John the Baptists' baptizing with water. Thus, Peter ends his explanation and argument for the appropriateness of his fraternizing with Gentiles and eating food that is not kosher by stating that clearly God gifted the Gentiles with the same experience of languages and great thoughts about God as He gifted the Jews, even the Jewish apostles. Consequently, if the transcendent Creator is doing this, why should Peter (or any other Mosaic Covenant obeying Jew) try to stop Him? Obviously, he should not. And his Jewish audience in Jerusalem agree, quiet down, and conclude that God is granting repentance and life to the Gentiles just as much as He is to the Jews. In the light of this fact, they also should acknowledge that eating food with believing Gentiles and which is not kosher because it is outside the explicit boundaries of the Mosaic Covenant renders neither the Gentiles nor Jews unclean. In the light of God's acceptance of Gentiles who have genuine belief in Jesus as the Messiah, their belief transcends the historical obligations of Jews to obey the Mosaic Covenant, so that Jews can join the Gentiles in the food that they eat, which is in apparent violation of the covenant. As a result, Jews demonstrate that they acknowledge the equality in status before God of authentically believing Gentiles who have no obligation to the Mosaic Covenant.

Later in this same passage, Jews take the message of Jesus as the Messiah to only their fellow Jews in Phoenicia (Lebanon), the island of Cyprus, and Antioch on the Orontes (near the coast of Syria). But Gentiles in Antioch hear and believe the message, so that Peter and other leaders in Jerusalem send Barnabas to investigate. Barnabas becomes so excited about God's display of His grace among the Antiochene Gentiles that he travels a short distance west to Tarsus and brings Paul back with him. These two Jewish theologians of Jesus the Messiah go on to teach the Gentiles for a whole year, which, of course, is exactly what Jesus told Paul is his responsibility as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 24,26). And it is in Antioch where believers in Jesus are first called Christians.

There are a number of things we glean from this story for our purposes of understanding God and His relationship to the Jews and His relationship to the Gentiles. First, originally, even the apostles understood the Mosaic Covenant in such a way that they considered it immoral to associate so closely with Gentiles that they eat food that is not kosher. Therefore, Peter needed his theology changed, so that it would be clear to him that the Mosaic Covenant's prohibition against being in close proximity to Gentiles so as to partake of food

which is not kosher has nothing to do with communicating the most important ideas in the world to Gentiles. When it comes to the Jewish Messiah, Jews are supposed to proclaim him to themselves and to everybody else, regardless of the social circumstances in which this places them. But a question is, did this new understanding for Peter also change his perspective on the Mosaic Covenant so that, 1) he believes that Jews no longer need to obey it, or 2) he believes that God is no longer interested in fulfilling His promises to the Jews of giving them the land of Israel and descendants, while also eventually making them a “great nation,” or 3) he believes both #1 and #2? Our study of Joel and other passages is leading us towards none of these as being correct. Thus, Peter is still an Abrahamic Covenant & Mosaic Covenant believing Jew who is expecting God to use Jesus to rule Israel on the land of Israel and to rule both Jews and Gentiles in the eternal Kingdom of God in heaven. However, he now understands also that his relationship with Gentile believers in the Jewish Messiah transcends his obligation to the religious and ceremonial commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, to the effect that the former trumps the latter when necessary—without affecting his relationship with God as a good, Bible believing, Mosaic Covenant following Jew.

The second thing that we glean from this story is that there is an actual sharing of the Jewish Messiah by Jews and Gentiles. Yes, Jesus is Jewish, but he is not so Jewish that he cannot be the king, judge, and means of divine forgiveness for Gentiles. Indeed, he is just as much these for non-Jews as he is for Jews. But does this mean that God has set aside His promises to the Jews, so that making them a great nation on the land of Israel according to Genesis 12:1-3 is no longer part of His plans and purposes? It might seem so, but we are seeing in Acts, and certainly in Joel, Jeremiah, and Revelation that this is not the case. The Jewish Messiah will be the king of the Jews when they become a “great nation” on earth, and he will be the king of all authentic believers in eternity in the new creation.

The third thing we glean from the story is that the prophets of the Old Testament wrote in a detailed and correct enough manner that a student of them could see clearly the correspondence between their writings and Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection for the purpose of his becoming the judge and advocate of human beings, the latter however being for only authentic believers. Indeed, we have been learning over and over again that the apostles used the Old Testament as their basis for understanding Jesus, and not the other way around. The Old Testament was their adequate and accurate source of ideas for explaining the life, death, resurrection, and future kingship of Jesus. We have also seen in Joel and Jeremiah that Jesus’ advocacy was so that mortal Jews with divinely changed inwardness could live on the land of Israel with his ruling over them from Jerusalem and so that Jews and Gentiles with changed inwardness could gain entrance into eternal life, which some will begin when Jesus returns and they are resurrected or immediately changed into immortal, morally perfect beings.

The fourth thing we glean from this story is that the ultimate requirement and mark of either a Jew who has the right to inhabit the earthly kingdom of Israel or the heavenly kingdom, or a Gentile who has the right to inhabit the heavenly kingdom is exactly the same—God’s pouring out His Spirit on the person, i.e., God’s changing the person’s inwardness so that he performs and demonstrates genuine, biblical belief in Jesus as the Messiah. In other words, this requirement and mark is the same for both a Jew and a Gentile and does not involve *per se* obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, Peter as an apostle can observe a Jew speaking about the mighty things of God in a foreign language, without

knowing anything of how well this Jew has been practicing the Mosaic Covenant, and tell that he is a person who can live on the land of Israel under Jesus' kingship and gain eternal life. And now Peter knows that this telltale sign of the Jew's being qualified for these two kingdoms is exactly the same as that of the Gentile's being qualified for the second of the two kingdoms, i.e., the eternal one.

Therefore, a Jew can be doing an absolutely lousy job of obeying the Mosaic Covenant, even completely ignoring it, but if he all of a sudden genuinely believes that Jesus is his Messiah, king, judge, and advocate in order to obtain God's eternal mercy, then he is acceptable to God. In the same way, a Gentile can be doing an absolutely lousy job of acknowledging that there is a God, but if he, too, all of a sudden genuinely believes that Jesus is his Messiah, king, judge, and advocate in order to obtain God's eternal mercy, then he is just as acceptable to God as the believing Jew. And together they will live in the eternal Kingdom of God, starting with mortal and immortal Jews inhabiting the land of Israel and immortal Gentiles inhabiting this same land as a result of Jesus' second coming.<sup>12</sup>

### **Acts 5:12-33**

This now takes us back one more relevant passage in Acts to another important event in Jerusalem. The apostles are arrested and put in prison by the high priest and his associates. An angel of God releases the apostles from prison, and they return to the temple to proclaim the message of Jesus as the Messiah. Eventually, the entire Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, have them arrested again and brought before them. It is the apostles' response to the Sanhedrin to which we now want to give our attention, but here is the whole story of Acts 5:12-33,

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**Acts 5:12** By means of the hands of the apostles, many signs and affirming miracles were occurring among the people. And they were all of one accord in Solomon's porch. **5:13** And none of the rest dared to join them. Nevertheless, the people spoke highly of them. **5:14** Plus, more of those who believed in the Lord were added to them, multitudes of men and women, **5:15** so that they also carried the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, in order that when Peter came, even his shadow could fall on any of them. **5:16** And the multitude from the cities surrounding Jerusalem were coming together, bringing the sick and those afflicted by unclean spirits.

**5:17** And the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (that is, the faction of the Pharisees), and they were filled with strong aggression. **5:18** Then, they laid hands on the apostles and put them in public prison. **5:19** But, during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, and leading them out, he said to them,

**5:20** Go, stand, and speak to the people in the temple all the words of this life.

**5:21** After hearing this, they entered into the temple at dawn, and they were teaching. When the high priest and those who were with him appeared, they called together the Sanhedrin and all the council

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<sup>12</sup> This is what we have found from the compilation of the ideas presented in 1 Thessalonians 4, Revelation 20, and 1 Corinthians 15 above.

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of the sons of Israel. And they sent to the prison for them to be brought. 5:22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison. Instead, they returned and reported back,

5:23 We found the prison locked very securely and the guards standing at the doors. But when we opened them, we found no one inside.

5:24 When the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard this, they doubted them as to what had happened. 5:25 But someone came and reported to them,

Behold, the men whom you put in prison are in the temple, standing and teaching the people.

5:26 Then, the captain went with the officers, and they brought them, but without violence, because they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned. 5:27 And when they brought them, they stood them in the Sanhedrin. And the high priest questioned them,

5:28 Did we not command you absolutely not to teach in this name? But, behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you want to bring down on us the blood of this man.

5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered,

We must obey God rather than men. 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 5:31 God lifted up this man as ruler and savior to His right hand to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 5:32 And we are witnesses of these matters, along with the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.

5:33 And when they heard this, they became furious and planned to kill them.

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In v. 28, the high priest asks the apostles why they are disobeying the Sanhedrin's last order for them to refrain from speaking about Jesus in public. The apostles begin their response in v. 29 with the simple fact that God is their leader and not the human Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. They are implying that God has commanded them to be authoritative spokesmen in public of the news of Jesus' death, resurrection, and movement to a position of authority and ruling over the creation by being at God's right hand.

The apostles also refer to the "God of our fathers" as the one who has raised Jesus from the dead and granted him his position of being the ruler of the creation within the creation. This phrase in reference to God means that He is the God of the Jews, going all the way back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Of all the Semitic people living in the Middle East around 2000 B.C., it was Abraham whom God chose to be the first Jew, from whom the rest of the Jewish people would come.

The apostles then refer to the resurrected Jesus as "ruler and savior." The question is, ruler of what/whom and savior of whom? The apostles answer this question in this context by restating what Jesus' purpose is. It is "to grant repentance and forgiveness of immoral actions to Israel." But our question since the beginning of this addendum has been, When the apostles refer to Jesus' relationship to Israel, do they believe that God will first fulfill His promises to the Jews and set up a Davidic kingdom on the land of Israel, while they also perform the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Covenant on the land and in a temple, and

then God will fulfill His promise to both believing Jews and Gentiles and grant them life in the future eternal Kingdom of God? Or is only the latter promise still in effect? Except for the fact that the apostles name only “Israel” as the object of forgiveness, their response to the Sanhedrin does not provide us with any more details to say one way or the other. However, the evidence so far in Joel, Revelation, and the rest of Acts is leading in the direction that both the Jewish promises on the land of Israel and the Jewish/Gentile promises in eternal life are in the apostles’ minds. As a result, the Old Testament accurately and adequately states the promises which God will fulfill, while the New Testament confirms that this is the case through Jesus the Messiah.

### **Acts 4:1-30**

This brings us to the previous time that Peter, along with John, stood before the Sanhedrin, and the Jewish leadership had commanded them not to speak of Jesus in public. The story of Acts 4:1-30 reads,

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**Acts 4:1** As they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came up to them. **4:2** They were greatly annoyed because of their teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection from the dead by means of Jesus. **4:3** And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, because it was already evening. **4:4** But many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men was five thousand.

**4:5** It happened the next day that they gathered together—the rulers, elders, and scribes in Jerusalem, **4:6** along with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and as many as were from the high-priestly family. **4:7** When they had stood them in their midst, they inquired,

By means of what power or in what name did you do this?

**4:8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them,

Rulers and elders of the people, **4:9** if we today are being examined for an act of kindness towards an unhealthy man, that is, by means of what has this man been healed, **4:10** let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that in the name of Jesus the Messiah of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by means of this man he stands before you well. **4:11** He is the stone which was disdained by you the builders, which became the chief cornerstone <Psalm 118:22>. **4:12** Plus, by means of nothing else is there salvation, for there is no other name which has been given under heaven among men by which we must be saved.

**4:13** When they observed Peter’s and John’s bold openness and grasped the fact that they were uneducated and unlearned men, they were amazed, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. **4:14** Seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in response. **4:15** Then, having commanded them to go outside the Sanhedrin, they were conferring with one another, **4:16** saying,

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What should we do with these men? It is apparent to everyone who lives in Jerusalem that an obvious miracle has occurred through them, and we cannot deny it. 4:17 But in order that it might not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more in this name to anyone.

4:18 And having called them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

4:19 But Peter and John answered and said to them,

If it is right before God to listen to you rather than to God, you judge. 4:20 For we cannot not speak about the things we have seen and heard.

4:21 After threatening them further, they released them (finding no basis on which to punish them), on account of the people, because they were glorifying God because of what had happened, 4:22 for the man towards whom this sign of healing had taken place was more than forty years old.

4:23 And after being released they went to their own people and reported the things which the high priests and elders had said to them. 4:24 And when they heard, they lifted up their voices to God with one accord and said,

O Sovereign Lord, who has made heaven, earth, the sea, and everything that is in them <Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 146:6>, 4:25 who, through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David, Your servant, said,

Why are the nations disrespectful, and why do the peoples ponder futile things?

4:26 The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers have gathered together for the same purpose, against Yahweh and against His Anointed One <Psalm 2:1-2>.

4:27 For in truth there were gathered together in this city against Your holy servant, Jesus, whom You made the Messiah, Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel 4:28 to do whatever Your hand and Your plan predestined to occur. 4:29 And now, Yahweh, take note of their threats and grant that Your bondslaves speak Your message with all bold openness, 4:30 in the midst of Your stretching out Your hand for the purpose of healing, signs, and warning signs occurring by the name of Your holy servant, Jesus.

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Peter and John have healed a lame man and spoken of Jesus to the amazed crowd around him. Next thing they know they are being arrested by the Jewish leadership. The Jews are particularly upset that Peter and John are claiming that people can rise from the dead by means of Jesus. Are they saying the same thing as what we have seen Peter and Paul refer to as God's using Jesus to fulfill His promises to Israel? Yes, because we have seen that it means that the apostles are connecting God's earthly promises to the Jews with His eternal promises to the Jews and Gentiles. Here, Peter and John are emphasizing God's promise of eternal life to the Jews and that this occurs by God's using Jesus to bring this about. They do not provide the details of how God uses Jesus, but they must mean that he acquires mercy and forgiveness for them. In effect, they are also claiming that Jesus will become the Jews' king when God transforms them into the greatest nation in history.

What is so upsetting about all this to the Sanhedrin? Is it the difference in theology between them and the apostles? While the Jewish leadership place most of the hope of Israel

on obeying the Mosaic Covenant, are they upset that the apostles are placing all the hope of Israel on Jesus and belief in him? In other words, are the rulers of the Jews upset that the Messiah is being given such a prominent role by the apostles, which diminishes the role of the Mosaic Covenant? Yes and no. Because the Jews in those days misunderstood the Old Testament's teaching that the Messiah must suffer (cf. Acts 17), they would be upset that the apostles are giving the Messiah a much more prominent role in the nation of Israel than the Mosaic Covenant. But even if the Jewish leaders understood this important aspect of Old Testament theology, they would still be upset with the apostles. While the message of Jesus agrees with that of the Old Testament that the animal sacrifices are inadequate to gain God's mercy, so that he is the necessary means to doing so, it is more that the apostles are declaring that a man who was executed as a criminal by the Jewish leadership is their Messiah. It is not shifting the emphasis *per se* from the Mosaic Covenant to the Messiah that bothers the rulers. It is shifting the emphasis to an executed criminal that sounds outrageous to them. This comes out explicitly in the passage we previously examined when these same leaders complain to the apostles, "You have filled Jerusalem with your teachings, and you want to bring down on us the blood of this man" (cf. Acts 5:28). They cannot stand the fact that they are being accused of murdering the long-awaited Messiah of the Old Testament.

The next day the Sanhedrin meet and question Peter and John about their source of authority for performing such a miracle and making nonsensical statements that God's mercy and resurrection from the dead is dependent on the criminal Jesus of Nazareth. Peter responds politely that he knows that he is addressing the leadership of his own people, the Jews. These men are supposedly the most learned and educated Jews of their day. Therefore, because of their study of the Old Testament, they should have the best grasp on God's plans and purposes for the nation of Israel and the rest of the world. However, clearly they have misunderstood the same Old Testament passages which Paul will use later in Acts to explain that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer. As a result, they do not acknowledge and embrace Jesus of Nazareth as their king and God's priestly and sacrificial instrument of mercy. Therefore, Peter states plainly that it is "in the name of Jesus the Messiah of Nazareth" that John and he performed the loving act of healing the lame man, and he wants all of Israel, all the Jews, to recognize this. Thus, as we would expect from examining the previous passages of Acts, Peter's statements are very Jewish-centric.

Peter also refers to what happened to Jesus that, he is implying, resulted in his acquiring the role of king and judicial mediator for people before God. It was the Jewish leadership's executing Jesus on a cross, so that God raised him from the dead, that also permits Jesus to be the means by which they have healed the lame man. Peter explicitly comments that "we," i.e., his fellow Jews and he, cannot obtain escape from God's condemnation for their immorality by means of any other person (including a Levitical priest who performs an animal sacrifice for them). It is Jesus, or no one, who delivers them from divine judgment and destruction.

Peter uses a quote from Psalm 118 to bolster his argument about Jesus's role in the history of Israel and the current Jewish leadership's mistreatment of him by refusing to accept him as their Messiah and advocate before God. In order to understand Peter's use of this quote, we need to consider the entire Psalm and put the quote in its proper context. Thus, Psalm 118 reads,



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- Psalm 118:1** Admit [pl.] to Yahweh that He is good, because His loyal love is into perpetuity.  
**118:2** Let Israel say, His loyal love is into perpetuity.  
**118:3** Let the house of Aaron say, His loyal love is into perpetuity.  
**118:4** Let those who fear Yahweh say, His loyal love is into perpetuity.
- 118:5** From a stressful situation I called out to Yah. Yah answered in a big place.  
**118:6** Yahweh is for me. I will not fear. What can *adam* do to me?  
**118:7** Yahweh is for me. He is among those who are helping me. As for me, I will look on those who hate me.  
**118:8** It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to trust in *adam*.  
**118:9** It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to trust in those in high society.
- 118:10** All the *goyeem* have surrounded me. In the name of Yahweh I will surely cut them off.  
**118:11** They surrounded me. Yes, they surrounded me. In the name of Yahweh I will surely cut them off.  
**118:12** They surrounded me like bees. They were put out like a fire of thorns. In the name of Yahweh I will surely cut them off.  
**118:13** You pushed me violently so that I fell, but Yahweh helped me.  
**118:14** Yah is my refuge and strength. He has become *yeshua* for me.  
**118:15** The sound of joyful shouting and *yeshua* is in the tents of the righteous [*tzadeekeem*].  
**118:16** The right hand of Yahweh is being exalted. The right hand of Yahweh operates competently.  
**118:17** I will not die, but I will live. And I will proclaim the actions of Yah.
- 118:18** Yah has instructed me diligently, but He has not given me up to death.  
**118:19** Open the gates of righteousness [*tzedek*] for me. I acknowledge Yah.  
**118:20** This is the gate to Yahweh. The righteous [*tzadeekeem*] enter by means of it.  
**118:21** I acknowledge You, because You answered me. And You have become for me *yeshua*.  
**118:22** The builders rejected the stone. It is the cornerstone (רֹשׁ פִּינָחַ, *rosh pinnah*) (κεφαλὴν γωνίας).
- 118:23** This is from Yahweh. It is wonderful in our eyes.  
**118:24** This is the day that Yahweh has made. Let us rejoice and delight in it.  
**118:25** Please, Yahweh, save (הוֹשִׁיעָה, *hosheey'ah*)! Please, please, Yahweh, cause success! Please!
- 118:26** Blessed is that which [he who?] comes in the name of Yahweh. We have blessed You [pl.] from the house of Yahweh.  
**118:27** Yahweh is God, and He has caused there to be light for us. Bind the feast with ropes to the horns of the altar.
- 118:28** You are my God, and I acknowledge You. I lift You up high.  
**118:29** Admit [pl.] to Yahweh that He is good, because His loyal love is into perpetuity.
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It is important to recognize in this Psalm that sometimes the individual author is talking about only his own situation, and sometimes he is addressing a crowd. Thus, in v. 5 the author states, “From a stressful situation I called to Yah [short for Yahweh],” while in v. 1 he exhorts all his readers, “Admit [pl.] to Yahweh that He is good.” In addition, we do not know who the author is and when he lived. We also do not know if he recently was in a “stressful situation,” or if his experience of God’s rescuing him from one was in the distant past, or if God has been doing so consistently throughout his life. In any case, he is certainly

mentioning God's salvation (*yeshua*) as part of what it means for him to have the kind of relationship with God that he has.

The fact that this is a Psalm, it makes sense to assume that the author is Jewish, and he is addressing his fellow Jews, the nation of Israel. Consequently, in the first four verses, he exhorts the Jews, including the Levitical priests who serve God in the temple, all of whom he assumes are genuine worshipers of God ("those who fear Yahweh"), to declare unequivocally that they know that God's faithfulness to His promises to the Jews and His love for them are "into perpetuity." First, God's faithfulness and love are both contained in the one word חֶסֶד (*chesed*), which I have translated loyal love. It is the word which God constantly uses in the Old Testament to refer to His willingness to follow through on providing land, descendants, greatness as a nation, and eternal life to Abraham's descendants (cf. Genesis 12:1-3; 24:27; Exodus 15:13, etc.). As we are finding out from the prophets and Revelation, this loving faithfulness of God is in spite of the Jews' poor and immoral behavior, in other words, in spite of their deserving the exact opposite, both His temporary and eternal condemnation. Plus, we are finding out from Acts that God's loyal love is in spite of the Jews' rejecting and executing their own Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. God is so faithful to His promises that even this latter form of rebellion against Him will not stop Him from eventually granting them authentic belief and transforming them into a "great nation."

Second, the Psalmist uses an expression of time as to how long God's faithfulness and love will last for the Jews—לְעוֹלָם (*le'olam*). This phrase is usually translated everlasting or forever, both which can lead the reader to think that something is permanent, even possibly to the extent that it is eternal. Thus, in this case, the inference can be that God's *chesed* towards Israel and the Jews is eternal. However, if we consider that the rest of the Bible indicates that the present realm will eventually come to an end, then it makes sense to see as our options for interpreting *le'olam* in this Psalm as –

1. For a long time in the present realm, but not necessarily until its end
2. For the entirety of the present realm, right up to the end
3. For both the entirety of the present realm and into the eternal realm, thus eternally

Consequently, there is the possibility that God intends his *chesed* towards Israel and the Jews to last for only a finite period of time in the present realm, either until some important event or until the end of the present realm. Or it could last into eternity. For example, God could have made His promises to the Jews dependent on their accepting Jesus as the Messiah, so that, when they rejected Jesus at his first appearance, He abandoned them completely and decided never to fulfill His promises to them. As a result, His *chesed* towards Israel lasted for a finite period of time—until they rejected Jesus. Or He could have made His promises dependent on the existence of the present realm, regardless of the Jews' behavior, including their acceptance or rejection of Jesus two thousand years ago. As a result, His *chesed* towards Israel will last until He destroys the present realm and creates a new one, and it will involve His changing their hearts when they live on the land of Israel in Jesus' millennial kingdom. Or He could have made His promises dependent on simply His sovereign choice eventually to turn them into a great nation and kingdom, which would include His changing them inwardly, while also granting them life in the next and eternal realm, which also comes from

a circumcised heart. Therefore, this third option for His *chesed* towards Israel involves His changing the hearts of specific Jews in the present realm, especially the hearts of an entire generation at the second coming of Jesus as the Messiah, and welcoming each changed-heart Jew in history into the eternal Kingdom of God in the next creation, just as He welcomes each changed-heart Gentile into this same kingdom.

What does *le'olam* mean in Psalm 118? Verses 5-17 help us answer this question. In them, the author of the psalm describes a situation where Gentiles (*goyeem*) are coming after him to kill him. Yet, he is convinced that God will rescue him, and he will live. The word that he uses for deliverance and salvation is the Hebrew *yeshua*, the same word that Jews today, who are believers in Jesus as the Messiah, use as his name. Indeed, while Jesus is more a transliteration of the Greek word Ἰησοῦς (*iaysoos*), it is also an approximate transliteration of *yeshua*, which literally means salvation. In the psalmist's case, he is saying that Yahweh, the transcendent Creator, is his *yeshua* and *iaysoos*, his "Jesus" so to speak and deliverance from physical death that his enemies, the Gentiles, want to carry out towards him. But he says that God will deliver him by His "right hand," which is simply a reference to His power, strength, and whatever means that He uses at the moment to rescue His people from harm. Thus, we know that *le'olam* means at least while there are Jews who are being threatened by their Gentile enemies within the present realm. Otherwise, it would not make any sense for the psalmist to exhort his fellow Jews to praise God for his loyal love towards them.

In vs. 18-22, the author repeats some of the above ideas and adds a few others. First, he implies that *yeshua* from God comes to those who are the "righteous," the *tzadeekeem*, and he includes himself in this group. Second, he defines the *tzadeekeem* by implying that they are not the "builders" who "rejected the stone," that is "the cornerstone." To whom and what is the psalmist referring? In the context of this psalm, the "whom" are those in vs. 8,9 who trust in *adam* and in people of high society to save them from their Gentile enemies. While human beings appear to be able to help the psalmist and his fellow Jews in rescuing them from their enemies, they are not. The psalmist is saying that only God can deliver them from death and keep them alive. Nevertheless, he is implying that he observes others in the nation of Israel who have not placed their trust completely in God but are trusting in human beings instead. They are like construction workers who know what ought to be the cornerstone of the foundation of the building under construction, but they reject it and choose another one with which to build their "deliverance from their enemies." And what is the cornerstone in Psalm 118? God and His *chesed*, His loyal love and faithfulness to His promises to rescue His people from their Gentile enemies.<sup>13</sup> Thus, we see that the psalmist is not referring to any particular building. He is using cornerstone and its associated building as a metaphor for the most important idea which he is presenting in this psalm along with its consequent results. The most important idea is God's *chesed* and loyal love which lasts as long as there are Jews, and the consequent results are God's providing *yeshua* to the Jewish people and rescuing them from their Gentile enemies.

In vs. 23-25, the author appeals to God for rescue from death, extols God for His being His salvation, and expresses how wonderful all this is. Verse 26 is somewhat difficult. Is the psalmist talking about a person ("he") who comes in the name of Yahweh, or an act ("that") which does? In the context, it is "that which," i.e., the deliverance, the *yeshua*, which has

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Isaiah 28:16 and Zechariah 10:4

come from God to the author and that results in his salvation from physical death.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the psalmist adds that all the Jews, “we,” have blessed You (which is plural, i.e., the royal plural of God as King) from the temple, the house of Yahweh. The Jews have blessed God from the location of His connection with them, the temple, which is the appropriate thing to do according to the Mosaic Covenant. In vs. 27-29, the author ends by stating that God has brought the light of His knowledge and salvation to the Jews, which in this context is His loyal love and promises to Abraham to give them land, descendants, and the status of a great nation, so that they should worship Him with sacrifices in the manner in which He has commanded in the Mosaic Covenant. And he once more claims for himself that God is his God and then exhorts his fellow Jews to grab on to the fact that God’s *chesed* is for at least as long as Jews exist (*le’olam*).

While it is possible that the psalmist is of the opinion that God’s *chesed* is dependent upon the Jews’ genuine belief and worship of God, nevertheless, he is implying that, as long as there are believing Jews, then God’s *chesed* towards them will occur. Therefore, *le’olam* must mean at least until the end of the present realm, because we know from the prophets and Revelation that believing Jews will exist through the time of the Messiah’s millennial kingdom. For our purposes of understanding Peter’s quote of Psalm 118:22 in his speech in Acts 4:11, we have also seen that the author of this psalm is not referring to an actual building, e.g., the temple, the king’s palace, a Jewish citizen’s house, etc. He is using the idea of construction workers who build an edifice as a metaphor for certain Jews’ distrust of God in the midst of their being threatened by Gentile enemies who want to kill them. Rather than trust the cornerstone, God and His loyal love, the Jews are rejecting Him and trusting human beings to deliver them from their enemies. Similarly, Peter is pointing to the hearts and unbelief of the Jews within the Sanhedrin who are listening to him. Peter is saying that the building that constitutes their own salvation from God and includes resurrection from the dead has the wrong cornerstone. Rather than trusting God, who has provided the Messiah as their means to His mercy and eternal deliverance from His condemnation, they are trusting themselves just as the psalmist spoke of certain Jews who trusted in *adam*, i.e., human beings.

Indeed, the Jews of Peter’s audience must be depending on their own obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, so that they are overlooking the concept in the Hebrew scriptures regarding the Messiah as the very means to God’s mercy in place of the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant. Peter puts it plainly in 4:12 that nothing except the Messiah, not even the Mosaic Covenant, contains the required effectiveness to rescue people from God’s condemnation. We should also find it interesting that Peter does not say that the Mosaic Covenant is no longer relevant to the nation of Israel now that the Messiah has come. This is not conclusive that the Jews are still obligated to follow the covenant, but we saw Paul in Acts 21 dutifully go to the temple to carry out particular ceremonies of the covenant for himself. Therefore, it is very possible just from learning the book of Acts that the Mosaic

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<sup>14</sup> When the Jews welcome Jesus on Palm Sunday as he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, they quote this verse and obviously mean “he who,” not “that which.” While the psalmist means *the thing* of God’s powerfully rescuing him from his Gentile enemies, the Jews on Palm Sunday take this meaning and demonstrate the significance of it with respect to the Messiah, whom they believe will rescue them from their enemies. However, they should also believe that he will rescue them from God’s eternal condemnation, even though it is not clear in the passages that they do believe this (cf. Matthew 21:9; 23:39; Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; John 12:13).

Covenant exists as a national obligation for the Jews until the end of the present realm, while it is also ineffective in obtaining God's mercy, because it is only Jesus who has died and qualified for the role of advocate before God who can obtain it for them. In which case, the Jews' observance of the Mosaic Covenant during the millennial kingdom is simply a required means for them to reveal their authentic belief in Yahweh in the midst of their submission to Jesus as their king.

This portion of Acts ends with the Sanhedrin's deciding to release Peter and John, who return to the other apostles, relate to them their experience, and together they all pray and extol God for His greatness and the story which He is telling with Jesus at the center of the plot. They also encourage God to give them the courage to continue publicly proclaiming the news of Jesus as the Messiah that God accompanies with affirming miracles.

### **Acts 3:1-26**

The next passage we should consider is the event that started the process of Peter's and John's being confronted by the Jewish leadership, their healing the lame man in chapter 3 and explaining to the surrounding crowd how they are able to do so. Thus, Acts 3 reads,

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**Acts 3:1** Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour of prayer. **3:2** And a certain man, crippled from birth, was being carried, whom they used set down daily at the gate of the temple which was called Beautiful, so that he could ask for alms from those who were entering the temple. **3:3** When he saw Peter and John as they were about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. **3:4** But Peter, along with John, gazed at him and said,

Look at us.

**3:5** And he gave them his close attention, expecting to receive something from them. **3:6** But Peter said,

Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have, I give you this—in the name of Jesus the Messiah of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

**3:7** And seizing him by the right hand he lifted him up. And immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened. **3:8** And leaping up he stood and began to walk. Then, he entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God. **3:9** And all the people saw him walking and praising God. **3:10** And they were recognizing him as the one sitting at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him. **3:11** While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together towards them at that which is called Solomon's Porch, utterly astonished.

**3:12** But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people,

Men, Israelites, why are you marveling at this, or why are you staring at us as if by our own power or devotion to God we have made him walk? **3:13** The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied before Pilate, who judged that he should be released. **3:14** You denied the Holy and

- Righteous One, and you asked for a murderer to be given you. **3:15** Thus, you killed the leader of life whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.
- 3:16** His name has strengthened this man whom you observe and know—on the basis of belief in his name. And belief, which is through him, has given to him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. **3:17** And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just like your leaders. **3:18** But God has thus fulfilled the things which He announced beforehand through the mouth of all His prophets, that His Messiah would suffer.
- 3:19** Repent, therefore, and turn, so that your sins may be blotted out, **3:20** so that seasons of revival may come from the presence of Yahweh and He sends you the appointed Messiah, Jesus, **3:21** whom heaven must receive until the times of the restoration of all things, about which God spoke through the mouth of His set apart prophets from the age.
- 3:22** Moses said,  
Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You will listen to him in all that he says to you. **3:23** And it will happen that everyone who does not listen to this prophet will be completely destroyed from among the people  
<Deuteronomy 18:15,19; cf. Leviticus 23:29>.
- 3:24** Indeed, all the prophets who spoke, from Samuel on, also announced these days. **3:25** You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham,  
And in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed <Genesis 12:3; cf. 22:18>.
- 3:26** For you first God raised up His servant and sent him, blessing you by turning each one of you from your evil ways.
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The first part of the story is straightforward. Peter and John are apostles of Jesus and, therefore, his authoritative spokesmen. They are in Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews, where there is also the temple which God commanded they build. The temple is the “house of God,” which we have seen in Genesis 28 means that God connects with His people, the Jews, in this building for the purpose of affirming His promises to Abraham. Peter and John approach the temple in order to pray. A lame man asks them for alms, and instead they command him to walk on the basis of Jesus of Nazareth’s being the Messiah. God heals the man, who leaps and walks and praises God in front of the crowd that is there at the temple. Naturally, they are astonished, and Peter explains to them what is happening.

The first thing that he wants them to understand is that it is their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who has performed this miracle. In addition, Jesus has been God’s servant, His “set apart and righteous one,” and they rejected him by demanding that the Romans crucify him, which they did, even though Pilate deemed him innocent. Peter also calls Jesus the “instigator of life,” meaning that he rescues people from death, both physical and eternal death, through God’s using Jesus as their advocate during the legal proceedings of the final judgment. Peter mentions the important fact, too, that God raised Jesus from the dead, the implication being that Jesus, by dying on the cross, qualified to assist others in rising from the dead and remaining alive for all eternity. And Peter, John, and the other apostles have personally witnessed the risen Messiah.

Peter then intimates that Jesus and belief in him that has resulted in the lame man’s being healed and will result in authentic believers’ receiving life from God instead of death is not only because Jesus experienced crucifixion, but also because his suffering is exactly what God declared through the Old Testament prophets would happen and was necessary to

happen. Peter also adds that forgiveness from God is available to these Jews through belief in Jesus, which would come as very surprising news to these people who were used to seeking God's mercy through only their offering animal sacrifices according to the Mosaic Covenant—if they lacked the kind of understanding of both the Mosaic Covenant and Jesus which the apostles have. Nevertheless, Peter is absolutely certain that Jesus will be the key not only to their obtaining God's forgiveness, but also to their inward spiritual renewal which accompanies God's restoring the Kingdom of Israel on the land of Israel, that will constitute God's presence among the Jews when Jesus returns to set up this kingdom in Jerusalem. Peter calls all this the “seasons of revival,” i.e., inward revival, during the “presence of Yahweh” when “He sends to [the Jews] the appointed Messiah, Jesus,” which will be at “the times of the restoration of all things.” This last comment refers to God's establishing Jesus's Davidic and messianic kingdom as He also predicted “through the mouth of His set apart prophets.” We will want to remember that Peter uses the words “restoration of all things” when we look at chapter 1 of Acts.

While this exhortation by Peter to confess their sins could be construed as for the purpose of obtaining only eternal life, all the evidence we have been gathering about God's fulfilling all His promises to the Jews is leading us to conclude that the purpose is just as much so that they acquire the earthly Kingdom of Israel when Jesus returns. This makes good sense of the language that Peter is using—words such as “seasons of revival” to refer to the inward, spiritual revival of the generation of Jews on the land of Israel when Jesus returns, and God's “sending” the Jews “the appointed Messiah,” i.e., their king, to rule over them when He transforms them into a strong and powerful country, and the “restoration of all things” Jewish, including the Davidic kingdom on earth with the final king, Jesus, ruling from Jerusalem.

Peter then backs up these Jewish claims by reminding his listeners that Moses stated clearly that God would raise up another Jewish spokesman whom they would be obligated to obey or suffering destruction by God. When we looked at Deuteronomy 18:15 in the context of Paul's speech in Acts 13:16-52, we concluded that Moses was speaking of a leader greater than himself, whom God would bring into existence for the people of Israel. And this leader is Jesus. Obviously, Peter also is implying that Jesus is this very prophet, about whom all the other Old Testament prophets spoke in line with God's promise to Abraham and his Jewish descendants that it would be through them that the Gentiles and they would obtain the fulfillment of God's promises, including the one of eternal mercy and life. Consequently, Peter can say that God has sent the risen Messiah to the Jews first, which results in their genuinely repenting and seeking His mercy. And the implied result is that the Jews will obtain God's blessing. However, what is God's blessing for the Jews. Is it only eternal life? Or is it only the establishment of the earthly kingdom on the land of Israel with Jesus as their king? Or is it both? Putting together all the clues in Joel, Revelation, and now Acts, we are finding that it is both for the Jews and eternal life for the Gentiles. This means, too, that the “destruction” of which Moses spoke for Jews who disobey the prophet Jesus begins with God's earthly judgment immediately before Jesus' return as described by Joel and Revelation and ends with eternal destruction.

As a result, Peter and John are announcing to their Jewish audience that the clock has started even more aggressively moving towards God's fulfilling His promise to them to build

them into the greatest nation on earth by providing them with the central element and means for this to happen—the crucified and risen Messiah. Jesus will not only rule over the Jews on the land of Israel, but he will also be the very foundation of God’s changing their hearts so that they are genuinely repentant of their immorality and genuinely submissive to Jesus’ authority as their king. Jesus will also be the means by which God blesses the Gentiles of the earth with eternal life. And because these actions by God constitute the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham and his physical descendants, it is these who also have a biblical right to hear the news about Jesus first, before the message goes out to the Gentiles. Thus, we see that God’s “restoring all things” to the Jews, situating them on the land which He promised them so that their enemies never harm them again, and granting eternal life to Jews and Gentiles, requires both the first and the second appearances of Jesus as the Jews’ (and, of course, believing Gentiles’) king and advocate before God.

### **Acts 1:1-14**

This fact helps us understand the apostles’ question and Jesus’ answer in Acts 1, which we will consider first before looking closely at Peter’s quote of Joel 2 in chapter 2 of Acts. Acts 1:1-14 reads,

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**Acts 1:1** Theophilus, I myself composed the first story concerning all the things which Jesus began to do and teach **1:2** until the day when he was taken up and after he had instructed, through the Holy Spirit, the apostles whom he had chosen. **1:3** After he had suffered, he presented himself alive to them with many convincing proofs, appearing to them for forty days and talking about things concerning the Kingdom of God. **1:4** While he was spending time with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, “Which you heard about from Me, **1:5** because John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

**1:6** Therefore, when they would come together, they were asking him,

Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?

**1:7** And he would say to them,

It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father has established by His own authority, **1:8** but you will receive authority when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and as far as the end of the earth.

**1:9** And after he had said these things and they were looking at him, he was lifted up and a cloud received him out of their sight. **1:10** As they were gazing into heaven after he had gone, indeed, behold, two men in white clothing stood by them. **1:11** and they said,

Men of Galilee, why are you standing looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was received from you into heaven, will come in the same manner you watched him go into heaven.

**1:12** Then, they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain which is called The Olive Grove, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. **1:13** And when they entered, they went up into the



upstairs room where they were staying—Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas of James. 1:14 All these were busily engaged with one mind in prayer along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

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Luke, the author of both the gospel of Luke and Acts, begins the latter by reminding his friend Theophilus (literally “God lover”) that he wrote the gospel of Luke and is now composing this account which will pick up the story at the point of Jesus’ ascension into heaven that occurred forty days after he rose from the dead. During these forty days, Jesus speaks to his apostles regarding the Kingdom of God, which includes as part of the process of setting it up the apostles’ being “baptized with the Spirit who is different,” which we will look at more carefully in chapter 2.

In v. 6 the apostles specifically ask Jesus about his “restoring the Kingdom of Israel” and whether this is when he will do so. While generic English translations make it sound as though they are asking him at this very moment before he ascends into heaven, this does not make sense in the light of how important an idea this would have been to the apostles. Would they really have waited until the fortieth day of Jesus’s appearance after his resurrection to ask this question, especially when Jesus has spent the last thirty-nine days talking to them about the “Kingdom of God?” I do not think so, and it makes more sense to interpret Luke as saying that the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel was *the* burning question for the apostles, so that, for literary purposes, Luke has them ask their question as Jesus leaves them. Therefore, assuming that this question has part of their discussion for the last thirty-nine days, it, along with Jesus’s answer, “It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father has established by His own authority,” serve as an important segue to the statement by the two men in white clothing who appear as the apostles are looking up after watching Jesus ascend into heaven.

They comment that “this Jesus, who was received from you into heaven, will come in the same manner you watched him go into heaven.” Thus, Luke is letting Theophilus know that the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel will occur at Jesus’s second coming, not at his first coming. Luke is also informing his reader that, theologically, this has been God’s plan all along. The Messiah would first appear to suffer and qualify to be both the Messiah and the people’s priest and advocate before God at the judgment. Then, he would appear again, at some later date known only to the transcendent Creator and not to man, and “restore the Kingdom of Israel.”

We notice, too, that Jesus does not object to the question as though the apostles’ theology of Israel and the Jews is incorrect, which is to say that he affirms that he will “restore the kingdom to Israel.” Thus, it is reasonable to interpret Luke in his telling this story in chapter 1 to affirm that God will fulfill His promise to transform the Jews into the greatest nation in history, while Luke goes on in the rest of Acts to affirm that God will also fulfill His promise to both Jews and Gentiles to create a new and eternal Kingdom of God in a new creation. This is also what makes the most sense out of Luke’s ending the book of Acts with a conversation between *the sole apostle to the Gentiles*, Paul, and Jews *in Rome*. In this way, Luke is continuing to affirm that the gospel of Jesus as Messiah is always for the Jews first (cf. Acts 3:26; Romans 1:16), to announce that through Jesus He will make them a great

nation by changing their hearts and providing them with eternal forgiveness, and for the Gentiles second, to announce to them that, along with believing Jews, He will bless them with eternal life.

### **Acts 2:1-47**

Now we are ready for Acts 2 and Peter's using a quote from Joel 2 to explain what God is doing on the Day of Pentecost. All of the second chapter of Acts reads,

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**2:1** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in the same place. **2:2** Suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **2:3** And tongues like fire were seen, being divided among them, and they sat on each one of them. **2:4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak with other languages as the Spirit was giving them to speak.

**2:5** There were Jews living in Jerusalem, God-fearing men from every nation under heaven. **2:6** And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speaking in his own dialect. **2:7** They were confused and wondering, saying,

Behold, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **2:8** So how is each of us hearing them speak in his own language in which he was born. **2:9** Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and those who dwell in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **2:10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **2:11** Jews and converts, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them in our languages talking about the mighty acts of God.

**2:12** And they all continued to be confused and perplexed, saying to one another,

What does this mean?

**2:13** And others were making fun of them and saying,

They are full of wine.

**2:14** But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them,

Men, Jews and all those who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and pay close attention to my words, **2:15** for these men are not drunk as you suppose, because it is the third hour.

**2:16** But this is that which was spoken of through the prophet Joel,

**2:17** Indeed, it will be in the last days, says God, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. **2:18** And on My male slaves and on My female slaves, in those days, I will pour out My Spirit, and they will prophesy. **2:19** And I will give warning signs in heaven above and signs on the earth below—blood, fire, and vapor of smoke. **2:20** The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and remarkable Day of Yahweh. **2:21** And it will be that everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved <Joel 2:28-32>.

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- 2:22 Men, Israelites, listen to these words. Jesus the Nazarene, a man who has been confirmed by God to you by means of powers, warning signs, and signs, which God did through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know, 2:23 this man, given over by the fixed plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 2:24 God resurrected him, having loosed the cords of death because it was impossible for Him to be held by it, 2:25 for David says with reference to him, I was always seeing Yahweh in front of me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be disturbed.
- 2:26 On account of this my heart was cheered, and my tongue exulted. Moreover, my flesh will dwell in hope,
- 2:27 because You will not abandon my life to Hades, and You will not give your committed one to see decay.
- 2:28 You have made known to me the ways of life. You will fill me with joy with Your presence <Psalm 16:8-11>.
- 2:29 Men, brothers, it is right to say with confidence to you concerning the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is in our midst to this day. 2:30 Therefore, being a spokesman for God and knowing that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat someone from the fruit of his loins on his throne <Psalm 132:11>, 2:31 he foresaw and spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah, that he would neither be abandoned to Hades, nor his flesh see decay. 2:32 God resurrected this Jesus of whom we are all witnesses.
- 2:33 Therefore, having been lifted up to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you both see and hear.
- 2:34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, Yahweh said to my Lord, sit at My right hand,
- 2:35 until I place your enemies as a footstool for your feet <Psalm 110:1>.
- 2:36 Therefore, let the whole house of Israel know for sure that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.

2:37 And when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles,

What should we do, men, brothers?

2:38 Then, Peter said to them,

Repent and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,

2:39 because the promise belongs to you, your children, and all those who are far off, as many as Yahweh our God will Himself call.<sup>15</sup>

2:40 And with many other words, he was carefully bearing witness for persuading them saying,

Be saved from this morally twisted generation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Because of Peter's experience with Cornelius and his family in Acts 10, along with Peter's specific statement in 10:34,35, "<sup>34</sup> On the basis of truth, I have reached the conclusion that God does not show favoritism. <sup>35</sup> Instead, the one who fears Him and performs righteousness in every nation is acceptable to Him," Peter must be referring to only Jews when he says, "and all those who are far off." Peter does not expand the horizons of authentic believers in Jesus to include the Gentiles until after and as a result of his experience in Acts 10.

<sup>16</sup> Peter is calling the present Jewish generation a perverted one, seemingly contradicting his statement in 2:16 to the effect that the simultaneous conversion of three thousand Jews constitutes a "fulfillment" of Joel's prophecy that God

2:41 Therefore, those who embraced his message were baptized, and, in that day, about three thousand persons were added. 2:42 And they were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and togetherness, to the breaking of bread and prayer. 2:43 And fear came upon every person, and many attesting miracles and signs occurred through the apostles. 2:44 And all those who were believing were together, and they were holding everything in common. 2:45 They were also selling their possessions and property and were distributing them to everyone according to his need. 2:46 Each day they were persevering with one accord in the temple, breaking bread in each house, and sharing food with gladness and singleness of heart. 2:47 They were praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord was adding daily to their togetherness those who were being saved.

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The first four verses introduce the scene. The apostles and other disciples of Jesus are together in a building in Jerusalem. The Spirit of God causes flames of fire to rest on their heads, and they speak in foreign languages. The next nine verses describe the response of Jews and Gentiles who are visiting Jerusalem from other parts of the Roman Empire where their native tongue is not a language that men from Galilee would know. Therefore, they are surprised to hear these followers of Jesus not only speaking in foreign languages that they do not naturally know, but also talking about God and His greatness. Some of these foreigners even think that these men are drunk.

However, Peter stands up in their midst and explains that “this is that which was spoken of through the prophet Joel,” and he quotes Joel 2:28-32, which in the Hebrew reads,

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- Joel 2:28 And it shall come to pass after this, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. And your sons and your daughters will speak on behalf of God. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions.
- 2:29 And also on your servants and your maidservants, in those days I will pour out My Spirit.
- 2:30 And I will give signs in the heavens, and on the land blood, fire, and columns of smoke.
- 2:31 The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood in the presence of the coming of the **Day of Yahweh**, the great and fearful One.
- 2:32 And it will happen that all who call upon the name of Yahweh will escape to safety, because in the mountain of Zion and Jerusalem there will be someone who escapes to safety, just as Yahweh said, even among the survivors whom Yahweh is calling—
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I repeat here Peter’s quote in the Greek text of Acts 2 for easy comparison,

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- Acts 2:17 Indeed, it will be in the last days, says God, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.
- 2:18 And on My male slaves and on My female slaves, in those days, I will pour out My Spirit, and they will prophesy.
- 2:19 And I will give warning signs in heaven above and signs on the earth below—blood, fire, and vapor of smoke.
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would convert all the Jews at some point in their future. Instead of this being a contradiction, it substantiates the interpretation that Peter is only saying of Joel that what is happening before his eyes on Pentecost in Jerusalem is like what God will later do according to Joel, and that it is significant enough, i.e., 3,000 plus Jews’ becoming authentic believers all at once (cf. 2:47), that he feels comfortable connecting this phenomenon, at least loosely, to Joel’s prophecy.

**2:20** The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and remarkable Day of Yahweh.

**2:21** And it will be that everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved <Joel 2:28-32>.

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First, we notice that Joel does not use the phrase “in the last days.” In fact, Joel never uses this phrase (in Hebrew בְּאַחֶרֶת הַיָּמִים (*be’achareet hayyameem*) (cf. Genesis 49:1; Isaiah 2:2); in Greek ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις (*en tais eschatais haymerais*) (Genesis 49:1; Isaiah 2:2). If he did, it would make interpreting the book of Joel a lot easier, because he provides little help in understanding the time of the events he is describing. The time must be deduced by looking at all the somewhat obscure clues throughout the whole book, and, as stated in the body of this paper, I have found that it makes the most sense to conclude that Joel is talking about the judgment of the Jews on the land of Israel just prior to the return of Jesus the Messiah. Peter seems to agree, because he employs the phrase “in the last days” to paraphrase what Joel is saying.

However, is Peter saying that the speaking in unknown foreign languages by Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost is the one and only fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32, so that God will very soon send Jesus back to earth to defeat Israel’s enemies and set up his messianic and millennial kingdom in Jerusalem? It might appear so, because Peter’s words are, “this is that which was spoken of through the prophet Joel.” But there are two other viable options for how to interpret Peter.

The author of Hebrews begins his letter to Jews who are struggling in their belief in Jesus as the Messiah,

**Hebrews 1:1** God, after He spoke to the fathers long ago through the prophets in many portions and in many ways, **1:2** in these the last days, has spoken to us through the Son...

Clearly, this biblical author believes that he is writing “in the last days,” literally “in these the last days” (ἐν ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων (*ep eschatoo tone haymerone tootone*)). Taking into account that Peter heard ten days earlier that Jesus would return to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-11), he could very reasonably be saying that God’s causing Jesus’s followers to speak in foreign languages by His Spirit is the beginning of the last days, the end of which he does not know, but that the last days will culminate in the return of Jesus as the Messiah. As a result, the prediction of Joel is in the process of being fulfilled, but it will not be completely fulfilled until sometime later.

Another option for interpreting Peter is that God’s causing these Jews in Jerusalem to speak in foreign languages is a foreshadowing of Joel’s prediction. It is an indication of a future event in the sense that the dynamic that is in play among the Jews on Pentecost is the same as that which will be in play when Jesus returns. This option makes the most sense in the light of the evidence from Joel, Revelation, etc. Thus, Peter is saying that the miraculous event of Pentecost is not only the kind of thing that God will do among the Jews when Jesus returns, but that when He does, it will be a massive revival involving the entire nation of Israel, which will follow a horrific experience of judgment by God and will accompany the return of Jesus as the Messiah.

With this last option, we can see that when Jesus returns, God will fulfill Joel's prophecy by producing a national and inward revival of the Jewish people, so that every time a Jew becomes an authentic believer between Jesus' first and second coming, the national dynamic is at play in the individual Jew, and it is a reminder that His goal is to judge and save Israel through the means of the Messiah, which will eventually happen at some unknown time in the future. Therefore, Peter is not stating that Joel's prophecy is now being fulfilled completely and only here on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead. Instead, he is saying that, just as God will use His Spirit to change the entire nation of Israel at Jesus' return, He is using His Spirit on a smaller scale to change the Jews who are speaking with unknown foreign languages on the Day of Pentecost.

Peter goes on to explain to his audience that David spoke of the Messiah's resurrection in Psalm 16 after God first gave him the Davidic Covenant which promised an eventual, permanent king of Israel (cf. 2 Samuel 7). We saw Paul quoted the same verse in his speech to the Jews in the synagogue of Psidian Antioch in Acts 13. Both Paul and Peter interpret David to mean that a future king from his line of descendants would die and rise from the dead, before his body had the opportunity to decay. And both Paul and Peter know this king to be Jesus of Nazareth. Peter also quotes another of David's psalms, Psalm 110, to remind his audience that David viewed the final king from his descendants as his "Lord," for whom God would crush his enemies when He not only raised him from the dead, but also raised him to "sit at [His] right hand," meaning that Jesus had definitely qualified to be God's instrument of fulfilling His promises that we have considered in Genesis 12 to both Jews and Gentiles. This naturally includes the promise of Joel 2:28 of God's "pouring out His Spirit" on the Jews as part of the return of the Messiah. Consequently, Peter is saying that speaking in foreign languages by Jesus's current followers points to and confirms that God will make of Israel a great nation in the future when Jesus returns (as implied by Jesus and stated by the two men in Acts 1), living on the land of Israel completely unharmed by their enemies, because Jesus will be ruling over them.

As a result of Peter's speech, three thousand of his listeners, probably mostly Jews, become believers in Jesus the Messiah. Interestingly enough, they are not described as speaking in unknown foreign languages as a demonstration of God's pouring out His Spirit on them. Instead, Luke mentions that they are baptized in the name of Jesus, they continue learning about Jesus from the apostles, they eat together, they watch God confirm the apostles' message with miracles, and they share their wealth with one another. In addition, God daily adds more believers to their number. Thus, we can say that these Jews' conversion to Christianity constitutes an event in line with Joel's prediction that Peter quoted, so that Jewish conversion to Christianity over the last nineteen hundred years or so points to "the last days" of the present realm when God will change the heart of every Jew living on the land of Israel at the return of Jesus, who will establish his Jewish, messianic kingdom in Israel.

We should also take note of Peter's statement in vs. 38,39 to these Jews in Jerusalem who are becoming authentic believers in the Messiah, that the "promise" in this context of *forgiveness* and *receiving the Holy Spirit* ("the Spirit who is different" as we could also translate the word "holy") belongs to them and their descendants, i.e., Jewish descendants. Because we have seen in Acts 10 how surprised even the apostles are when God commands Peter to present the message of Jesus to Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles, it makes sense to interpret

Peter's additional words in 2:39 "and all those who are far off" as referring to only Jews. Thus, he is saying that Jews who are not currently living on the land of Israel and have been dispersed during their history to foreign lands will receive this same promise of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Peter could very easily mean that eventually God will bring these dispersed Jews back to the land of Israel for the fulfillment of His promises that involved the Messiah and his messianic kingdom. For example, we have looked at the fact that God says in Jeremiah 23:3,

**Jeremiah 23:3** And I will gather the remnant of My flock from all the lands from where I have driven them, and I will cause them to return to the pasture, and they will bear fruit, and they will be many.

### **Conclusion**

Our conclusion from this study in Acts that includes Peter's quote of Joel 2:28-32 is that God's reach towards the Jews is never too short, and His plans are to send their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, to them once more, so that God destroys their enemies, molds them into the greatest nation of human history, forgives them for their immoral actions, changes them inwardly and they become authentic believers in Jesus the Messiah, and ultimately grants them eternal life with believing Gentiles in the permanent new creation of the Kingdom of God. In this way, the Messiah is the hope of Israel, to grant the Jews the status of the greatest nation in human history and entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God, and to use Abraham and his descendants, namely himself, as the very means by which Gentiles also gain entrance into God's kingdom of the next and permanent realm.

In addition, at Jesus' return, God will resurrect from the dead both Jews and Gentiles who had been authentic believers in God and His Messiah in history, and He will lift from the earth those who are living as authentic believers, so that both groups encounter Jesus as he is descending to set up the millennial kingdom in Jerusalem. God will also transform these resurrected and lifted believers into immortal and morally perfect beings, and they will rule over the millennial kingdom with Jesus until God destroys the present realm and creates a new, eternal realm. It is in this final form of the Kingdom of God that all authentic believers in human history will reside for all eternity as immortal, morally perfect subjects of their king, Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish Messiah.

As a result, the modern trend that fails to see how foundational are God's promises to the rest of the story which He is telling and renders His promises to Abraham irrelevant and wrong as they are stated in Genesis 12:1-3, along with other ideas in the Old Testament, does God and the Bible a great disservice by ignoring God's perfect character, disconnecting Him from the Jews and their earthly destiny on the land of Israel under Jesus' leadership, and eliminating Jesus' role as first the Messiah of the Jews and second the Messiah of the Gentiles, while trying to lump these two and the order in which the Bible presents them into only one Messiahship. Yes, Jesus is the very center of cosmic history, but not at the expense of the Jews, but in support of their role on earth and in heaven. As Paul, for example, reveals in his discussions in Acts with both Jews and Gentiles, the Old Testament is true and the accurate basis of understanding Jesus, not the other way around, which in no way denigrates

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Jesus, but only highlights that it his God and ours who establishes His plans and purposes in the Old Testament and demonstrates them in greater detail with the first appearance of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, while both the Old Testament and New Testament inerrantly and accurately point us towards his second appearance to complete God's tasks of bringing about the earthly Kingdom of Israel and the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.