

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 29, Joel

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the Book of the 12. This is session 29 on the book of Joel.

This session is going to focus on developing the message, the setting, the implications of the book of Joel.

Joel is one of my favorite books in the book of the 12. You may have an immediate question about all of this. Why are we looking at Joel among the post-exilic prophets when, in fact, as we look at the order and arrangement of the book of the 12, Joel is the second book listed there and seems to be listed among the Assyrian prophets.

The issue here and part of the problem here is that the date of the book of Joel is something that is very difficult to determine, and it's something that scholars themselves have debated back and forth, and the book has been placed in several different settings, and the date has been given at several different periods in Israel's history. Based on the place and arrangement of this book in the Book of the 12, earlier scholars tended to date this very early, and some interpreters have even dated it as early as the 9th century BC. If that were the case, it would actually be the earliest of the minor prophets.

Others have dated it just before the Assyrian invasion. Others just before the Babylonian invasion. I think both of those are very real possibilities.

The book is a warning about the coming day of the Lord. It's a warning about a judgment that is about to come on the people that is imminent. I read an article recently that saw this book as being written sometime in either the exilic or early post-exilic period as well.

But the recent trend, and I think the more recent consensus, is that we should date the book of Joel in the post-exilic period and place it somewhere in either the late 6th or early 5th century. There is a struggle, and we can't fully identify or explicitly state that this is the definitive time when the book of Joel was written. But there are several things that lend us or that lend toward a dating in the post-exilic period.

Joel is not mentioned outside of the book. We don't know about him from other historical records or the historical books in the Old Testament like we do the prophet Joel or some of the other prophets. There is no historical superscription here identifying the time period of the prophet's ministry.

There is just overall a lack of explicit statements about the actual historical setting of the book or events or figures that would have been present as Joel was carrying out his ministry. However, there are a couple of things that support the idea of a post-exilic setting for the book. In chapter 3, verses 2 to 3, we have this statement.

I will gather all the nations, and I will bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of my people and my heritage, Israel because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land. They have cast lots for my people and traded a boy for a prostitute and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it. There has been a dispersion of the people of Israel.

They have been taken away into exile. This seems to fit with the post-exilic period. Although others have argued maybe this is dealing with the Assyrian invasion and the Assyrian exile of the northern kingdom rather than the southern kingdom.

A second thing is that there is a mention in chapter 3 of verse 6 about how the leaders of Tyre and Sidon and Philistia have sold the people of Israel or Judah into slavery. It says you have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border. The reference to the Greeks there may support the idea that Joel's ministry is in the context of the post-exilic period.

Although we also have references to the Greeks in the Assyrian annals and inscriptions. They were involved with the people of Syria and Palestine at an earlier time. We don't really know much about the slave trade that might have happened between Syria and Palestine and the Greek people.

This could be referring to an earlier period. Rather than a reference to the Greeks, this may simply be a reference to Greek-speaking people. In Ezekiel chapter 26 verses 12 and 13, we have a reference to slave trade between Javan and Tyre, the Greeks and Tyre, and that dates from the 6th century.

So, even this reference to the Greeks is not really terribly definitive. A third piece of evidence that supports a post-exilic setting is that we have no reference or no mention of a king in either Israel or Judah. It seems odd if we talk about it immediately before the Assyrian crisis or immediately before the Babylonian crisis, but the book is so brief that we may not necessarily expect to see a reference there.

So, for all of these reasons, Joel, the most likely date seems to be a post-exilic period, but these other possibilities are definitely there. There is reference to the sanctuary. The sanctuary is standing.

The people are called to assemble there and to come before the altar of the Lord. If Joel is a post-exilic book, then it means that it is dated after 515 BC, the time when

the people actually completed the temple. There are references to the sanctuary in chapter 1, verse 14, chapter 1, verse 16, chapter 2, and verse 17, and there's this call for a sacred assembly.

So, if Joel is a post-exilic book, and that's the way that I'm going to treat it and deal with it, Joel's ministry was carried out after the rebuilding of the temple in 515 BC. Beyond that, we cannot be more definitive. I don't think, ultimately, it changes the message of the book all that much, whether we read it before the exile or after the exile.

But the general consensus is that it is a post-exilic book. So, in light of that, let's reflect a little bit and review a little bit the history of the post-exilic period. Remember that the people come back to the land in 538 and 537 BC as a result of the decree of Cyrus and the transfer of power from the Babylonians to the Persians.

The return is going to take place in three stages. The first return is going to be led by Zerubbabel and Joshua. They're going to ultimately rebuild the temple through the ministry and the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, 520 to 515.

The ministry of Joel comes after that. We have a second return that happens under Ezra in 458 BC. Then we have a third return under Nehemiah in 445 BC.

We are going to just sort of conjecture here a little bit and put the ministry of Joel either at the end of the 6th century after the temple has been built or sometime early in the 5th century before the second return under Ezra and Nehemiah. Now, he talks about the coming of the day of the Lord and the fact that there has been a locust plague that has come upon the people of Judah, and it's been devastating on the land. But he also talks about what appears to be an enemy army that is going to invade Judah as punishment from God.

This is going to be the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is coming. You need to prepare for this.

You need to repent. You need to get right with God or there is the possibility that God is going to bring more judgment. In 490 BC we have a very significant battle in history.

We have the battle between the Persians and the Greeks that takes place at Marathon. Really you have sort of this titanic struggle that is going on between the West and the East. If Joel is warning about the possibility of an enemy army attacking, I wonder about the possibility if it may somehow be connected to the movements of the Persians or the Greeks in relationship to this major conflict that happens in 490 BC.

So, the general idea and kind of the basic timeline that we're going to take for this is that the ministry of Joel takes place somewhere around 500 BC. After the temple has been rebuilt, after the return of the people to the land, and in a sense, there is repentance; there is a spiritual revival in the years 520 where the people recommit themselves to the Lord. They respond to the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah and yet the repentance is not complete.

By the time that we come to the ministry of Joel, the people are back in another situation where they are facing the judgment of God. Just like in the time of Josiah when there is this revival, there is this return to pure worship and God blesses Josiah and the people are spared from judgment. Remember that it doesn't take very long for people to go back to their idolatrous ways.

Then ultimately the exile is going to take place and Jerusalem is going to be destroyed in 586. We would think in light of the exile that the people would finally realize the seriousness of their covenant on faithfulness to the Lord. If anything could cure their sin and their rebellion and their covenant on faithfulness, you think it would be the exile.

Yet when they come back to the land, they sort of drift away from the Lord. They do not rebuild the temple immediately and Zechariah and Haggai have to call them back to faithfulness. They are faithful for a little while and then the ebb and flow continues.

By the time of Joel, we are again looking at a place where God is using a prophet to remind the people of judgment that is coming. The judgment that has occurred here, they have already begun to experience in some sense the covenant curses. The further judgment that is going to come upon Judah is that God is going to bring a further manifestation of the Day of the Lord.

In their recent history, they have experienced a devastating locust plague. It has wiped out the land and God has used this to remind the people that they are not being faithful. In the same way that they experienced the covenant curses before the exile, they are back to the place where they are once again experiencing the covenant curses.

Joel's message is, if you think that the locust plague that you have just experienced is bad, wait for what God is about to do because the Day of the Lord is coming. In many ways, the message of Joel very closely parallels the message of Zephaniah that we have already looked at. The reason why Joel, even though it possibly is one of the latest of the books in the Book of the Twelve, the reason that it has been put at the front of the Book of the Twelve is because of specific thematic concerns and ideas that are introduced in this book that are going to run throughout the book of the Twelve.

Joel is going to talk about the judgment of the Day of the Lord. That motif is going to be mentioned in the book of Obadiah, in the book of Amos, in the book of Zephaniah. It is going to be a recurring theme.

So, Joel thematically may be put at the front of the book and at the front of the Book of the Twelve to highlight and to emphasize this emphasis on the Day of the Twelve that is going to carry through this literature all the way to the end. There is now facing the people of Judah another experience of the Day of the Lord. Amos said the Assyrians were coming.

That's the Day of the Lord. Zephaniah says the Babylonians are coming. That's the Day of the Lord.

Joel is warning of what appears to be, in Joel chapter 2, another enemy army. This is the Day of the Lord. So, Joel is put at the front of the Book of the Twelve because it introduces those concerns.

There is another time of national crisis in the post-exilic period. The people have not learned their lesson. They've gone back to their sinful ways.

The fact that they're back in the land doesn't preclude the possibility that God may bring them here in the near future for further judgment. One of the other reasons for the placement of Joel at the beginning of the Book of the Twelve is that it also provides us with a paradigmatic example of national repentance. The positive thing of Joel's ministry is that when Joel does warn them of the Day of the Lord and of the approaching judgment, the people do take that seriously.

We're going to see in chapter 2 that there does appear to be a turning to God that happens in this book as a result of Joel's message. Because of that, the warning of judgment and the warning of the Day of the Lord, that judgment is going to be averted. Amos warned that the Day of the Lord was coming and the judgment wasn't averted.

Zephaniah warned that the Day of the Lord was coming, and the judgment wasn't averted. Joel warned of the judgment that God was going to bring. The people responded.

They got right with God. At the beginning of the Book of the Twelve, this is put there to say that this is what God ultimately wanted from his people all along. Then the frustration as we work our way through these Twelve books is, we have 400 years of prophetic history and we have very limited examples of times when the people came back to God.

At the beginning of this story, we see what God wanted. The book of Joel connects to the book that precedes it. It connects back to Hosea because Hosea concludes with a call to repentance and a call to return to the Lord.

Joel opens up with a call for the people to weep and mourn and repent and realize the judgment that God has brought against them. The book of Joel connects to what follows in the book of Amos that comes after it because it's going to talk about God roaring as a lion, thundering as a storm. That's going to be the introductory message that's found in the book of Amos as well.

The placement of Joel in the book of the Twelve seems to be literary and thematic, the causes behind it, rather than historical and chronological. So that's the historical setting. A locust plague has occurred, and further judgment is going to come from God and all of this seems to have somehow taken place between the rebuilding of the temple in 515 BC and the second and third returns under Ezra and Nehemiah later in the fifth century.

All right, let's look at the description and the message of the day of the Lord and the prelude to that, the locust plague that has already occurred in the land. Joel wants them to understand that God has brought judgment on them as a warning that more judgment is going to come. The locust plague is just the prelude to what. It's just the shot that God has fired across the bow.

And again, we see another connection between Joel and the book of Amos that immediately follows it. Both of these prophets are going to focus on locust invasions. And in the book of Amos, God says, I have sent these locusts, I have sent them to warn you, but in chapter four, yet you have not returned to me.

And so, in Amos' day, God sent a locust plague and it did not get the people's attention. In Joel, God sends a locust plague and fortunately, it did get the people's attention. Amos also mentions a locust plague in chapter seven, verses one to three.

Amos sees the vision of this locust plague that is going to swarm through the land. He realizes the devastating effect that it's going to have. He prays for God to spare the people, and God relents and does not send judgment.

God gives them another opportunity in spite of their resistance to repent and return to him. So, there's another, I think, literary thematic reason for the way that Joel is placed at the front of the book. In chapter one, we have a very vivid description of the national response that God wants to see on the part of his people as a result of this judgment that he sent against them.

Verses two to four say this, and we begin in verse one, the word of the Lord that came to Joel. And we have the narrative of what's going on. Hear this, you elders, give ear, all the inhabitants of the land.

Has such a thing happened in your days or in the days of your fathers? I mean, this was a major event. Tell your children about it and let your children tell their children and their children to another generation. They're going to be talking about this for a long time.

And what's happened is, is what the cutting locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust has left, the hopping locust has eaten. And what the hopping locust has left, the destroying locust has eaten.

And the commentators are going to discuss we have four different names for locust here. Are we talking about four varieties and species of locusts? Or are we talking about the four different stages of growth and development among the locusts? Ultimately, that's not that important. The use of these four different terms for locust is a rhetorical way of emphasizing the fullness of this swarm, how large the amount of locusts that had invaded the land, and the devastation that they had brought upon the crops and the economy of the people.

This was directly a judgment from God. Remember, Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, one of the curses that God will send against you is that instead of enjoying the blessings of the land, God will send the locust against you and they will consume your crops. That is exactly what has happened.

And these four different terms reflect how devastating this would be. Now, if you're interested in thinking about what it would be like to experience a locust plague, the National Geographic website has some interesting information on the kinds of locust plagues that take place in Africa and the Middle East. And they experienced these back in the days of the Old Testament.

It's something that's still commonly part of the experience of the people there in the locust infestation in Afghanistan and the devastating effect that it had upon the crops and the economy of that nation. It was literally a nationwide crisis because of this. The National Geographic website gives us this information.

It says that one of these locust plagues in the Middle East can be more than 450 square miles in size. That's a lot of locusts. A locust swarm can pack between 40 to 80 million locusts in less than a half square mile.

Each locust, and 40 to 80 million in a half square mile, can eat its own weight in grain or plants every day. And so, what that means is that a swarm of that size could consume 423 million pounds of food every day. We don't know if the size of the

locust swarm that Joel is talking about is of that size or not, but we're talking about a significant impact, not just on their livelihood, but something that could threaten their very existence.

I mean this could bring a famine that could bring pretty extensive death and devastation. These locust swarms are also able to travel incredible distances. In 1954, scientists documented that a swarm of locusts flew from northwest Africa to Great Britain.

And in 1988, from west Africa all the way to the Caribbean. So, this is not just a minor event. This is a devastating locust plague.

And this is the judgment of God. God wants the people to understand the seriousness of sin. And again, if you want to illustrate the principle of reaping and sowing in the Bible, the prophets are a great place to go to do that.

The people sow their sin, and they reap the consequences of military invasion, exile, and conquest. They sow wickedness, they reap the consequences of God totally destroying their land and their crops, and that's what's happened. And what we have in Joel chapter 1 is that there is a call on various people in the post-exilic community to weep and mourn over what has happened.

First of all, there is a call to the leaders in verse 2. There is a call to those who are the wine drinkers in verse 5. And they're obviously going to be upset about this because their source of wine has been taken away. The priests are called to mourn in chapter 1, verse 8. One of the things that the priests would mourn about is that the destruction of these crops meant that the people would not be able to offer the grain and the drink offerings that would bring God's blessing. And so that's going to perpetuate the judgment and the distance between God and his people.

Chapter 1, verse 11, the farmers, the ones who are dependent on these crops for their livelihood, are to mourn. And listen to the crops that are mentioned. The vine dries up, the fig tree languishes, the pomegranate, palm, and apple, and all of the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of men.

And so, various crops were taken away, and the farmers are to mourn about that. And so, all of the people are to weep over what has happened, and ultimately not just to weep about a national disaster, but they are to use this, and they're to use this time of grief as a way of expressing their repentance to God. Yeah, you've experienced something horrible at the physical level in the loss of these crops and food and livelihood, and there's a national crisis facing you, but ultimately you need to repent of your sin.

Call a sacred assembly, in verse 14, and get right with God. And the reason for this, and the warning behind this, is, alas, for the day, for the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty, it comes. Okay? He doesn't say, look, you just experienced the day of the Lord, the judgment of the locust plague.

The day of the Lord is near, there is a further judgment on the way, and so there's a call to repentance in chapter 2, or in chapter 1. That call to repentance and a second warning of judgment that is coming is also given to us in chapter 2, verses 1 to 3. Listen to how that chapter begins. Blow a trumpet in Zion, sound an alarm on my holy mountain. So again, we have either a time of war or a time of disaster, and the people are called to recognize that God is preparing to do something that's even worse than what they've just experienced.

And in verse 2, or again at the end of verse 1, this idea of this judgment that's coming, it's the day of the Lord. For the day of the Lord is coming. It is near. Okay? So, do you see the direct connection to the book of Zephaniah that we have here? It is going to be a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, and there's never been anything like it before.

Okay, the white water of God's wrath is again going to be poured out on the people. Now, in verse 3, we have a description of what that judgment will be like, and it raises one of the major interpretive questions and issues in the book of Joel. Here's what it says.

What does this sound like he's describing here? It sounds as if the prophet is describing for us another locust plague. And so, the interpretive issue here is, do we read this literally or metaphorically? Could possibly chapters 1 and 2 simply be variant messages that were both preached in relationship to this same locust invasion? That's one possibility. Another possibility is that chapter 2 is advancing and moving forward, and I think this is the greater likelihood, and it's warning of another judgment that's coming, and there is going to be a second wave of this locust infestation that is going to be worse than the invasion and the swarm that they have already experienced.

So, the locusts are coming back to stage 2. That's another position and another interpretation that's given to this passage. But I think the third possibility here is that what he's doing, and this is really effective in the artistry and the rhetoric and the way that he does this, is that he is using the invasion of the locusts to portray the invasion of an enemy army that is going to come on the land. And that's going to escalate the seriousness of the judgment that is about to bring.

And so in the same way that this locust plague has come through the land and has wiped out the crops and devastated the land, something worse is on the horizon. A group of soldiers, numerous as the locust plagues, numerous as the locusts, have

swarmed through the land, an army that is going to devastate the land as fully as these locusts did. I think that's what's in view here in chapter 2. Now you might raise the question, well, if that's the case, if an army is simply being described here, or if an army is being metaphorically described here, why does it say that they are like war horses that they run, that they are like a powerful army, or that they are like warriors or like soldiers as they scale the wall? Well, one of the uses of the preposition like or as in Hebrew, sometimes it can be used to make a comparison or a simile, but at other times, it can be used to stress that the comparison is one that it's exactly like this because that is the identity of the thing that is being described. I think we have this back in Joel chapter 2, verses 1-15, Alas for the day of the Lord, for the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction or like destruction from the Almighty it comes.

That verse is not simply saying that the locust plague was like the invasion that God was going to bring. It was saying it was the destruction that God was bringing. And so, the comparison is not just one of similarity; it's one of identity. And here, I think the preposition is being used in the same way when it says that it is like war horses, it is like a powerful army, it is like warriors, it is like soldiers; the preposition is really being used in kind of an intense way to say, look, this is what it really is.

And so, as this army comes upon the land of Israel, this is what is facing Judah in the immediate future. The prophet is warning them of what will happen if there is not a proper response to God. And then we have another call to repentance and what I would view as being sort of, I think, the key passage in the book of Joel.

Joel chapter 2 verses 12-17: Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all of your heart, with fasting, with weeping, with mourning, return to the Lord your God. And we go back to the qualities of God that are found in Exodus 34:6. He's merciful, he's abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster.

If they return to God, there is the possibility that the judgment that the prophet has just warned them can be averted. Remember, the prophets are not simply saying, here's the future. It's laid in stone. They are giving us the shadows of what will happen in the future if the people do not come back to God.

But there is always the possibility, as we've seen with Nineveh, as we've seen in Jeremiah chapter 18 verses 7-10, as we saw in the preaching of Micah, Jeremiah 26-19, there's always the possibility that if the people take this judgment seriously, God might not, God might relent and might not send the judgment that he's threatened. Who knows whether God will not turn? If they turn to God, God will turn, and God will relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God.

So, if they will call this sacred assembly if they will genuinely repent, if they will rend their hearts and not just go through some kind of ceremony, if they will genuinely come back to God, this enemy army that will go through the land and devastate the land, and again, we don't know who this army is or what threat he's talking about, if they will listen to God, that judgment can be averted. The sad thing in Judah's history and in Israel's history is that they have this long history of not listening to the Word of God, and when the possibility of God relenting and not sending judgment, when that's offered to the people, most of the time they do not take advantage of that. Jeremiah goes and preaches his temple sermon and then later is going to read the scroll of his prophecies of judgment in the temple with the hope that perhaps, maybe, they'll listen and repent.

When they do not listen and repent, the judgment comes in the form of the Babylonian invasion. The surprising element that we have here is that this appears to be one of those few select times where the people of Judah did take the prophetic warning seriously and judgment is averted. So, in chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, consecrate a fast, consecrate the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, even the nursing infants.

I mean, this is a national crisis. Bring everybody from the oldest to the least, and if they will come and if they will pour out their hearts to God, God may relent and not send the judgment. Now, we do not have an account or a statement or a notation or a narrative that the people actually did this.

There is nothing between verse 17 and verse 18 that says this was carried out. But from the response that God has in verse 18, it seems to be clear that the people carried through on what the prophet called them to do. And as a result of this repentance and as a result of them crying out to God after they have already experienced this locust plague and have more judgment on the way, God relented and did not send the judgment that was threatened.

Listen to what verse 18 says. Then the Lord became jealous of his land, and he had pity on his people. The Lord answered and said to his people, Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied, and I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

I will remove the northerner far from you. And the reference to the north, I think, lends support to the idea that what we're talking about in chapter two is an army, not just a locust invasion. I will drive him into a parched and desolate land.

So, we do not have a specific statement that they did carry out the sacred festival or that they assembled and cried out to God. But the change of God and God's response here indicates a repentance on the part of the people. And as you're reading through

the book of Joel, what you should see as you're going through this is that chapter 2, verse 18 is actually a hinge verse in this book.

Because up until this point, it's all been about judgment, weeping, mourning, calling a fast, get ready for what's about to happen. What follows after this are promises of restoration and the fact that they will avert the judgment and God is going to give them blessing in the place of judgment. My favorite expression of this and what God is going to do for the people is found in verse 15.

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locusts have eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, the cutter, my great army which I sent among you. Only God has the power and the capacity to give back to them what they have lost in this devastating judgment. God says, by my grace, I am going to give you back the years that the locusts have eaten and have consumed.

And you're going to enjoy blessing instead of judgment and cursing. Okay, so I think that's the best way to read this passage is that we have God's response to the actual repentance of the people. Leslie Allen says this, you know, even without an explicit record of repentance, we are intended to assume that Joel's appeals were ultimately successful.

Finally, people listened to the prophet. Evidently, the people did gather to a national service of fasting and lamentation and the priest duly offered prayers on behalf of a genuinely repentant community. And because of that, God responded and did not send the judgment in the same way that God relented and did not destroy the people of Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah.

That happens in Joel chapter 2. In the same way that when Micah said Jerusalem is going to be leveled and the temple mount itself is going to be turned into a heap of rubble, when Hezekiah repented, Jeremiah 26:17 to 19, God relented and did not send the judgment. However, one of the problems that we have here is that the possibility that verse 18 describes God's response to what the people did is actually only one of the interpretations that are offered for this verse. And the issue here has to do with the specific verb forms that we have in verse 18.

We have a form of the Hebrew imperfect verb with a conjunction, a vav in front of this. And so, how are we supposed to read these forms that are referred to as *vayiktol* verbs? There are two different interpretations of this. A number of commentators are going to translate these not as narrative past event things that God has done, but they are going to read them as prophetic perfects.

And that's one of the ways that this particular construction could be read. These are going to be read as prophetic perfects, where it's not a description of what God did for the people in response to their repentance, but it is simply a promise of what God

ultimately will do for the people at the time of future restoration. And so some interpreters are actually going to interpret the passage in this way.

It's not a narrative, it's not an account of what God did for the people. It's ultimately what God is going to do. And that's reflected even in some of our English translations.

The King James, the New International Version, the New American Standard, they are going to read these essentially as prophetic perfects. And so, this verb form could be used here to stress the idea that we're talking about a future event, but it's expressed with a verb form that normally talks about things in the past to stress the certainty of the ultimate fulfillment. It's as good as if God has already done it because God keeps his promise.

There are a number of commentators who take this approach and who understand the *vayiktol* verbs in this way. Nagowski, Stewart, and Sweeney, in their commentaries, are going to see these as promises about what God is going to do. However, other commentators, and this is where I'm coming down on this, note the fact that the normal use of the *vayiktol* is used to describe what we call preterits.

It's used as a preterit to talk about past events or to record events that have occurred within a narrative and a story. Now, you might say, well, we don't really have a narrative and a story here. But what a writer named Troxell has mentioned in an article in this passage that I think is very good is that we do have a narrative about the past ministry of Jonah.

And it's kind of put in narrative form in chapter 1, verse 1, the word of the Lord that came to Joel. And so, we have the past historical message of Joel, then we have the oracles that Joel gives, and what Troxell argues is that we have a resumption of the narrative in chapter 2, verse 18. The message in oracle form is put in the present, but we're talking about what happened as Joel actually preaches here.

And the Lord became jealous for the land. He had pity on the people. He answered and said to the people, here's what I'm going to do for you.

And so, in the ESV and in the Net Bible and in this understanding of this, we're not talking about the Lord promises to become jealous, the Lord promises to have pity, but the fact that the Lord actually did this. And again, the fact that *vayiktol* verbs, this special form of the imperfect verb with the conjunction, is normally used to express the preterit or the narrative past that seems like the most likely reading of this. Additionally, in verse 20, in verse 28, it says this, and it shall come to pass afterward.

And so that is looking to a blessing that is going to happen in the future beyond the immediate blessing that God has already bought in response to the repentance of his

people. So, there are a couple of different ways that commentators and interpreters interpret and even our English translations; read Joel chapter 2, verses 18 to 27. But I think the best way to read this is that we have an account here of where the people do respond to God and here's how God ultimately promises to bless them in light of their repentance and their response to him.

So, the promise here, God is going to restore, God is going to give back to them what they've lost in the locust plague. The covenant curses are going to be turned in to covenant blessings. All right, beyond the immediate restoration, and we've already seen this, I think, in the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, there is blessing beyond the immediate things that God ever does for the post-exilic community.

Even if we take Joel as a book that was written before the exile, there are ultimate blessings. There's the final blessing, the final restoration that goes beyond anything that God is going to do for his people in the immediate future. And that becomes the focus of the prophet in Joel chapter 2, verses 28 to 32.

And I want to look at that. I want to look at that passage just briefly. Joel chapter 2, verses 28 to 32, says, It shall come to pass afterward, after these immediate blessings and after I reverse this, at some unspecified time in the distant future, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams. And this is the pouring out of the spirit that is going to happen in the final restoration, in the last days. And so this is moving beyond the time of Joel and looking forward to the ultimate kingdom of God.

Remember, one of the challenges in interpreting the prophets is that their horizons change. As they look at the two mountains, they talk about things that are far apart from one another and sometimes join them together. The near mountain here that Joel sees is that God took pity on his people and made promises to them that he's going to fulfill in the near future.

But ultimately there is going to be a pouring out of the spirit in the last days. When we were studying the book of Micah, we looked at these last days promises. We took some time to focus on the book of Joel and the promise that's given here.

And we saw as we move forward into the time of the New Testament, what we understand is that there is a now and not yet fulfillment to the promise that Joel makes here in Joel 2:28-32. Now, the church has already begun to experience the pouring out of the spirit that God promised for the people of Israel. Peter says on the day of Pentecost, what you're observing here and the phenomena that you're observing here, what you're observing here is the fulfillment of Joel 2, 28-32.

And that fulfillment is going to continue and carry forward through the entire last days period of the church. But it is going to be consummated at the second coming of Christ and at the time when Israel will experience this, and the full blessings of the covenant will be experienced and poured out. Now, in verse 30 of this prophecy, it says that I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, the blood and the fire and the columns of smoke.

The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. So, this part of the prophecy is looking to the ultimate, the full, and the final, the awesome day of the Lord that comes before the consummation of all things. But even in this part of the prophecy, I believe that we have now and not yet elements.

When the prophet uses the image of smoke and fire, the sun being darkened, and the moon turning into blood, I think we may have here a metaphorical description of war. The moon turning into blood may represent what happens with a lunar eclipse, which takes a blood-like appearance. That type of event happening in the sky was an omen in the ancient Near East of some natural or national disaster that was about to happen.

It was often the prelude to a war or to the invasion of an enemy army. And so what Joel is talking about here is that along with the pouring out of the Spirit, there is going to be disaster and calamity and warfare and all these things. But again, I think as we look at its fulfillment in the New Testament, we likely have both now and not yet fulfillment.

Joel, here, in terms of the near fulfillment and talking about the day of Pentecost, may be talking about the destruction of Jerusalem that takes place in 70 AD. But ultimately, the book of Revelation is going to use this same imagery to talk about the final catastrophic judgments on the final day of the Lord before the time of the coming of Christ and the second coming. And so, I think both with the pouring out of the Spirit and with the fire and the smoke and the sun being turned to darkness and the moon being turned to blood, there are near and far fulfillments of that as well.

In Joel chapter 3, the horizon of the prophet seems to completely move into this future time. And the Lord is again going to talk about a final and a universal judgment that is going to be carried out on all nations. And in chapter 3 and verse 2, it says this, The Lord talks about a final judgment here, a judgment on the nations that will take place in the valley of Jehoshaphat.

This is not identifying a specific location. Jehoshaphat, the name means the Lord has judged. And this will be the place where the Lord executes his final judgment on the nations.

And the judgment of the nations will bring about the salvation and the final restoration of Israel that was only partially realized in the return from exile. We have an interesting verse in chapter 3, verse 10. As these nations come down, they are going to wage war on Israel.

There is an eschatological battle. And God is going to bring these nations, both to purge Israel in another final act of judgment, but ultimately to judge the nations as well. Listen to what it says in chapter 3, verse 10.

It says, Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears, and let the weak say, I am a warrior. We have a direct reversal of what is given to us as the eschatological vision in Micah's chapter 4. There, the nations are going to beat their swords into plowshares and not learn war anymore. That's ultimately what is going to happen in the future kingdom.

But prior to that, the nations are going to do the opposite. They're going to beat their plowshares into swords, and they're going to turn their farming implements into weapons. And all of that is going to lead into the final judgment that will finally bring the world peace that God promises in Micah chapter 4. The salvation of Israel will come about as the result of this final day of the Lord, chapter 3, verses 14 and 15.

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord, is near in the valley of decision. Now, the day of the Lord is near. Not just a judgment on Judah, not just something that's going to happen in the immediate future.

But the judgment of the Lord on all peoples is near in the final day of the Lord. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw. They're shining.

And the Lord is going to roar from Zion. In the midst of all of this, and in the midst of all of this disaster and calamity, God will purge Israel in judgment and will ultimately save the remnant that fulfills his covenant promises. And in the midst of this chaos and disaster, what Joel says, those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

And so there is the hope, there's the offer, there's the promise of salvation in the midst of all of this disaster and chaos that's going on. The portrayal of the eschatological battle that is given to us in Joel chapter 3 is a part of the prophetic vision of the Old Testament at large. We can take this passage in Joel chapter 3 as God gathers and assembles the nations.

We can compare it to Micah's chapter 5, verses 5 to 9. We can compare it to the passage in the vision of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39. We can compare it to the purging of the nations that takes place to God bringing about salvation for all peoples in Zephaniah chapter 3, verses 8 and 9. We see a more detailed description of this eschatological battle in Zechariah chapter 12, verses 1 to

9, and then in Zechariah chapter 14 and throughout that entire chapter. Zechariah 14 talks about the judgment that is going to come upon Judah, and the city is going to be invaded.

People are going to be taken away in exile. The women are going to be raped. It's going to be a time when two-thirds of the people are purged from the land of Israel, but God will ultimately intervene.

He will come down on the Mount of Olives and save his people. And then even the survivors among the nations will come to worship the Lord. So, this idea of an eschatological battle is part of the prophetic vision of the Old Testament.

It informs the prophetic vision of the New Testament when it talks about the battle that will take place in the Valley of Megiddo at Armageddon in Revelation 16 and 19. Revelation builds upon and adds to our understanding of this eschatological battle that is found in the Old Testament itself. There is also a final battle at the end of Revelation chapter 20, where Satan will be fully and completely destroyed.

So, the vision of the eschatological battle between Israel and the nations is found in the Old Testament and filled out for us in the New. The purpose of this battle is to judge the nations, to purge Israel of their sin, to purify the nations so that they can also be included in the kingdom of God, to provide a final defeat of evil and the forces of evil, including Satan himself, and ultimately to purge the way for a kingdom of peace where finally the swords will be beaten into plowshares, and the ultimate hope of all of this is peace in the absence of war. So, I think that as we look to the prophetic future and what is going to happen, the idea of an eschatological battle where God will judge the nations that's part of the picture.

And in the world that we live in and even things that maybe are happening in the Middle East today, it's not hard to imagine that taking place. But one of the things that we have to be careful of is that often as we look at these prophetic passages, there is the tendency of popular treatments of these passages to want to connect them too closely to contemporary events. Ian Duguid, in his commentary on Ezekiel, notes how the enemies of Gog and Magog throughout church history have been identified with whatever group of people happened to be the primary enemies of the church at that time.

In the fourth century AD, Ambrose identified them with the Goths. In the seventh century, they were the Arabs that were invading the Holy Land. In the 13th century, they were the Mongol hordes.

In the 17th century, they were the Pope, the Turks, or the Roman Emperor. In the 19th century, there was the view that carried over into the Cold War that it was the Russians. And I had some students when I taught the prophets in Russia that asked

me, why do you Americans always say that we're Gog and Magog? Recently, it's been identified with the Islamic nations that unify themselves against it.

The purpose of these prophetic texts is not to help us to identify the enemy. We are actually looking at a worldwide rebellion against God. Will it include the United States? We don't know.

Will the United States even be present at that time? Prophecy doesn't answer that question. It doesn't satisfy our curiosity about all kinds of other things that we would like to know about the working out of this judgment. But it does remind us there will be a final judgment, and we can trust that God will ultimately bring his kingdom of peace.

Ian Duguid and I'll close with a quote about this whole idea of the eschatological battle. And he says this about Ezekiel 38 to 39. I think it applies to all of these passages that we've mentioned from Joel chapter 3, Revelation chapter 16.

Here's what these passages are about. These messages are not coded messages for those who live in the last days, who, by carefully unlocking its secrets, will be able to determine the symbolic identity of the participants in the final struggle. Rather, it is a word of encouragement to all the people and all of the saints of all times and places that no matter what the forces of evil may do, God's purpose and God's victory ultimately are secure.

And we can rest in that. God brought a judgment against the people of Israel in the days of Joel. Then because of their repentance, he relented from sending further judgment and he promised that ultimately he would one day pour out his spirit.

Ultimately, he would one day judge the nations, and ultimately, he would bring his kingdom of peace. The people of Joel's day could look forward to that promise with hope and anticipation, and we can do the same because we know that God is faithful to the covenant promises that he has made to his people and God's design for salvation history and the goal of the kingdom of peace that he has promised. God has the power, the ability, and the sovereignty to bring those things about.

We can trust in that. We can be confident in the promises of God.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the Book of the 12. This is session 29 on the book of Joel.