



# PT Butler

## Bible Study Notebooks

### Study of the book of Joel

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## JOEL 1:1—3:21

God uses “nature” to get humanity’s attention to what else he wants to say to it! He always has, he always will! God said right from the beginning, in Eden, when human beings turned their backs on God (Gen. 3:17) that he was subjecting the whole creation to “futility” and putting it in “the bondage of decay” (see Gen. 3:14-24; Rom. 8:18ff) so that they would “groan (i.e., long) for redemption.” God used “nature” in the form of famines, droughts, plagues, floods, pestilence, war, etc. all through history (OT and NT) (see Gen. Ex. Num. Deut., Amos 4; Haggai 1:11; Rom. 1:18-32; Rev. 6,8,9,16) to try to bring the world to repentance. Why shouldn’t God use “nature”? It belongs to him. He made it and sustains it constantly by “the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17) by holding it together. Doesn’t any loving father use every “tool” at his disposal to get his child’s attention in order to “redeem” him from what will destroy him? Why are we so inclined to want to deny that God speaks to us even today in “nature”? Jesus infers that towers falling on people and riots ending in bloodshed are signals from God that the world needs to repent (Lk. 13:1-5). Wasn’t the depression beginning in the “Roaring Twenties” a sign for America to repent? Aren’t earthquakes, tornadoes, droughts, floods, riots, “Aids-viruses” in America and all over the world signs from God that mankind must repent? Learn to thank God for the “thorns” of life (as the great apostle Paul did, 2 Cor. 1:8-11; 12:7). Listen to “nature”—God is telling the world that he judges and he redeems. “Nature” also shows that its Creator has power to renew what he has promised to renew.

Five reactions God expected from Joel’s audience: (a) awake (come to consciousness—come to your senses). Be aware of judgment—“tune-in”—get the message. Most of the world is oblivious to what God is saying in “nature” because it has “deliberately ignored” the “facts” (2 Pet. 3:5ff) of “nature”; (b) lament like a young engaged woman who has lost her fiancé—be broken-hearted, devastated; “wiped-out,” mourning, unable to cope, needing help from Someone beyond human beings; (c) be confounded—be humiliated—acknowledge you don’t have the answers or resources—acknowledge mental and spiritual bankruptcy; (d) gird on sack-cloth—be uncomfortable, be agitated, don’t relax, be earnest about seeking comfort and relief; (e) sanctify a fast—deliberately set aside a time when everyone takes their mind off physical things and concentrates on spiritual things—even to the point that eating and sustaining the body become secondary! God is extremely serious about sin! He wants people to be serious about it! Why do people laugh and joke about sin? Why do people defy God’s word about sin? Why do Christians think soberness and seriousness is unbecoming a Christian—when we are surrounded by such indifference about sin? All the epistles of the NT insist, that while a Christian may look forward to heaven with joy, at the same time he should look upon this world with soberness and penitence (Rom. 11:17-25; 12:3; 1 Cor. 15:34; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 5:13-26; Eph. 4:17—5:33; 6:10-20; Phil. 1:27-30; Col. 3:5—4:6; 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:6ff; 2 Pet. 3:11ff, etc., etc.).

“The day of the Lord” is a phrase throughout the Bible (esp. the OT) which may be applied to any great judgment (or redemption) of God upon mankind. The exile of the Jews was “a day of the Lord” and so was their release from captivity. Each of these

“days of the Lord” in the OT prefigured the coming “judgment” of all world-government attempts to solve man’s problem (sin)—including the physical “kingdom” of Judaism. All such physical systems and ideologies would be “judged” and exposed and shown to be impotent when God set up his Messianic kingdom (the church). This is clearly predicted in the OT (Jer. 3:15-16; Dan. Chs. 2,7,8,9,10,11,12; Ezek. chs. 37-48) and clearly fulfilled in the NT (Col. 2:15-16). That was the point Obadiah was making when he said Edom would be judged and “the kingdom would be Jehovah’s.” That is the point Amos is making in Amos 9:11-12 (see Acts 15:15-18). The locust plague, then, becomes a “judgment” upon the people of Judah in Joel’s day to turn their attention to their Messianic destiny. God wants them to be and act like Messianic people—redeemed people! So, he sends them a message that all physical things (this whole world and human flesh) are doomed under the judgment of God. Man had better latch on to spiritual things and get his eternal spirit into harmony with God’s spiritual will (2 Cor. 4:16-18). The locust plague was “a day of the Lord”! The Messianic kingdom will be spiritual! Joel’s people needed to prepare themselves and future generations for that! Each day of the Lord (catastrophic, natural, judgment, redemption) was also a symbol, a prediction, of the consummation of the Messianic age until the end of time and the final judgment and redemption of God upon this world!

Joel uses the Hebrew word shoov and it is translated, “turn.” It is used over 1000 times in the OT and means, “to return or go back, bring back.” The basic meaning of the Hebrew verb is “movement back to the point of departure (unless there is evidence to the contrary). The clearest meaning of the word is in Deut. 30:2 where obedience is stated as the essence of “returning” to the Lord. There is another Hebrew word sometimes translated “repent:” and that word is nacham. Nacham connotes “change of mind” and shoov connotes “change of action.” Nacham is used in Joel 2:13 speaking of God “repenting.” Nacham is most often used to mean “comfort.” Joel is interested in bringing his audience to “returning” to godly actions in their lives. Of course, godly action presupposes a godly frame-of-mind. One does not change behavior without changing values or motives and thinking. The locust plague had already changed their thinking! They needed to put their mental attitudes into action and do what God wanted! It is imperative to stress the necessity of a change of thinking as the meaning of repentance. That is where repentance must start. Doing Biblical things with a mind in rebellion against God is hypocrisy! But it is also necessary to stress that a change of action is what completes repentance. Jesus illustrated this with the parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-32). One said he would do the father’s will and didn’t—the other said he wouldn’t but “repented” and did! When the Lord commands people, “repent and be baptized” there is no repentance unless one is baptized! Saying and doing are inseparable. People can’t have one without the other!

No! There is no question as to whether the Lord will bless those who repent! The question is, “In what way will the Lord bless?” Or, “Of what does blessing” consist?” The Lord is absolutely faithful! He keeps his word! His will is omnipotent, his knowledge is omniscient! He does not lie—he does not change (Heb. 18:3; Jas. 1:17; Malachi 3:6; Num. 23:19). Joel is adapting finite human language (which is unable to explain the actions of the Infinite) to the action of God and had to speak of God’s action as if it were “repentance.” God’s word is immutable. His covenant is irrevocable. Humans may change—indeed, humans must change. But God never changes! God

acts always in accordance with his will. He does not will something today and change his will tomorrow. God may “adapt” the administration of his will (different “strokes” for different “folks”—patriarchs, law of Moses, Christian) to differing times and circumstances, but he never changes his will which has always been redemption of mankind through vicarious sacrifice of an absolutely Perfect Human being—Jesus Christ). What God reveals to us of his will in the Bible, he has always willed. God has given mankind the privilege to decide one thing today and decide differently tomorrow. So that, on the basis of man’s decision (while he has life in this probationary existence) God acts—but God always acts according to his immutable word. God has said (repeatedly), sin will bring judgment—repentance will bring blessing (redemption). When that judgment comes and when that blessing comes, and how they both come, may be withheld temporarily, may be kept unrevealed, and may be beyond our understanding even though revealed in the scriptures. Only because we know God does not change may we have hope! If God changed, how could we repent in hope of ultimate blessing (even if we have to wait for it and even if we admit we can’t understand it?). God is always “ready” to forgive! He “will” or “wills” to forgive. But what he has “willed” to do, he has made contingent upon the “willingness” of human beings to submit to what he has “willed.” You see, it is man who must change! Believers are not afraid to change because they trust in an unchanging God! Believers believe that when they change, God will be faithful to his revealed, immutable “will.” Joel 2:14 should be translated, or paraphrased: “If you persevere in your repentance (change of mind and action), you may hope for acceptance by the Lord, and hope for his withholding of judgment, and hope for blessing from God instead of judgment.” Why? Because God keeps his word! The word “whether” (RSV and NASV) and “if” (KJV) are both supplied words. Neither are in the Hebrew text. Literally the Hebrew text reads, “Who knows he will return and repent (both shoov and nacham are used here of God) and leave behind him a blessing.” This verse (2:14) should be understood as a rhetorical question (a question expecting an affirmative response). “Do we not know that he will turn away from judgment and leave us a blessing upon our repentance?” Yes! We know that, because that is what God has promised. God keeps his word! He has demonstrated exactly this kind of action in times past—all according to his revealed will. Jesus, because of his death and resurrection in history, is the ultimate affirmation (“oath”) that God keeps his word (2 Cor. 1:20-21). “Do you not know...” is a repeated phrase in the Bible. Yes! There is plenty of evidence in the scripture (history) that God acts this way. He has said it and backed it with historical evidence, we believe it, that settles it!

Joel is definitely speaking of God’s promise to “restore” what the locusts had taken away (2:25-27). So these verses are somewhat contemporary with Joel in 830 B.C. But God is just as definitely predicting the Day of Pentecost which took place in A.D. 30-31 and is recorded and referred to by Peter. We have Holy Spirit revealed, apostolic, confirmation for the latter part of this prediction (Acts 2:14-24). What Joel is doing is employing one of the “tricks-of-the-trade” for a God-inspired prophet. He is employing the prophetic “M.O.” (Modus operandi) called “shortened perspective.” He is “seeing” for his listeners an event centuries yet in the future as if it were just around the corner in time. He sees Pentecost of the apostles over 800 years later (Acts 2) as if it follows immediately the repentance of Judah and the “blessing” of restored crops. In reality, Pentecost is 800 years away from Joel. Every prophet of the OT uses this “M.O.” (e.g. between Isa. chs. 51 and 52,53; between Dan. Chs. 1-6 and 7-12; between

Amos 9:9-10 and 9:11-12ff—see Acts 25:25-28; between Micah 5:2 and 5:2-4, etc., etc., etc.). Jesus used it between Matt. 24:34 and 24:35. From Matt. 24:1-34 Jesus talks about the destruction of Judaism and Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In Matt. 24:35–25:46 Jesus talks about the end of the world and the final judgment. He does not fill us in on what will transpire between A.D. 70 and the end of the world (no one does). John employs this “M.O.” in Revelation 20:6 and 20:7 (in my opinion). John does not tell us what transpires between the fall of Rome (when Satan is bound) and the end of the world when Satan is destroyed. This “M.O.” is used because the contemporary event and the predicted event (centuries later) are inseparably tied to one another symbolically, theologically, and historically! The latter event will eventuate from the contemporary one and is symbolized by it! That’s why!

The “and” of 2:30 connects what is said after it to 2:28 where the statement is made about what shall come to pass “afterward.” In other words, the “portents” are connected some way to the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The Day of Pentecost is the beginning of Joel’s Messianic prophecy. The “great and terrible day of the Lord” seems to be the end of his prophecy. “Great and terrible” must mean the final judgment. So, between Pentecost and the final judgment, “portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke” are to come to pass. A “portent” is a sign. The “sun turned to darkness and moon to blood” is apocalyptic symbolism depicting cosmic, cataclysmic, catastrophic upheavals in the world of mankind, both natural, social, political, and spiritual (see Isa. 13:10; 14:12;ff; 24:23; 34:1-4; Jer. 4:23-28; 15:9; Amos 8:9; Micah 3:6; Hab. 3:11, etc.). The falling of empires, cultures, and civilizations, in addition to constant natural catastrophes on a cosmic (universal) scale are all going to happen continually during the Messianic age! From Pentecost to Final Judgment, “portents” will continue to be given by God (see Rom. 1:18-32; 8:17ff; Acts 14:16ff; 17:22ff; Rev. chs. 6-16). God will continually give an impenitent world signs (“portents”) that a “great and terrible day of the Lord” is coming—even in the Messianic age. But in the interval, the “Lord roars from Zion” (from the NT church) that the way to escape that “Terrible Day” is to find refuge in “Zion”—the church of Christ 2:32. This is what Obadiah had predicted! That “Zion” means the church is an apostolically confirmed interpretation (see Heb. 12:22-24). “Zion” meant covenant-relationship in the law of Moses in Joel’s day—and means covenant relationship in the church 800 years later on the Day of Pentecost.

All the nations were to be gathered “in the Valley of Jehoshaphat” when God “restored the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem” 3:1ff. Their (Judah’s) “fortunes” were “restored” when God “poured out his Spirit on all flesh” 2:28. That was the Day of Pentecost. The “fortunes” of the covenant people were “restored” in the Messiah (see Acts 2:29-39; 3:17-26; 13:26-41, etc.). God’s “fortune” for the world was spiritual—in the Messianic blessings—in the church of Christ. When God delivered his redemptive program in Christ and the church, he also “entered into judgment with” all the nations in “Jehoshaphat’s Valley” (see 2 Chron. ch. 20 to see what Jehoshaphat’s Valley means—it means a victory over God’s enemies by God himself, and not by man). It would be a literal impossibility to get “all nations” into the Valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the Ascent of Ziz, a waddy that leads from the Dead Sea northwest toward Jerusalem), let alone one nation! Joel is using the locale of Jehoshaphat’s “victory” to symbolize God’s victory at the coming of the Messianic age (see Isa. 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:57; Col. 2:13-15; 1 Jn. 5:4)!

Ezekiel and Zechariah and Micah and Isaiah and Daniel all use the same kind of apocalyptic symbolism. When Christ came and died on the cross and rose from the dead he “triumphed over principalities and powers,” triumphed over death, “judged” all “nationalism” and set up the only eternal and universal kingdom—the church of Jesus Christ. Gethsemane, Calvary, and the Empty Tomb and Pentecost and ancient Rome’s fall (the book of Revelation) was “Jehospahat’s Valley” and “Gog and Magog.” By the way, the phrase in Joel 3:14 “confusion, confusion in the Valley of Decision” is the same—even in Hebrew—as Ezek. 39:16 “Hamonah”!!! The cross confounds the world (1 Cor. 1:18ff)!!!

The Lord was to “roar from Zion” and from “Jerusalem” (same place) when he “restored the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem” and when he defeated all nations “in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.” That began with Christ’s redemptive work, included the founding of the church at Pentecost, and included the fall of the last great world-wide empire, Rome (see Dan. 2:31-45; 7:1-28), and the continuing “portents” in history and nature until the “Great and Terrible Day of the Lord” (i.e., the end of the world and final judgment). In other words, the Lord was going to “shake heaven and earth” up through the preaching of salvation in his kingdom of the Messiah. The Lord would “shake down” all other systems and plans and methods of mankind once and for all by revealing Himself and his plan in his final revelation—Jesus Christ and the New Testament scriptures. We have the “faith once for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). All other systems of salvation (no matter what they claim) have been demonstrated to be false (i.e., “shaken down”) absolutely by the Gospel! Even Judaism was to be included in that “shaking down” (see Heb. 12:18-29). Only “Zion”—the “new Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22ff)—the new “Israel” (Gal. 6:14-16) (the church of Christ) was to remain! Of course, there will remain “nations” and political systems as long as this world continues—but they cannot save! Of course, there will be religions, new and old, cropping up all over the earth so long as there are non-Christians, but they are all false and “shaken down.” God clearly, once for all, unequivocally, historically, defeated all that when he “restored” Judah’s “fortunes” in the Messiah. All the “mountains dripping sweet wine, etc.” is “window-dressing” (i.e., apocalyptic style) to describe the blessedness of the Messianic age (we call it “times-coloring” as part of the prophetic, “M.O.”—that is they “color their message with the vernacular of their times since it is impossible to speak of the spiritually invisible which was yet to come in the NT times).

“Zion” or “Jerusalem” is the church even in the OT. Paul spoke of the church in the symbolic sense, using “Jerusalem” at least twice (Heb. 12:22; Gal. 4:26). “Jerusalem that above” in Gal. 4:26 does not mean heaven—but the “Jerusalem that is pre-eminently above the Jerusalem of Judaism” because that is the context in Gal. 4:26! That is exactly what Paul means in Heb. 12:22ff! Isaiah spoke of the Messianic age as the “Holy Way” (Isa. 35:1-10). Isaiah predicted that God would make a “feast on Mt. Zion in the Messianic age (Isa. 25:1-12). The “New Jerusalem” according to Joel 3:17 will be “holy” (set apart to God) and “strangers” (Heb. zarim, “aliens”) will be barred from her (Heb. “outsider” Ex. 29:33; 30:33; Lev. 22:10,13; Num. 1:51; 3:10,38; 18:4,7; Isa. 25:2,5; Isa. 60:10; 61:5; Jer. 2:25; 3:13; 5:19; 30:8; 35:7; 51:51; Ezek. 7:21; 11:9; 16:32; 28:7,10; 30:12; 31:12; Hosea 7:9; 8:7; Obadiah 11). If you have read all these references, you will see that God is talking about heathen. When God “restored Judah’s fortunes” he made “Jerusalem” (the church) inaccessible to heathen! Those not

in covenant relationship to God through Jesus Christ will not be allowed intercourse or commerce with the New Jerusalem! That certainly cannot be modern, physical, literal Jerusalem! It cannot be a restored Judaism, because after the cross Judaism ("old Jerusalem") is no longer acceptable to God (see Romans, Galatians, Hebrews). It is the church of the Messiah that shall be "inhabited forever" (Heb. Olam).

### Introduction to Paul T. Butler Th.D

Paul was born in Springfield Missouri and graduated from Conway High School prior to enlistment in the US Navy. He began serious bible study with correspondence courses from San Jose Bible College. He later enrolled in Ozark Bible College and acquired his Bachelor of Theology degree June of 1961. He received a Master of Biblical Literature degree from Ozark in May of 1973. He received a Doctorate of Theology from The Theological University of America in October of 1990.

Paul taught at Ozark Christian College from 1960 to 1997. He also served many years as registrar for the college.

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