

THE BOOK OF JOEL
Lesson 8, Chapter 4

Last time we spent considerable time on discussing how prophecy works in general and that the Book of Joel operates no differently. In a nutshell it is that the prophetic fulfillments are only sometimes a one-time event. Most often these fulfillments happen more than once, in different eras, and manifest themselves in different ways. Further, each time the fulfillment of a specific prophecy happens, the scope of it widens. That is, while most of the time the place of fulfillment is somewhere in Israel, and the people involved in the fulfillment are those nearby Israelites, the next time that prophecy is fulfilled it goes beyond the nation of Israel and involves either a larger group of Israelites or it begins to include gentiles and gentile nations. Therefore, we can confidently say that prophecy happens not only as a progressive revelation of God's will and intent, but also it unfolds as a progressive fulfillment that widens the scope of where and whom it affects.

With that, let's open us God's Word to Joel chapter 4.

READ JOEL CHAPTER 4 all

Joel chapter 4 essentially is a series of what we could call "restoration" promises. That is, while the first half of Joel promises divine retribution upon Israel for their rebellion against their faithful God Yehoveh, the second half of Joel speaks about Yehoveh restoring Israel to greatness...and to a level of greatness they have never before experienced. Here in chapter 4, then, God switches from judging Israel to judging the nations that had afflicted Israel so maliciously.

We must always keep in sight that biblically speaking, since early in the Old Testament, the term "nations" always means gentiles and gentile nations and never Israel or Israelites. Therefore, we mentally need to add the word "gentile" in front the word "nations" to correctly understand the intent.

To get the most out of studying Joel chapter 4, we need to notice the structure of it. Verse 1 is a kind of connecting statement that links chapter 4 to the first 3 chapters. After the connecting statement that is verse 1, immediately follows a

threat to punish “all the nations”. Beginning at verse 9, the terms and reasons for the punishments of the nations, as well as the sorts of punishments that will be inflicted, are announced. Essentially we have here a divine summons to war as the means for God to first gather the nations together in order to punish the nations as a collective. It is interesting that the way this summons is worded, it is very much in the form of a legal court subpoena. Further, we must also keep in mind that the “war” that happens “in the valley of Jehoshaphat” is not just any war as with the hundreds of wars between tribes and nations that have happened over the eons, rather it is a continuation of the Holy War that God has been prosecuting for ages and ages. Adding the word “holy” to the front of the word “war” is not about making it a “religious” war. This isn’t like the Crusades that were anything but holy, even though the Popes attempted to frame it that way by their own authority. Holy war is also not like the devastating European wars of centuries ago that were between Catholics and Protestants nor is it like WWI and WWII, whereby WWI essentially was over settling a royal family squabble, and WWII that was over an evil German tyrant and his Italian and Japanese allies who wanted to build a world empire under their control. A Holy War is a God-directed and God-orchestrated war for the purpose of advancing Redemption History. And, it brings with it certain rules and boundaries and outcomes. To begin with, God always wins. It may, from earthly eyes, seem as though the war and the prosecution of it is all about human aspirations and human efforts, with the typical resulting winners and losers. But, in reality, it is very different as it is directed from the unseen spiritual realm, and so we must understand it in that way.

When we get to chapter 4 verse 15, we see an ironic reversal take place. That is, Joel 4:15 and 16 are nearly word for word the same as Joel 2:10. In Joel 2:10 the target of God’s wrath is Israel, but then in Joel 4 the target of God’s wrath switches to the nations. Joel 2:10 said this:

CJB Joel 2:10 *At their advance the earth quakes, and the sky shakes, the sun and moon turn black, and the stars stop shining.*

And this compares to Joel 4:15 and 16, which says:

CJB Joel 4:15-16 ***¹⁵ The sun and moon have grown black, and the stars have stopped shining. ¹⁶ ADONAI will roar from Tziyon, he will thunder from Yerushalayim, the sky and the earth will shake.***

So, the celestial signs and portents of both God's wrath upon Israel, and then later upon the nations, are the same. The sun and moon are affected in strange ways. Celestial signs and events have always been a part of the human experience and used by religions of all sorts to inspire the people to do one thing or another because the vast expanse of the great dome of lights above us is so mysterious and awe inspiring that surely it must have meaning. It is really still part of us in modern times as Christian authors have used these predicted signs and portents as the subject of best-selling books that Believers seem drawn to. Therefore, before we go any further, I want to address something of a trend in the modern era about the celestial portent of God's coming wrath that is presented to us in Joel concerning the moon going dark, which is more or less repeated in the Book of Revelation chapter 6.

CJB Revelation 6:12 ***Then I watched as he broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, the sun turned black as sackcloth worn in mourning, and the full moon became blood-red.***

Indeed, this mention in Revelation of the full moon becoming blood-red is essentially the same as what we are reading in Joel. It's just that the "dark" color of the moon is said to be a dark red and not a dark black. In our time, this prophesied reddish color of the moon has garnered the name Blood Moon and unfortunately it has become the subject of unwarranted hype and even hysteria among some groups, and used by certain leaders of the Christian community to scare people in order to profit for themselves. A few years ago, a series of so-called Blood Moons was to begin at Passover and so many Christians thought it portended the wrath of God coming as biblically prophesied in Joel. Let's talk about this before we move on in order to dispense with yet another manmade myth that is wrongly attributed to Holy Scripture; something that ought not to influence our thinking as we read Joel.

Leading up to 2014 and 2015 the talk of a series of Blood Moons that arrived on the first day of the start of 4 Biblical Feast days became a national sensation in

Christendom, especially among so-called Evangelical Christians and the Messianic and Hebrew Roots movements. The circumstance was that beginning on Passover in 2014 and also the next year there was to be a so-called Blood Moon. Even more at the beginning of Sukkot that same year and again in 2015 there was also another so-called Blood Moon to begin the festival. It was purported that these Blood Moons are incredibly rare and that each time this series of 4 Blood Moons happens in connection with the biblical feasts, some cataclysmic event occurs that involves Israel or the Jews in some way, and it drastically affects the Jews and/or Israel and it changes the course of human history. Therefore, the Blood Moons are seen by some as unmistakable prophetic signs that we are deep into the End Times and so we ought to pay close attention to the celestial events.

But, what is a Blood Moon? Put simply it is a full Lunar eclipse. So, what is the difference between a regular Lunar eclipse and a Blood Moon? Absolutely nothing. Many people expected to look up into the darkness and rather than see a darkening disk slowly cover the moon, they'd see the moon turn an alarming blood-red. Not true. While it is true that sometimes the moon does seem to get a slight reddish tinge to it during a full eclipse, it has happened countless times before and the reddish tint has mostly to do with light refraction and dust particles in our atmosphere.

So, where did the scary name Blood Moon come from? Most people will say it's in the Bible. Not true. In fact, the source of this frightening term is new, and it comes from a well-known preacher in Texas named John Hagee; he's the one who coined the term Blood Moon. Where might he have obtained such an idea? From the verses we've been reading in Joel, and from Acts 2 and Revelation 6. Although this is where the idea, but not the name, came from, it is important to notice that the turning of the moon to blood-red is prophesied to occur in the immediate context of the fearful Day of the Lord. In fact, as most good Bible scholars have recognized, the Book of Revelation doesn't give us new prophecies so much as it puts into a sequence the previously given prophecies that we find from OT prophets such as Joel, Isaiah, Ezekiel and others. As for the timing for the moon turning blood-red (in Revelation 6) it is not explicitly given as occurring during the opening of the 6th of God's 7 Seal judgments. We learn in Revelation that at the end of history, as Armageddon is imminent, the Lord will pour out His

judgment on all the earth, and those judgments will arrive in the form of 3 sets of 7 judgments (a total of 21 defined events). These have been rightly labeled the Trumpet, Seal and Bowl judgments. In Revelation 6 we learn that it is in the midst of these End Times judgments that we are to expect this unique event of the moon turning blood-red. Let me be clear: this event is not now; not today; and that is because we're not yet in the midst of God's 21 judgments (much more prophet fulfillment has to happen before we enter that period of time).

As to the claimed cosmic rarity of there being a lunar eclipse precisely on the beginning of a Biblical Feast Day, and it happening not only on 2 Biblical Feasts in the same year, but it repeating again the following year, such a thing supposedly means that each time this Lunar Tetrad (as is it known in the science world) occurs, something monumental happens in conjunction with it concerning Israel and/or the Jewish people. Let's examine those claims.

Just how rare is this series of 4 lunar eclipses that happen on 4 Biblical Feast days? The so-called Tetrad series of 2014 and 2015 was the 8th time it has happened since the birth of Christ (and it happened with equal frequency before the birth of Yeshua). So, while it is indeed rare, it isn't THAT rare. In fact, the last time it happened before 2014 and 2015 was in 1967 and 68. Did something monumental happen then? Oh yes; in the famous Six Day War the Israelis captured Jerusalem from the Arabs and rejoined it to the Land of Israel. And that was indeed the fulfillment of prophecy.

But how about the lunar Tetrad of 2014 and 15? Did something of great significance happen Israel or the Jewish people upon that one? No. In trying to revise history, it is regularly claimed that a Tetrad happened when Israel became a nation in May 14th 1948. Was there a Blood Moon that year? No. Despite all the false claims that there was, there was not. Rather, however there WERE 4 Blood Moons in 1949 and 1950. And while Israel continued to fight for their existence against the Arabs during that time, the reality is that their re-birth as a nation occurred nearly a year before the lunar eclipses of Passover and then Sukkot in 1949 and 50. And (by the way) it is the year before the Tetrad no matter if we calculate it using the modern Western calendar or the ancient Hebrew calendar. Bottom line: there is no fit. The series of 4 Blood Moons did **not** coincide with the year and event of Israel's rebirth.

As we continue to go back in time we find that prior to 1949 and 50, the last series of Blood Moons was in 1493 and 1494. However, it is the year 1492 that is much more burned into the consciousness of Westerners because it is the year that Christopher Columbus set sail to discover the New World. Something else quite important also happened in 1492: Spain's monarchy ordered all Jews to be forcibly expelled from Spain and all Spanish-held territories. There is no doubt about the coincidence of these two monumental events, because in his own diary Christopher Columbus said that it was in the same month that he was commissioned to sail to the New World that the Jews were expelled. But...1492 was NOT the year that began a series of 4 Blood Moons, it was the year before. Thus, so far, we find that the ONLY event of something of great import happening to the Jewish people and/or Israel during the years of the lunar Tetrad was the 1967-68 event of the capture of Jerusalem.

Let's step back even farther, now. Prior to the 1493-94 series of lunar eclipses on Biblical Feast days, the next one was in 860 and 861. Before that it was 842 and 843, and prior to that it was 795 and 796. What awesome thing happened to Israel and/or the Jewish people in those years? Nothing that history or Jewish Tradition records. The one thing that those who sensationalize the so-called Blood Moons draw attention to is the rise and spread of Islam at that time. But that has been an ongoing ebb and flow for centuries and Islam was created and spreading long before those dates. Otherwise, there is nothing historically specific concerning Israel and the Jews that we can attach to those events.

The final one we'll look at (which is the first set of Blood Moons since the birth of Yeshua) took place in 162 and 163 B.C. There was a great deal of persecution by the Romans of the Jews during that time, but nothing unprecedented. There is no recorded history changing event that revolves around the Jewish people in that time frame.

So as to the claim that every time there is a series of 4 lunar eclipses on Passover and Sukkot in two consecutive years producing Blood Moons with a corresponding great historical change concerning Israel and the Jewish people, it is simply false and sensational. We can only find one instance of it, and that was in the 1967-68 lunar Tetrad event with the liberation of Jerusalem.

Now let's look at this from another aspect: how often do lunar eclipses occur? NASA says that since 3000 B.C. and until 2000 A.D. (a period of 5000 years), there will have been over 12,000 lunar eclipses. The earth has averaged more than 2 lunar eclipses per year since time immemorial and this will continue well into the future. Lunar eclipses themselves are anything but rare, happening around every 5 months or so.

How about the rarity of an eclipse falling on the beginning of a Biblical Feast day? First understand that total lunar eclipses always occur on full moons. And that the 1st day of Passover and Sukkot always fall on full moons. In fact, the full moon is what marks the start of these 2 Biblical Feasts. So, while I don't have an exact number, since Israel was given the Torah at Mt. Sinai about 3300 years ago until today, there's been hundreds of times that one or the other of these Biblical Feasts experienced a full lunar eclipse, which usually appeared as the moon having a reddish tinge. And while the only data I have deals with the A.D. (or C.E.) era and doesn't consider the B.C (or BCE) era, we learn that 2014 and 2015 were only the 8th time that we have had a series of 4 full lunar eclipses that occur on Passover and Sukkot in consecutive years.

Let's sum up what we've learned. Of those 8 previous times of Lunar Tetrads only on ONE occasion did anything monumental happen to Israel or the Jewish people; and it was a good thing...it was the re-capture of the capital of the Holy Land, Jerusalem. There is no mention of something called a Blood Moon in the Bible; it is a name coined by John Hagee only a few years ago, and it is also the title of His bestselling book that has been the catalyst for this immense interest (if not downright anxiety) of Lunar Tetrads. What the Bible does speak of is that during the time of God pouring out His wrath on the earth at the End of Days (the Day of Yehoveh), the moon will turn blood-red; but no doubt this will be a different color than on a typical lunar eclipse. However, there is no specific reference to any biblical Feast Day that this celestial portent of God's wrath might happen on.

Further these lunar eclipses on Feast days will not turn the moon to blood-red, and in reality any minor reddish tinge during a lunar eclipse isn't unusual as it has happened countless times in the past (and I have personally witnessed it as have most of you).

I've often paraphrased Sir Isaac Newton who wisely explained several hundred years ago that biblical prophecy is not a crystal ball placed there to tell us the future. It is there so that when the future happens we can look back and see that God has pre-planned it all, and that His prophecies are always true, and that they all happened faithfully, exactly as promised. I know how anxious we all are for Messiah to come and for the world to be transformed into the Kingdom of God, but we mustn't use that as excuse to become false prophets or to repeat the words of modern-day false prophets. Not only does it ruin our personal witness, it can be especially debilitating for Hebrew Roots and Messianic folk because it can discredit the hard work and truth that many have labored on, for many years. With that myth of Blood Moons dealt with, let's return to Joel chapter 4.

Verses 18 through the end of Joel draw not only a contrast between what will happen to the nations versus the restoration that will happen with Israel, but it also adds in specific mention and punishments for Egypt and Edom. The location of ancient Egypt is essentially the same as modern Egypt. But ancient Edom is now part of the nation of Jordan. So, in modern terms this is a prophecy again Egypt and Jordan.

With that broad structure of Joel chapter 4 now explained, let's begin our interpretation and study beginning at verse 1. Verse 1 begins: "For then, at that time...". What time is this talking about? The verse just before this one (which is found in most Bibles as chapter 3 verse 5) is:

CJB Joel 3:5 *At that time, whoever calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved. For in Mount Tziyon and Yerushalayim there will be those who escape, as ADONAI has promised; among the survivors will be those whom ADONAI has called.*

"At that time" in Joel 3 was referring to the pouring out of the Spirit of God which ushers in the Day of Yehoveh (the Day of the Lord). So, the first verse of chapter 4 is referring to the same period of time. Obviously the several things that are foretold to happen at the End are not going to happen all at once on one single day (one 24-hour period) nor will they occur in perfectly sequential order...there will be overlap. That is, it's not that one prophesied thing will happen and then

proceed to its end; and after that the next prophesied thing will happen until it ends, and so on until all the prophetic happenings are completed. This knowledge lends further proof that The Day of the Lord in no way refers to a one-day event...to one rotation of the earth. Rather, this particular Day of the Lord speaks of an unspecified period of time during which God will pour out His Holy Spirit on humanity, His wrath on Israel, and then later His wrath upon the gentile nations. So, it will be unlike any previous Days of Yehoveh.

Now; what is said to happen "at that time"? Along with God's wrath will also come restoration for Israel... more specifically to Judah and Jerusalem. But, in order to restore Judah and Jerusalem's fortunes, first the gentile nations' collective oppression of Israel will have to be dealt with and ended. Clearly the pouring out of the Holy Spirit will not bring this oppression to an end; rather it is going to take a violent confrontation between Yehoveh and the nations. In order to bring this about, God is going to cause something to happen (no doubt something of a political nature) that will bring the collective will of the world to go against Israel to the point of war (we really don't know what that motivation to gather together apparently to attack Israel will be). Even though it is said that this war will occur at The Valley of Jehoshaphat, we don't know where that is. The word Jehoshaphat means "Yehoveh has judged". For the longest time it was thought that this was the Kidron Valley that divides Jerusalem. That thought has more or less faded because it isn't that big of a valley that it could contain large elements of a multi-nation military force. And, while it is too often stated as settled fact, nothing here in Joel says that this Valley of Jehoshaphat is necessarily even in Israel (although I think it probable that it will be). In truth, it may not even be the formal name of a place at all, because here in Joel is the only time in the Bible that we find the words "The Valley of Jehoshaphat". It may well be that is but an expression (such as when we speak of someone being in the valley of despair...despair being a condition and not a location). That is, the nations are under the condition of being under God's judgment (although they apparently don't recognize it). Wherever the war might occur (assuming this is speaking of location), it has to be an enormous battle theater where God will exact a final judgment upon the earth's gentile nations to vindicate His people, Israel. What's the purpose of this war? God wants His people to finally be safe and secure and this Holy War is His means to accomplish it.

Regardless of whether The Valley of Jehoshaphat is the actual name of an actual place, it plays no role in understanding this passage. God is going to use His Heavenly authority to bring about a legal action against the nations...a well-deserved judicial punishment upon the nations...on a world-wide scale... for the benefit of Israel.

Whenever this event is spoken of, inevitably the question is asked: which among the nations will be there? Does "all nations" literally mean all 200 of them, without exception? Will any nation be spared? Will even the USA, which is currently Israel's biggest ally, be there, too? I cannot possibly answer that question. First, because biblically "all" doesn't necessarily 100%; it means the vast and controlling majority. Considering that this gathering of the nations in The Valley of Jehoshaphat occurs during or after the time of the Anti-Christ ruling the world, it means that the political map of the world as we know it today will be significantly different. My personal observation is that Israel is steadily losing support among the world's nations. Part of reason of this loss is due to Israel's often chaotic and irritating self-serving government leaders and their foolish policies. But probably the larger reason for the loss of support is a spiritually induced...an **evil** spiritually induced... hatred of God's people. Anti-Semitism is back with a vengeance in Europe, it is gaining steam in America and in American politics, and continues to be a doctrinal mainstay of Catholicism and the Western Christian Church in general (even if the Church tends to deny it, and another portion of the Church claims some level of friendly concern for Israel and the Jewish people).

The 2nd half of verse 2 says that the main offenses that the nations are being divinely punished for are that they scattered God's people and then took over God's land and divided it among themselves. Verse 3 adds to it that in taking God's people captive, the nations used Israel's young boys as possessions (slaves) that they traded for the favor of unclean whores, and also used Israel's young girls (again as slaves) to trade for material things such as wine. The mention of whores and wine together is a biblical way of picturing immorality and debauchery.

I've demonstrated in many of my lessons on the books of the Minor Prophets that God isn't going to punish the nations simply because they tick Him off. Rather,

they violate the terms of the Mosaic Covenant and thus God will match the specific violation to the specific curse (the punishment) He will impose. It will be as we find these laws and the punishments for violation as listed in the Covenant of Moses. Yehoveh acts in the same way for Israel's covenant violations. As Douglas Stuart notes, these 2 verses (2 and 3) are couplets that describe an enemy's capture of Israelite land and the deportation of people for sale as slaves. Kidnapping someone (and God sees Israel's enemies who take Hebrews for slaves as kidnappers) are, according to Exodus 21:16, due the death penalty. Therefore, the result of this Holy War of Joel will be the death of countless millions....probably billions...the residents of the gentile nations who come to fight God in The Valley of Jehoshaphat.

^{CJB} **Exodus 21:16** *"Whoever kidnaps someone must be put to death, regardless of whether he has already sold him or the person is found still in his possession."*

We must also notice God's severe reaction upon various nations for the crime of taking His land (Israel) and dividing it up for themselves. To Yehoveh, the land and the people of Israel are organically connected. The land set apart for Israel is just as sacred and set-apart for Him as are the Israelite people. Let me pause to repeat something that I've said several times in the past: don't you dare support the Oslo Accords Treaty that divides Israel into 2 states if you hope to remain on God's good side. That there are those in Israel (perhaps as much as half the public) that support such a thing, is all the more shameful. As a Believer, it is unfathomable to me that you could say you are for Christ but then turn around and agree to bring such harm to God's people as to take away land from them that God specifically gave to them for their use. The "Two State" and "Land for Peace" scenarios are an abomination to God. You'd think that Israel's foolish giving away of Gaza to the Palestinians (something the international community of nations pressured them into doing) that formally occurred in 2005 would be a hard lesson learned. This give-a-way has resulted in the terrorist group Hamas taking it over as Gaza's rulers and nearly daily ever since attacking Israel in one way or another, as living proof of the folly of any land for peace proposition. Now, of course, another group of Palestinians emboldened by this Gaza land give-a-way to Israel's enemies, and so are demanding Israel's relinquishment of the West Bank of Israel to them. Sadly, the USA, Europe, and nearly all the nations of the world are pressuring Israel to do just that. It might sound good

and right politically...or even from some warped idea of fairness...but such a division of God's land is an offense to Him of the highest order and the punishment for it is terrible.

OK. Verse 4 is quite interesting to consider. If one goes to several different Bible versions we'll find it worded (in English) somewhat differently in each one. What it mainly concerns are the nations that immediately surround Judah. For some reason, God found it necessary to make it clear that Philistia and Phoenicia were as equally responsible for the oppression of Israel as all the other nations of the world. Although Phoenicia is not mentioned, I call it that because Tyre and Sidon were together the main cities of Phoenicia. The opening words are a bit hard to understand. How are we to discern the intent of the words "what would ye with me?", or "What have I to do with you?", or "What are you to Me?". The CJB takes it mean "What do you have against Me? Kiel and Delitzsch make a dynamic translation of these words that seems to me to get the intent of it across to us in an understandable way. Here it is:

Ye have neither cause to avenge yourselves upon Me (that is, upon my people Israel), nor any occasion to do it harm. But if repayment is the thing in hand, I will make it and do it very speedily, and bring back your doing (to My people) upon your own head".

Then verses 5 and 6 go on to explain what it is that Philistia and Phoenicia did to Israel and thus this is what is also going to happen to them in return.

This verse (among others) is regularly claimed by Bible scholars to be a later addition to the Book of Joel by some unknown editor, because it would be difficult to apply such circumstances to the 8th century B.C., which is when Joel was alive. It is provable through recorded history that around the middle of the 4th century B.C. that Phoenicia and Philistia acted together as a kind of political community, and being seafaring nations one of most lucrative cargos at that time was human slaves. Often enough those slaves were Hebrews. Using their vast fleet of ships, they were known to ship these slaves to destinations all over the Mediterranean. Since Alexander the Great conquered that area in the middle part of the 4th century B.C., then what is being prophesied by Joel must have finally occurred prior to 343 B.C. The contention by many Bible scholars is, then, that this portion

of Joel chapter 4 had to have been written about this time and not before. In response to that, I say this: no. The 4th century B.C. isn't when it was written. Rather this prophecy was written in the 8th century B.C., but this particular prediction didn't happen until the mid-4th century. That is, it perfectly forecasted the eventual political alliance of Phoenicia and Philistia and that the result would be them being slave traders who also traded captured Israelites. The problem for far too many modern Bible scholars is that they do not believe in prophecy. That is, for them prophecy is but a myth... no prophet could predict the future. So, they look at the matter strictly historically and deduce that Prophets pretended to make predictions of the future, but in fact these events had already happened. Thus, my conclusion about what is happening here is dismissed, because I DO believe in prophecy as legitimate predictions of the future.

Today, modern Philistia is Gaza, while Phoenicia and Tyre are Lebanon. So, as it would apply to our current era, whatever God is going to do to those folks it will be to the people of Gaza and Lebanon. How the political map might change by the time the End Times fulfillments of these prophecies happen I cannot predict. But I will predict that it will look somewhat different than it does today in the year of our Lord 2023.

Let's stop here and we'll continue in Joel chapter 4 next week.