

# JOEL

## HISTORICAL SETTING

The unified kingdom of Israel was split in two by a tax revolt. The ten northern tribes became the northern kingdom of Israel. From 921B.C. to 721B.C. the northern kingdom lived in perpetual idolatry. The Law of Moses contained curses for disobedience, one of which was expulsion from the Promised Land (Deut. 28:64-65). God sent prophets warning Israel of the curse. Finally, in 721B.C., using the Assyrian Empire, God expelled the ten northern tribes from the Promised Land.

After 921B.C., the southern kingdom of Judah vacillated spiritually. In like manner to Israel, God sent prophets to Judah warning her of the curse. Finally, in 586B.C., using the Babylonian Empire, God expelled the two southern tribes from the Promised Land.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God revealed the Exile would last 70 years after which the Jews would be allowed to return (Jer. 29:10). In 539B.C. Jews began to return to Jerusalem. It took years to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. The second Temple was completed by 515B.C.<sup>1</sup>

About this time disaster struck.

## A LOCUST SWARM INVADED JUDAH (1:2-20)

Joel described the infestation:

*JOEL 1:4 (ESV)*

What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.

Joel likens the locust to a nation and to predators with powerful teeth.

*JOEL 1:6-7 (ESV)*

6 For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. 7 It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree;

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<sup>1</sup> I believe the date of Joel to be 515B.C. or after for the following reasons: 1) the Temple stood in Jerusalem (1:9, 13-14). Solomon's Temple was destroyed in 586B.C. The second Temple was rebuilt by 515B.C. 2) Joel makes no reference to a king. Leadership is in the hands of elders. Since 586B.C. there has been no king over Judah.

As the locust swarm slowly made its way across Judah, Joel called the people to repent because *this plague was a punishment from the Lord*. This act of divine judgment is called the *day of the Lord*.<sup>2</sup>

*JOEL 1:14-16 (ESV)*

14 Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. 15 Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. 16 Is not the food cut off before our eyes...?

## **THE LOCUST WERE THE *LORD'S* ARMY EXECUTING THE *DAY OF THE LORD* UPON JUDAH (2:1-11)**

In chapter two, Joel likens the locust to a massive, unstoppable army. They sounded like a crackling fire as they devoured everything green; like fire, they destroyed everything in their path. They are the Lord's army executing the judgment of this *day of the Lord*.

In the midst of this disaster, the Lord offers a way out.

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<sup>2</sup> ...generally speaking, "the day of the Lord" is an idiom used to emphasize the swift and decisive nature of the Lord's victory over His enemies on any given occasion.

In the Old Testament "the day of the Lord" may refer to either a particular historical event or an eschatological battle which will culminate the present age. The following elements are associated with it:

(1) "The day of the Lord" sometimes involves the judgment of God's people, including the Northern Kingdom (at the hands of the Assyrians; cf. Amos 5:18, 20) and Judah (at the hands of the Babylonians; cf. Lam. 1:12; 2:1, 21–22; Ezek. 7:19; 13:5; Zeph. 2:2–3). Sometimes this judgment appears in the context of a more universal judgment on all nations (cf. Isa. 2:12; Zeph. 1:18).

(2) "The day of the Lord" often involves the judgment of foreign nations, including Babylon (at the hands of the Medes; cf. Isa. 13:6, 9), Egypt (at the hands of the Babylonians; cf. Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:3), Edom (cf. Isa. 34:8–9), and the eschatological northern coalition headed by Gog (Ezek. 39:8).

(3) "The day of the Lord" will bring purification and restoration for Israel (cf. Isa. 61:2; Mal. 4:5), but also intense suffering (Zech. 14:1–3).

"The day of the Lord," then, encompasses several specific past "days" or events. These include the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, the Babylonian Exile, Babylon's conquest of Egypt, and the fall of Babylon. These examples of the Lord's intervention in history prefigure that final time period when He will annihilate His enemies on a more universal scale and restore Israel (for a thorough development of this relationship between history and eschatology, see Isa. 13–27).

In Joel all three of the elements just listed appear in relationship to "the day of the Lord." Israel's judgment is threatened in Joel 1:15 and 2:1–11, Israel's deliverance is foreseen in 2:28–32, and universal judgment on the nations is depicted in chapter 3. Joel seemed to telescope events in his treatment of the Lord's "day." As he reported how his generation barely escaped "the day of the Lord," he envisioned Israel's ultimate deliverance from her enemies at the end of the age.

In discussing the day of the Lord in the end times, Joel focused on one major aspect of that "day," namely, the single event when the Lord will intervene in history to destroy His enemies and deliver His people Israel.

The day of the Lord, however, as other Scriptures show, will include other events:

(1) Before Israel's enemies will be destroyed they will plunder and devastate Israel (Zech. 14:1–2). This will be a time of anguish for Israel (Zeph. 1:7–18; cf. Dan. 12:1). Jesus called this time period (the Great Tribulation) a time of "great distress" (Matt. 24:21) for the nation.

(2) After the Lord will destroy His enemies (at Messiah's return) the day of the Lord will include a time of blessing for Israel (cf. Obad. 15 with Obad. 21), known as the Millennium.

(3) Then after the Millennium the day of the Lord will also include the destruction of the present heavens and earth and the making of new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:10, 12–13).

Therefore, according to Scripture passages besides those in Joel, "the day of the Lord" will be a lengthy time period including both judgment and blessing. It will begin soon after the Rapture and will include the seven-year Tribulation, the return of the Messiah, the Millennium, and the making of the new heavens and new earth.

## IF JUDAH WILL REPENT, THE LORD WILL RELENT (2:12-17)

*JOEL 2:12-14 (ESV)*

12 “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; 13 and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. 14 Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?

In verse 17 Joel admonishes the priests to cry out to the Lord.

*JOEL 2:17 (ESV)*

Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, “Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’ ”

## GOD RELENTED FROM FULLY EXECUTING THE *DAY OF THE LORD* (2:18-27)

The people must have repented because the Lord relented!

*JOEL 2:18-20 (ESV)*

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. <sup>19</sup> 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 more make you a reproach among the nations.

<sup>20</sup> “I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.

The Lord relented and destroyed the locust, driving them into the Mediterranean and Dead Seas. The stench and foul smell were from the billions of locust carcasses decaying on the seashores.

Not only did God destroy “His army”, He restored Judah’s agriculture.

*JOEL 2:24-26 (ESV)*

24 “The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. 25 I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you.

26 “You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

I’m not sure how to understand the final sentence of verse 26, “And my people shall never again be put to shame.” Perhaps Joel was thinking about the future when God will ultimately and finally deliver the Jews from all her enemies.

### **THE FUTURE *DAY OF THE LORD* (2:28-3:21)**

The *day of the Lord* which Joel and his contemporaries experienced foreshadows a future *day of the Lord*. The future *day of the Lord* involves the Great Tribulation, Campaign of Armageddon and the Messianic Kingdom.

In the future *day of the Lord*, Israel, as a nation, will enter the New Covenant as indicated by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit<sup>3</sup> (Jer. 31:31-40; Ezek. 36:22-38). This will happen in the final days of the 7-year Tribulation.

*JOEL 2:28-29 (ESV)*

28 “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. 29 Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

In the future *day of the Lord* God will punish Israel’s national enemies.

*JOEL 3:1-3 (ESV)*

1 “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, 2 I will gather all the nations and 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, 3 and have cast lots for my people, and

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<sup>3</sup> A major provision of the New Covenant.

have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.

This judgment, also described in Joel 3:11-14, corresponds to the Campaign of Armageddon described in Revelation 14:14-20, 16:16 and 19:11-21.

*JOEL 3:11-14 (ESV)*

11 Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord. 12 Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. 13 Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great. 14 Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

Finally, in the future *day of the Lord*, the Promised Land will overflow with wine, milk and water.

*JOEL 3:18 (ESV)*

“And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Shittim.

## **IN THE FUTURE *DAY OF THE LORD*, GOD WILL FULFILL HIS COVENANT PROMISES TO ISRAEL AND PUNISH ISRAEL’S ENEMIES**

Therefore, one of the practical things we can do is to vote for those political platforms that support the nation of Israel. God will bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel. This does not mean we support every decision or action taken by the Israeli government. But it does mean we need to support leaders who will keep us faithful allies to Israel.

## **AS GOD DISCIPLINED JUDAH, SO ALSO GOD DISCIPLINES US TO TRAIN US TO RIGHTEOUSNESS**

God chastised Judah probably for the sin of formalism, that is, for obeying the letter of the Law, not the spirit (“rend your *hearts*, not your *garments*”). God was quick to relent when the nation repented.

God disciplines you because He loves you and He wants you to be a righteous person.

*HEBREWS 12:3-11 (ESV)*

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God's discipline involves training and correction.

God trains us to righteousness through

- Scripture,
- through obedience to the Law of Messiah and
- through service.

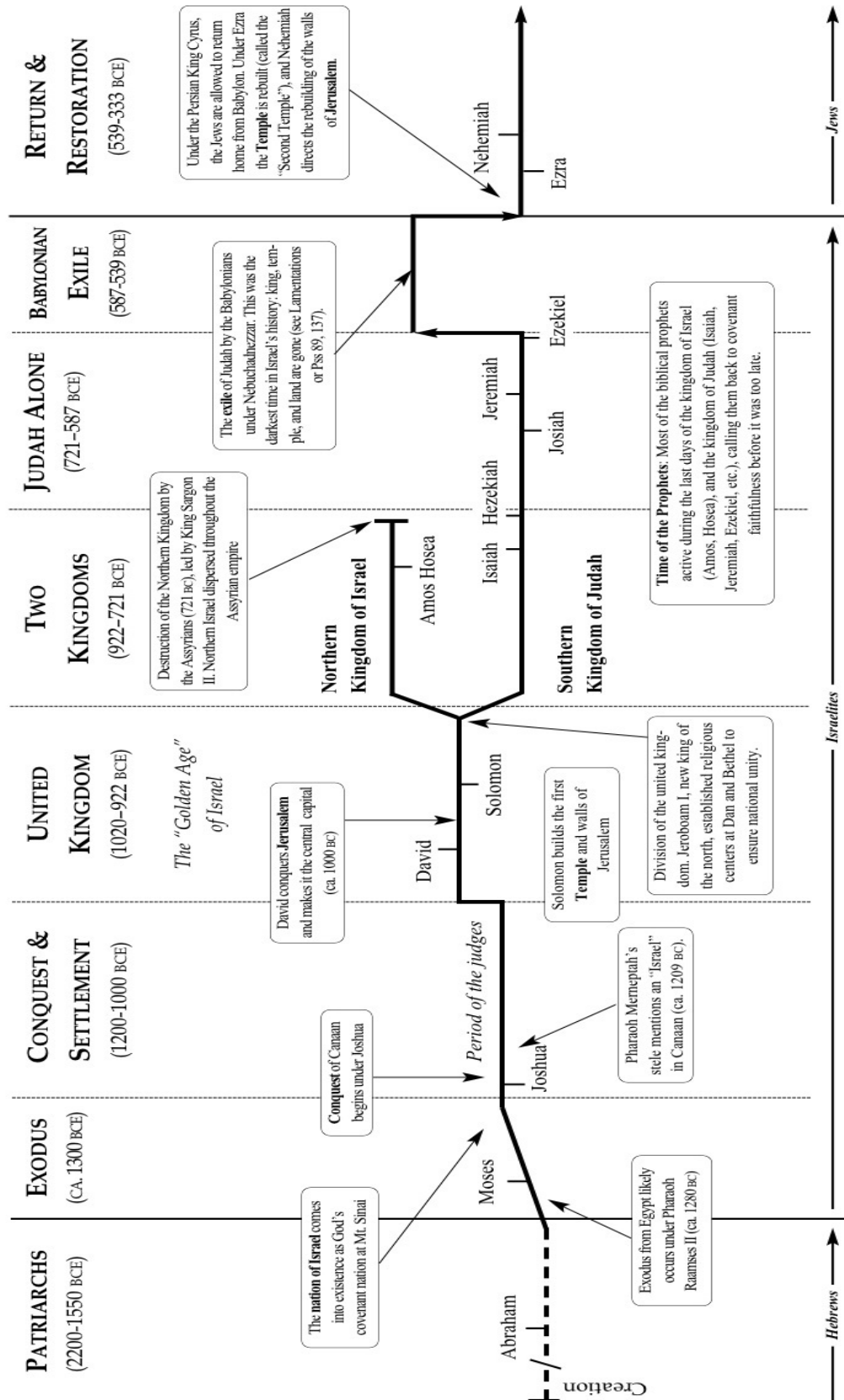
God corrects us through...

- Scripture and conviction of the Holy Spirit.
- Through fellow believers.
- Through the Elders.
- Through church discipline.
- Through divine intervention.

God's motive is love; His goal is our transformation. To be transformed by God's discipline, we need to endure; we need to be faithful.

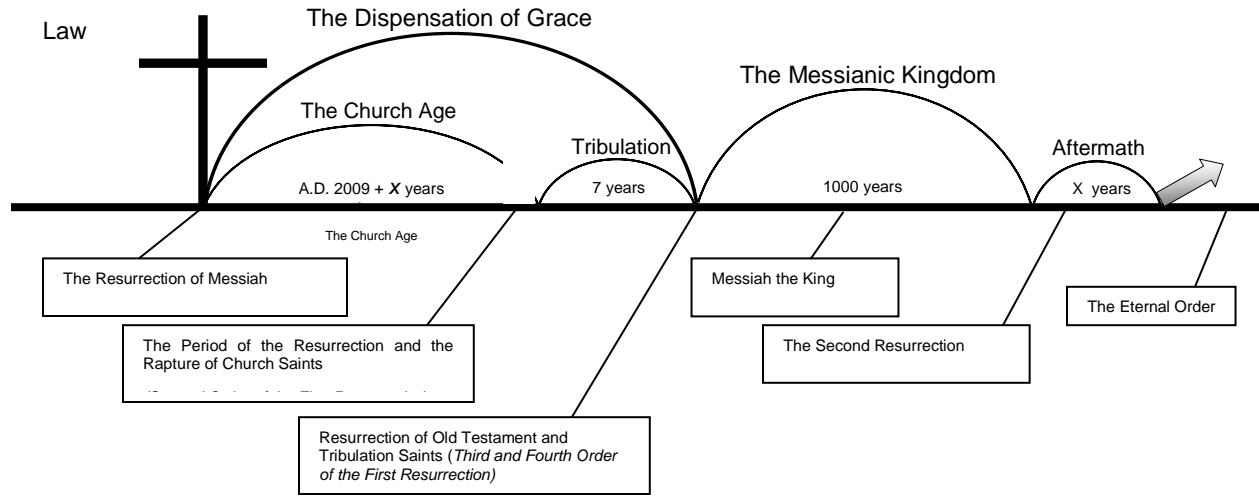
Be thankful God loves you so much He's not willing to leave you as you were.

# The Old Testament Story†



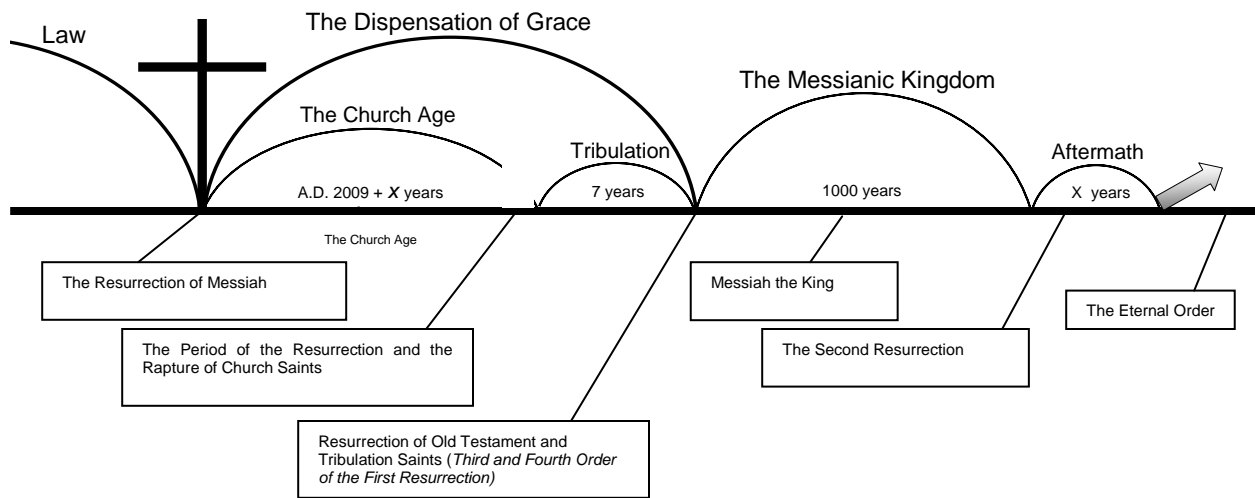


### Chronology of Eschatology



Adapted from *The Footsteps of the Messiah*,

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