

The Movement - A Righteous Revolution

(Amos Five / Joel Two)

Introduction

First, let's start with an inductive premise followed by a deductive conclusion. *The world is positioned for what we call a "perfect storm"*. By "perfect storm", I mean that the global climates for civil, social, cultural, political, religious, and economic platforms are unstable and unsustainable across the board. Civil and social unrest and divide are presently unsustainable, cultural and political corruption, greed, and immorality are also unsustainable, leaving global economic viability on the brink of failure, or, if you prefer - collapse. We are in the early stages of either "**the**" Biblical end-times, or the greatest global re-set in the history of mankind.

On the surface, that seems a bit gloomy for a Sunday morning, but then again, this is 2023. We have just lived through the greatest global power shift that any of us have ever seen in our lifetime. For example; control what the people know, and what is known about them (information and narrative), control where the people can go (fuel and energy), and finally, control what the people can own and access (property, food, and healthcare). These control mechanisms, if not fully implemented, are already in place. Do not think conspiracy or politics - think Biblical reality and mankind's rebellion. So, in Biblical context, what seems to be the end of all things is, in fact, the beginning of all things - God of the paradox. With God, what was thought to be a gloomy and hopeless premise and conclusion can, in reality, be all joy and hopeful - good news. If you are struggling, let me help you get there with this...

2 Timothy 3:1-5

***But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.
2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant,
abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless,***

unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

Matthew 24:4-14

And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day,

let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Having made the relevant connection or crossable bridge between these three Biblical text's and our current reality, we need to remember two critical truths. One, God's Word does not change. And two, God's world, changes in every generation. Amos and Joel are two ancient prophets whose voices and message has not changed and yet, remain purposeful and appropriate for our ever-changing times. Their writing is relative and should resonate within the lives of followers of Christ, and believers everywhere. Nothing in the past 2,500 years has made their messages obsolete.

Amos and Joel represent a movement toward God, a righteous revolution against evil and godlessness, if you will. Not even the present-day practice of re-defining and re-writing Biblical context and Scriptural narrative can change the eternal truth of these two ancient voices. Both can be interpreted seamlessly into present-day reality, without ignoring the original context or disrupting the intended meaning. So yes, Amos and Joel can and must still be heard. We must hear and then listen to their un-compromised message of right and righteous covenant relationship with God, their urgent call of fidelity to the order and authority of God's eternal and sovereign Word, and their intense appeal to establish and maintain a genuine habitation for the presence of Holy Spirit within us.

Amos

Israel had existed for nearly two hundred years as a separate kingdom (Northern and Southern) when Amos emerged with a strong message of condemnation and correction from God. The prophet addressed the political, social, religious, moral, and ethical problems of that society. Amos called for repentance, justice, righteousness, and moral

purity. And, twenty-six hundred years later, as we look around... well, here we are. Sound relevant enough?

Amos chapter five, calls the spiritually compromised and sterile leaders and congregations to turn their self-awareness and appropriation into a genuine love for the righteousness of Christ Jesus and to return to a principled and knowledgeable practice of Biblical fidelity. Amos beckons the capable and influential to do right by the wounded and disadvantaged, and, more importantly, to do right by God, who in His mercy called us His very own. He says, *“Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you. Seek Him and live.”*

Joel

In three short chapters (four in Hebrew), Joel gives a contextual (specific) word picture of how the prophets understood and implemented God's judgment, apocalyptic events, and the future of His people. Even for its brevity, more than any other book of the Bible, Joel is the book of the Day of the LORD.

So, regardless of the obstacles of time, passage, and language, Joel chapter two, calls those who are overwhelmed by the great human struggle and the tragic events and circumstances of life to seek remedy and hope through the regenerative love and power of Creator God. Joel's words remain a profound “go-to” perspective on the presence of God, and the downloading of the Holy Spirit into the lives of those who sincerely and humbly seek Him. He says, *“And it will 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. And, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

My prayer is this. Regardless of your age or status in life, you will join with us to seek understanding and full engagement into what God is saying and doing in our day. Whether this is the ending or the beginning of what God is doing, **"We seek we find, we pray we hear, we study we learn."** Our families and those we love will depend on this. There is indeed an urgent and intense movement toward God and His Word; a righteous revolution that is now happening around the world. From the beginning to the end, to the new beginning of a world without end - a movement of God has always been toward Him, His Word, and the presence of His Holy Spirit.

Dr. Stephen Isaac - The Reunion Church

4.30.23 The Movement - A Righteous Revolution

Amos Five - Seek Him and Live

Context: Historical and Biblical

Historical

Chapter one, verse one of Amos contains one the most significant clue as to the date of Amos's ministry and prophetic messages. Uzziah was king of Judah, and Jeroboam was king of Israel. Uzziah's reign in Judah was from 783 to 742 B.C., and Jeroboam's reign in Israel was from 786 B.C. to 746 B.C. With a strong historical degree of certainty, the time of Amos preaching to Israel was from 760 to 770 B.C.

The Assyrian Empire provided contract or paid protection from smaller aggressions against both Judah and Israel during this time. This kind of "big brother" protection did not come without a paying a steep price. Without the concern of enemy aggression or the continual use of resources and manpower, both kingdoms (northern and southern) expanded and flourished economically. The economic boom was accompanied by an

increase in a more liberal and self-aware approach to religious activities and sacramental worship. The de-centralized shrines at Bethel, Dan, Gilgal, and Beer-sheba had constant streams of worshipers bringing growing numbers of non-approved sacrificial animals and pagan offerings. Amos showed God's disapproval of such religious activities by announcing God's judgment upon the non-sanctioned religious sites, by giving counsel to stay away from them, and thereby declaring God's rejection of their religious activities (Chapter 5:4–5; 5:22–24). Increased religious activity, increased crowds, increased prosperity, a decisive decline in Godliness and honor to the covenant and moral laws of God.

Amos was a sheep breeder and sycamore grower from the region of Tekoa in Judah. He sold lamb to butcher's markets, lambs' wool to clothing merchants, and trees to carpenters. His name literally means "load-bearer." Amos came to Bethel to deliver to the religious leaders at the top of the heap the message of God's displeasure and disgust with where they had led and allowed their faith and worship to go. Amos also refused the term "prophet" (nābî) as an appropriate description of his role. He claimed no special authority associated with traditional titles when *Amaziah* ordered him out of Bethel (7:12–13). Instead, he gave his testimony of vocational heritage as "a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees" when the Lord ordered him to prophesy to Israel. He came to Bethel not as a representative of one of the prophetic community but as an "everyman" under the order of God to deliver the message of a godly prophet.

Amos knew the history of Israel and the history of the nations around Israel. He knew Israelite politics, society, and religion. He had enough courage to confront those who oppressed the poor, religious leaders such as *Amaziah*, and greedy land-grabbers and merchants. His strong sense of the Lord's call to prophesy was the enabling force of his ministry (7:15). To Amos (the load-bearer), the message was more important than the messenger, which is why God sent him. Such a sense of calling has continued to be the authority and motivation for service to the Lord's calling to this day.

Biblical

Abuse of power in the social structure and compromise with paganism in the religious were the two targeted sins which Amos would denounce. Paradoxically, in spite of record numbers worshipping at temple in Samaria, and at the de-centralized shrine sites, the period of preaching to Israel by Amos was characterized and necessitated by moral and spiritual decline, godless living, civil unrest, and social upheaval. Israel's frequent attendance at the shrines to make religious sacrifices did not result in moral, spiritual, and social uprightness. Religious leaders were greedy and self-serving, the rich oppressed the poor, indulged in extravagant and decadent lifestyles, denied justice to the oppressed and weak, and engaged in immoral sexual activities (2:6–8; 4:1; 5:11–13). The breaking point in all of this was that they no longer lived as they believed, and who they were (God's chosen people) was grossly contradicted by their accelerated and self-entertaining religious activities. Everything not palatable or that they did not want from the authority and order of the Laws of God they deconstructed and reconstructed under a new narrative. All style - no substance, all ritual - no righteousness.

Amos 5:21-24

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

These were the biblical and historical times when Amos's arrived in Israel to preach and proclaim a bold, un-biased, and hard message of judgment from God. Israel's outward show of devotion to God was complete hypocrisy, and unfortunately nothing new or uncommon to the spiritual shepherds of the household of faith - it had been nearly 200 years of bad leadership and breeding bad sheep, they fed off one another. Bad shepherds breed bad sheep - bad sheep enable bad shepherds. Enter Amos the "Load-

bearer." Message delivered. The prophet's words were heard throughout Israel's entire landscape leaving no part nor person unscathed. God's response to the leaders and to the people - NO MORE.

As you can see, the Biblical context for the book of Amos is simple, and yet in the head and hearts of the religious leaders and the people of God it became so difficult and complex. However, it was made complex because of their constant push back against the authority and order of the very God who had continually delivered and provided for them. We see the same contrast represented in our present-day. We too have made God's faith process very difficult and complex in how we self-focus in worship, within our daily approach to the righteousness of God, and our minimalistic adherence to the authority and order of the Word of God.

In the Amos message God's actions, sovereign judgment, and great compassion are present though not always distributed in equal portion. More importantly, the Amos understanding and his un-compromised command for the leaders and people to humbly return to God and His greatness frames the backdrop of relevance for Biblical discipleship in every era and all times, not the least which is our own. It is as if the ancient Amos is a 2023 Amos. And 2023 Amos is telling the world what God has told Him to say is just as He said twenty-six hundred years ago - NO MORE.

No More to any Worship void of the true presence of God.

No More to the huge disconnect between our Worship and our personal conduct.

No More to our passive aggressive rejection of Biblical authority and the order and priority of God.

No More to our rewritten narrative on the righteousness of God.

No More to our politically driven evangelical piety.

No More to our lack of responsible care and righteous protection of our children and our elderly.

No More to our progressive minimalist approach to God's Word.

Our spiritual freedom and grace are not entitlements and our covenant relationship with God has righteous expectations and must be enjoyed with humility and fidelity. It is God and God alone who cares for and commands the destinies of all people, even our enemies. Our sense of security must always be anchored in God alone, since our days of prosperity and plenty are the direct result of His blessing, and our times of gravity may actually be His love and discipline at work to save us from ourselves. Our worship must motivate and inform our own acts of righteousness, compassion, and justice towards all humanity - the wounded, afflicted, and oppressed. Our righteousness must have a singular intent and possess one crucial evidence of it's validity - that we believe and practice the priorities and values of the One whom we acknowledge as Lord. Israel, lost it - what about us? Lets find out.

Amos Five - The Text

Amos 5:5-7

Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing." Seek the LORD and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth!

This is God speaking to Amos - Amos speaking to the House of Israel (all leaders) - the People of Israel (Jewish people).

He says, *Seek me and live - come to me, and you will live.* Most often the verb (*seek*) gives the image of a quest for something unknown, or a search for someone lost or inaccessible, which we know of course, is not the circumstance here. The best translation of the Hebraic literary context here is "***come to me***" or, even more clearly, "***come back to me and worship me***" or "***come to me for help,***" "***come to me for counsel.***"

Of these, "***come/turn back to worship me***" may be the translation most accurately reflecting the authors original intent and context because of the obvious unrecognized worship going on in the remote shrines in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. However, a term for "worship" is not enough if it simply means a ritual or tradition. Some possibilities of interpretation rest on: "***come and let me be your Lord, come back to being my people.***"

The ancient Hebrew has *two commands* that present themselves in verses 5, 6, 14 of Amos five.

Command One - *Seek* (this describes the condition - needing guidance and truth) and "live" the consequence:*

Command Two - *Come To Me* (this describes the options - if you want to live)

5.7.23

Lets move to verses 14-15. If you remember, verses 4-5, exhorted leaders and people to ***seek God and live*** - here in verses 14-15, Amos will preach to Israel, seek good and not evil - hate evil and love good indicating a clear disconnect from the character and expectations of God. These verses will not tell us that Amos offered a hopeful path - this is judgment already set in motion Israel (and Judah for that matter) have already been justly judged by God (you could say that ship had already sailed or that genie was already out of the bottle), but one could not say everything would be alright. Every single person in Israel had already been judged and consequence decided - all that was

left was to determine who among them would hear the Word of the Lord from the messenger Amos. Who would hear, who would listen, who would return to God and live, who among them would return to all that was good and reject all that was evil. Everyone. God's judgment would bring social, civil, and religious collapse, followed by overthrow and captivity. A spiritual and moral re-set of Biblical proportion. Hopefully history will finally stop repeating itself, because as you can see here - at this point there would be no compromise of God's character and virtue. In its continued rebellion against the authority and order of God, Israel's circumstances had shifted them from being the central benefactor of the covering and covenant promise of God, which including a robust perk package complete with mercy, favor, blessing, and a retirement surety plan. In spite of all those proven and assets they had for three centuries ran hard into the culture and ways of man. They had moved from God's justice and mercy to God's just judgment. Listen to Amos.

Amos 5:14-15

Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. (ESV)

Amos has delivered a no-compromise message to all of Israel. Listen to his words one more time from The Complete Jewish Bible.

Amos 5:15-14

Seek good and not evil, so that you will survive. Then Adonai ELOHEI-Tzva'ot will be with you, as you say he is. Hate evil, love good, and uphold justice at the gate. Maybe Adonai ELOHEI-Tzva'ot (Lord God of Hosts) will take pity on the survivors of Yosef. (TCJB)

Just judgment is here - postponement petitions, pretentious plea's, and religious platitudes are no longer options. This is happening. Amos offers midnight hour advice to those who would sincerely repent fully knowing they had already been judged.

*Seek good and not evil - so that **you will survive**. (not avoiding judgment, here is your only chance to survive it)*

*Hate evil, love good, and uphold justice **at the gate**. (do the right and righteous thing before you go in - not after you have already gone in to do the wrong and unrighteous thing)*

Amos 5:14-15 Contextualized

Was this message preached to us? No. Was the ancient text of Amos written to us? No. As present-day followers of Jesus Christ, and people of God, is this message and the ancient text for us? Yes. Compare Amos words to God's people in 670 BC to the apostle Paul's words to the Church in Rome, and to Christians of all times and all places written to Rome 55 AD.

Romans 12:9-18, 21

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Our message from the Word of God through Amos - *Seek good, and not evil, that you may live. Make it your aim to do what is right, not what is evil, so that you may live.* The meaning of "seek" in its ancient Hebraic form and context is "to be concerned about," "to devote oneself to", "be concerned about what is good", "devote yourself to what is good," "strive after what is good," to contextualize the text of Amos without compromising the intended meaning - we can rightfully say...

Make it your aim to do what is right, don't compromise what is good and right for what is evil and wrong.

Do not compromise the honor and glory of God for the dishonor and shame of the evil ways and rebellious will of men. Do what is right and righteous before God and before men.

Do it for YOUR love of God; so that you might survive and live.

The Lord God of hosts - the Lord and God of His people, will really be with you.

The significant and relative message here for us today is simply this: WE can and WE will survive any and all difficult obstacles and tragic circumstances of this life if while we are living we have chosen good and not evil; if we have loved God and not the ways and will of evil men and women. The image we need to embrace is that of the true and eternal meaning of God's power and help. The Lord your God will help you.

5.14.23

Amos 5:21-24

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened

animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos Five - The Text (Continued)

5:21

God speaks... *I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in (Hebrew: I cannot smell) your solemn assemblies (Hebrew: your assemblies). The Lord says, "I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them."* ESV

In the ancient Hebrew language, when there is a sequence of two verbs (**I hate - I despise**) without a word relating them, the repetition is intended to be very forceful and to produce an emphasis that is important to the whole segment of text.

Hate. The translation should be something that means dislike of, or disdain for, what people do. There may even be a lively expression like *"What you are offering as worship is disgusting."* Or, to use an English idiom that may not be translatable but certainly comparable: *"Your feasts make me sick!"*

Originally, the word "smell" was translated literally when it was said that the Lord smelled sacrifices (with pleasure) (Genesis 8:21; Leviticus 26:31; 1 Samuel 26:19). Here Amos clearly used it as a word picture. "I can't *smell, hear, see, touch, or taste* what you are offering to me" (solemn assemblies - worship gatherings).

Feasts (ESV) and assemblies (ESV). The two words mean about the same thing here - religious or worship gatherings. Whatever they are - they are not anything that God is accepting, honoring, or blessing.

When we are interpreting scripture that uses repetitive literary techniques we should choose strong terms or restructure the sentence so that it is as forceful as possible. Repetition or use of synonyms often leads to forcefulness in modern languages, as it does in Hebrew. One possibility in English would be *“I am repulsed by your religious activities, and your worship services make me sick!”*

5:22

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. (ESV)

There were three specific Hebrew words used for offerings in the ancient Hebraic language. In some uses, they are not directly translatable, because not all peoples offered such sacrificial gifts in their religious worship and traditions.

Burnt offerings [*qorban ola'h*] were sacrifices in which the whole animal was burned up completely on the altar, being “sent up” to God in smoke. Central to the OT sacrificial system for atonement, they were governed by strict laws within the Mosaic code.

Grain offerings [*qorban minchah*] were presentations of grain, offered to God as gifts from the creature or the created to the Creator. The created is indebted/ devoted to the Creator

Peace offerings [*qorban shelamim*] were offerings given as a deep expression of one's gratitude, the fulfillment of a a vow or promise, or, a gift given out of a place of agreement or unity.

God said, "I Will Not Notice."

5:23

Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. (ESV)

Take-away... The context may be enough to make this clear, but if not, some direct possibilities are "*Stop the noisy songs of your worship*" or "*Stop trying to worship me with noisy singing.*" "*Away with your noisy songs!*" "*Spare me the sound of your songs*". In some other languages it would be better to translate instead "*Go away with the noise of your songs,*" "*Stop singing your noisy songs,*" "*Stop bothering me with the noisy singing which you use to worship me.*" "*Take away the noise you make by singing.*"

To the melody of your harps I will not listen. I do not want to listen to your harps. After the nose stops smelling, and the eyes stop seeing, now the ears stop hearing.

5:24

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

Interpret as, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never stops flowing and never runs goes dry. You must always be just, seek good, hate evil, and do what is both right and righteous."

Ever Flowing...

Love and Justice

Kindness and Goodness

Compassion and Mercy

Patience and Forgiveness

Amos Five Contextualized to 2023

Is there a right and righteous contextualization to our present-day global circumstance from the message of the ancient prophet Amos to the entire kingdom of ancient Israel? Is there a parallel to make between the cultural, moral, and religious behavior and practices of ancient Israel and those of our current behaviors and practices? If you answered "yes" then you are correct. And, here are those parallels and contextualized conclusions in summary from our "dig deep - dive deep" study of Amos chapter five.

Inductive Conclusions

[Verses 5-7]

Come back to God and His love and justice - come back to His order and authority.

Come to God and worship Him - worship Him alone.

Seek good not evil; hate evil and love good - so that you and those you love will live.

Pursue righteousness from the start (at the gate), don't create the opportunity for the unrighteousness of this world to overtake you.

[Verses 14-15]

Make it your aim to do what is right, don't compromise what is good and right for what is evil and wrong.

Do not exchange the honor and glory of God for the dishonor and shame of the evil ways and rebellious will of men. Do what is right and righteous before God, and before all men.

Do what is good and right out of your love of God; so that you might survive and live.

The Lord God of hosts - the Lord and God of His people, will really be with you.

[Verses 21-24]

When chaos and confusion commands the culture - return to the order of God's Word.

When the truth is no longer spoken about good and evil - remain steadfast and attached to the commandments and covenants of God's Word.

When defiance, rebellion, self-aware and self-pleasured enlightenment create a personal appetite for society - retain and hold close to the authority and righteousness of the Word of God.

When the end of all things seem to lead to uncertainty and fear - return to the beginning of all things - in the beginning was the Word.

7.2.23

The Movement - A Righteous Revolution Amos 5 Joel 2

Introduction - Joel Two

Joel is a *theocentric* book - all events, messages, responses, and reclamation plan point to GOD. The plague, the call to lament and repent, the instructions to return, the restoration and redemption, the gift of the Spirit, and the assurance of final victory are all centric to the supreme authority and power of the one and true Sovereign God. God's sovereignty over creation is one of central emphasis and intention to the writer and prophet Joel.

Joel, whose name in Hebrew means “**Yahweh is God,**” was called by God to minister to the southern kingdom of Judah. Other than knowing his father's name (Pethuel), there is not much information on who Joel was other than a chosen messenger of God Almighty. I like that. Some biblical scholars have found common ground on the time of Joel's ministry and writing at around 835 B.C. when the then seven-year-old Joash sat on the throne of Judah (Southern Kingdom). However, Jehoida the High Priest would have functioned as the real ruler of Judah until Joash came of age. But there are some evidential events that would also suggest a 500 B.C. time period.

There are significant similarities in Joel's style of writing to that of Hosea and Amos, biblical prophets who also ministered to Israel and Judah in the 8th to mid-7th century in and around the timelines of Joel's ministry. This gives reliable evidence that Joel was a contemporary of Hosea, Amos, and Zephaniah. In fact, the verbal parallels between *Joel 3:16* and *Amos 1:2*, and *Joel 3:18* and *Amos 9:13* are of note. Our focus will be on the prophecy of Joel chapter two.

The word of God came to the prophet Joel in the disastrous moments of a most traumatic event for the people of Judah. What moved Joel to preach and document this historically verified message was a literal invasion of the kingdom of Judah by insects. Take a moment and imagine enough locusts to blot out the entire sky and the light of the sun. The first two chapters of Joel provide us with sobering clarity that the locusts were a plague used by God to exact His judgment for their rebellious and Godless behavior. We can see that they no longer possessed the righteous *fear of the Lord*. The people are charged by Joel to grieve with sorrow for their sin and cry out to God in repentance and acknowledgment.

Joel 1:5

Wake up, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you wine-drinkers, over the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth.

Joel 1:11-13

Be dismayed, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, over the wheat and the barley; for the crops of the fields are ruined. Put on sackcloth and lament, you priests; wail, you ministers of the altar. Come, pass the night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God.

Joel 2:12-13

Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.

Joel 2:15-16

Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Consecrate the congregation.

Joel 2:17

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.

Joel Two - Content and Context

In 2023, not many can stomach the kind of accountability and consequential reality that Joel calls the leaders and people to acknowledge, but, clearly, the Lord had good reason and just cause to send judgment upon the land and the people of Judah. As stated, Joel's message was God's response to a devastating and deadly plague of locusts. The plague was so far-reaching that every aspect of human life in Judah was put at risk. This included the daily offerings/worship in the Temple in Jerusalem, which had been mandated to be maintained and continued with full access and opportunity for communion between God and the people during the plague. In other words, the Church did not shut down during the pandemic - it was the one place they were instructed to go and gather. Joel's understanding of God the Creator and God's creation allowed him to clearly see the locusts as symbolic of the Creator, carrying out judgment on a defiantly disobedient nation and its leaders. They still had their religion, they just no longer had right or righteous relationship with their God.

Joel describes the severity of their judgment in literal terms in chapter one, but his prophetic witness did not conclude with just the judgment of Judah—providing evidence to not only Joel but to all who would hear and receive his message that he had begun to witness to something even more. In Joel two, he would be giving witness to "THE" *Day of the Lord*. Amos, Zephaniah, and Isaiah had spoken of that *Day* as well, using descriptive terms of inescapable and inevitable darkness paired with intolerable and unbearable suffering. The clouds of locusts that obscured the sun and devoured the food supply were a judgment and were tragically devastating, but, they were not the final ***Day of the Lord that Joel begins to describe. They were, however,*** certainly a foretaste and foretelling of that *Day*.

Yahweh was ready for change and so now the prophet Joel urged the people of God to also be ready for change - that change would begin with repentance. We should be mindful that message of repentance and change was not just relevant to the ancient people of Judah. True biblical repentance always brings about right and righteous change in the repentant. When a an individual or a people no longer believe or practice repentance they no longer can see or understand the need for righteous change. Repentance and change are certainly still relevant today - it is the kind of right and righteous change that brings hope.

In chapter 1 mercy, not wrath, was God's response to Judah's repentance, and with His mercy came full restoration of all the damage and devastation of the insect invasion. Beyond that, the whole episode of judgment and deliverance brought with it a renewed understanding of Yahweh's sovereignty and uniqueness. It had a revelatory (revealing the unknown) quality that marked it as the harbinger (sign) of the days to come, when all of Israel, not just prophets, would experience personal communion with God and fresh revelations of His power and glory. The era of Yahweh's Spirit was on the way, an era so world-shaking that it bring with it the signal and signs of the final judgment, when the neighbor nations (enemies of God) would pay once and for all for their sin, hatred, and hostility. Israel's covenant faith would be confirmed by God's abiding presence in their midst.

Amos said that the Day of the Lord was **darkness not light** (5:18, 20); Joel goes one step further towards almighty God and says the Day of the Lord is **darkness before light**. The Lord through the mercy of His covenant of love had spared the people in the plague and preserved the honor of his name before the nations. Now He has a **Day beyond the Day**, when the vengeance that is the prerogative of the authority, order,

and justice of the one true Sovereign Lord. And, it is within His character and prerogative of course to extend grace and mercy to whom He alone chooses. This too flows from His unique and unified character, and as Joel prophesies will be manifest to the whole world. On behalf of all God's people (those called by His name), Joel saw a vision of that Day and he sang of it. From him we can learn the song of the Day of the Lord, a song which we should be ready to sing whenever our sovereign God is ready to gather His Kingdom.

As we have stated, Joel prophesied of a future Day of the Lord during the fallout of a catastrophic locust plague which served as a reckoning judgment to the kingdom of ancient Judah. In chapter two, He preached of three prophetically powerful landmark events. These three landmark events will lead us through Joel 2.

The Coming Day of Yahweh (of the Lord) - Joel 2:1-11

The Return to God and the Relevance of Repentance - Joel 2:12-17

The Outpouring of God's Spirit on All Flesh - Joel 2:28-32

The content and context of the Joel Two message is indeed relevant to present-day - because it is a dual-covenant message which includes not only the fore-telling signs of the final Day of the Lord, but the character and sovereignty of a merciful and loving God, and the authority and order of a just and righteous God. With this in mind and on our hearts it is important we dig deep to contextualize and find our application points:

Judgment is coming, and there will be a final Day of Reckoning - The Day of the Lord.

The corrupted mindset, the narcissistic lifestyle, and the defiant and rebellious behavior are unsustainable and bring with them irreversible consequences and judgment.

People must acknowledge the authority, righteousness, and order of God, and then repent resolved and intent upon following a biblical path to living, loving, and navigating the obstacles of a fallen and sinful world until Jesus comes.

God will then pour out His Spirit and save those who call on His name - and there will be wonders in the heavens and signs on the earth below - and the end of all things will be near.

7.9.23

The Movement - A Righteous Revolution Amos 5 Joel 2

Landmark Event One - The Day of the Lord (Yahweh) 2:1-11

Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations. Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run. As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle. Before them peoples are in anguish; all faces grow pale. Like warriors they charge; like soldiers they scale the wall. They march each on his way; they do not swerve from their paths. They do not jostle one another; each marches in his path; they burst through the weapons and are not halted. They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?

First, the biblical expression the **Day of the Lord** refers to God's special intervention into world events to judge His enemies, accomplish His purpose for history, and thereby demonstrate who He is—the sovereign God, and supreme authority of the universe.

Isaiah 2:10–22

Enter into the rock and hide in the dust from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty. 11 The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. 12 For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low; 13 against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; 14 against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills; 15 against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; 16 against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. 17 And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. 18 And the idols shall utterly pass away. 19 And people shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. 20 In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, 21 to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. 22 Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?

Second, as we have learned from Joel 2 there have been **Days of the Lord** which had already occurred where God demonstrated His sovereign rule and authority by using plagues, famines, and hostile conflict to execute His righteous judgment to restore the order of on both Israel and other nations.

Third, there will be visual phenomena that signal the arrival of Day of the Lord. The earth quaking, the heavens trembling, the sun and moon darkened, and the lightless stars, are all part of the visual evidence that the Lord himself is coming with his army for a reckoning, to bring justice and execute judgment. These signs are not merely poetic pictures of the effects and impact of the plague on Judah, but they are the awful and momentous signs which accompany the final Day of the Lord.

In chapter one Joel recalled the devastation of the locust plague on Judah - chapter two is not that day. Now Joel foretells of a future and final ***Day of the Lord***, His is the prophetic voice of that coming event. All that Joel says from this point forward points to this event. When Yahweh moves, we can see a just purpose and a very specific set of outcomes. The old order is inverted. The familiar, comfortable, and complacent disappears, and false security collapses. No one can withstand that day because there is nothing left to stand on. On the other hand, as we will see, with the death of the old, Yahweh brings new life and a new world into being.

Joel 2:1-2

Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

Lets take a moment and listen to the available words of confirmation to Joel 2. Confirmation from many other prophetic messengers throughout biblical history, scripture, and covenants (old and new).

Isaiah 2:12-17

For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low; 13 against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; 14 against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills; 15 against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; 16 against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. 17 And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

Amos 5:18-20

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light, 19 as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. 20 Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

Zechariah (14:1-3)

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. 2 For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3 Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.

Paul (I Thessalonians 5:1-6)

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the

day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober

John (Revelation 6:12-17)

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

The Bible indicates that the future Day of the Lord will have at least a twofold nature. On the one hand, it will be characterized by darkness and a terrible outpouring of divine wrath on the world. Yet it also will be characterized by light, an outpouring of divine blessing, and the administration of God’s rule over the earth. After describing the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars and God’s Day-of-the-Lord judgment of the armies of the nations gathered in Israel (Joel 3:9–16), the prophet Joel foretold great, divine blessing “in that day” (3:18–21).

In Joel 2, some descriptive reference to the locust plague of Judgment on Judah continues but with a significant change and shift: the shift moves from addressing response to the recent events of Judah's past to the imagery and prophetic warning of and an unprecedented apocalyptic future event. With intense poetic imagery Joel moves forward here in verses 1-11 of chapter 2 to compare the locust plague to a literal invading army. This hostile invasion is so horrifyingly extensive that it reveals itself as "the great battle" to be fought on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The locust army as an illustration stays in play for Joel but it is clear these are real armies not insects - the full revelation of God's wrath will follow. The reality of the Day of the Lord itself is so overwhelming and if one can allow oneself to see what you cannot see, for God to reveal what only He can reveal, and know what you do not know this will actually carry overtones of an even larger reality—God's exercise of universal and redemptive judgment.

Implications and Purposes for The Day of the Lord

God's Purpose

God will play a key role in gathering these leaders and armies (Zechariah 14:2; Joel 3:2; Micah 4:11-13; Zephaniah 3:8). He will have two purposes. First, He will use this force as His rod to break Israel's stubborn rebellion against Him and the Messiah so that the nation will repent (Daniel 9:24; 12:1, 5-7; Zechariah 12:10-13:1). God will not crush Satan and his kingdom, remove them from the earth, and establish His theocratic kingdom-rule until Israel repents (Zechariah 12-14; Acts 3:12-21) because God has determined that Israel will be the world's spiritual leader during God's millennial rule over the earth (Isaiah 2:1-5; 61:6; Zechariah 8:20-23).

Second

God intends to have the political and military forces of Satan's kingdom gathered together at one location to be destroyed by Christ when He comes from heaven in His glorious Second Coming on the Day of the Lord (Isaiah 34:1-8; Joel 3:2, 9-17; Micah. 4:11-13; Zephaniah 3:8; Zechariah 12:2-3, 9; 14:3-4; Revelation 19:11-21).

Satan's Purpose

Satan also will play a key role in gathering these political and military forces against Israel and Jerusalem near the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 16:12-16). He, too, will have two purposes. First, he will use these forces to try to annihilate Israel before it can repent. Since God will not crush him and his kingdom until Israel repents, Satan will believe that, if he himself can annihilate Israel before it repents, God will never crush him or his kingdom.

Second

Since Zechariah 14:4 reveals that the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem is where the Messiah will return when He comes from heaven on the Day of the Lord, Satan will want the political and military forces of the Gentile world gathered in that location to help him try to prevent Christ's Second Coming to Earth. They will be "gathered together to make war against him [Messiah]" (Revelation 19:19).

7.16.23

The Movement - A Righteous Revolution Amos 5 Joel 2

Landmark Event Two - The Return to God and the Relevance of Repentance - Joel 2:12-17

Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; 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. 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? Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. 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?’ ”

Even Now... (Verse 12)

Though consequences for sin and judgment are present, it is not too late to repent. The gracious invitation for godly contrition comes from the Lord himself. *“Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart.”* This bears the stamp of his authority. The repentance is called a turning, or returning to God (the meaning of the Hebrew term *na-šûb-hah; the returning*)

Hosea 3:5

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

Hosea 6:1

Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

This turning or returning is not a token gesture or an act of empty ritual; it must be sincere and wholehearted, with the full understanding of moral conviction. Outward manifestations of the "returning/repentance" there will be—fasting, weeping, and mourning (defection from God is comparable to death). But the fast, the tears, and the mourning must be symbols of a broken and contrite heart, a will that is fully yielded to God's precepts, principles, and ways.

Rend Your Hearts... (Verse 13)

The command to rend your hearts and not your garments is the Hebrew way of saying that inward contrition is more important than an outward show of grief, which by itself could be an act devoid of sincerity or integrity - done for show, for attention, or for pride and position. Biblically and historically, the rending of garments was most often a sign of overwhelming misfortune or lament. As the seat of moral and spiritual decisions, it is the heart and its attitude that must be confronted and reconciled or made right. It is in the heart and its attitude that evil thoughts and evil ideas are conceived and brought to birth. Rend your hearts (*qiru kem l'bab*) means 'change your whole attitude,' with a result that relates itself to the broken, contrite heart of Psalm 51.

Psalm 51:10-17

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

The precise nature of the change (torn heart) is evidenced by the return to God and the rejection of the ways, words, and weight of the world. But this return and this relationship are possible only because of the very character of God, marked as it is by His amazing grace. The description of grace follows a formula found frequently in the Old Testament.

Psalm 86:15-17

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant. Show me a sign of your favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

It was probably used regularly in worship both in praise and petition. God's compassion, His reluctance to judge, and His willingness to change his course of action are all tied to his 'great kindness', and His firm commitment (Hebrew; *hesed*) to His covenant with His people.

Who Knows... (Verse 14)

Joel moves from first to third person to show his unshakeable belief that he was God's messenger, speaking to the people of Judah in his name. The question is when there has been a habitual pattern established for rebellious, defiant, and apathetic sin "Who knows" whether the sovereign God will pull back from His righteous judgment and restore His favor"? This is a humble way of holding out hope. When waiting on the mercy, restored favor, and renewed blessing of God it is not time to assume or presume, but it is a time for repentant hopefulness. The expectancy that is held in check by awe (fear of the Lord) of God's sovereignty

Amos 5:15

Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Hear the Word of the Lord - we don't do what is right only when in His presence or waiting for His mercy and blessing but we begin our worship and honor of God outside

the temple gate, long before all hell breaks loose. In Jonah the hope is negative: averting judgment. Here in Joel, it is positive: receiving blessing in the form of a fresh fertility which allows the temple offerings to be resumed. Cereal and drink offerings indicate that the ravages and damage of the locusts are repaired (Joel 1:9, 13). The people's turning to God (2:12) will be matched by his turning to them. His course has been set on judgment; now he will turn to them in grace and leave in his tracks the tangible blessing of his providence—the produce which will express the restored relationship as the daily sacrifices are renewed. The lesson in this verse must not be missed: the material provisions God gives his people are as much for His service as for their comfort.

Assemble, Gather... (Verses 15–16)

Heartened by this word of hope, the prophet sounds the command to assemble the leaders and the priests, and they will gather the congregation. The call to assemble for the fast and to prepare for the siege are both sounded on the *shofar*. *Two horns is an alarm - one horn is to assemble* (Numbers 10:1–3). Because the judgment had become more provoking and the possibility of rescue more promising, the call to assemble and gather is more urgent and detailed than in 1:14.

One - Sanctify (separate out) the congregation means to; *'call for a sacred religious meeting' on the terms specified by Levitical law and Covenant tradition*. In the Hebrew theocracy, church, and state were not held separately. Political, economic, civil, and social problems were judged through a religious grid of moral and ethical Levitical laws, and then reasoned and reckoned through the principles and precepts of Israel's covenant relationship. All in one context.

Two - The call to assemble the priests and ministers went out first, and then the call to gather the elders (which refers to age more than leadership or title), as the contrast with children and nursing babies suggests. The comprehensiveness of the call underscores the urgency of the need and the corporate nature of the guilt. Everyone had to be there - top to bottom - greatest to least. Nothing was more important, nothing took priority

above the call to assemble and gather. Even the bridegroom and his bride; the nursing babies - leaky pipes, broken AC; I think you get the picture. Furthermore, the presence of the children would add power to the petition for mercy, as God's attitude toward the innocence of children was known among them.

From the Lobby to the Altar... (Verse (17))

Joel's instructions to the priests and ministers continue. The vestibule (entry/lobby), an area of 20 cubits by 10 cubits, was on the east end of the temple. The altar is the great altar of burnt offering in front of the temple. Ezekiel refers to this area (which is near the entrance to the holy place in the inner court) in his description of the twenty-five who turned their backs on the temple to worship the sun (Ezekiel 8:16). The priests undoubtedly were to face the temple with the congregation gathered behind them in the court.

The call to weep as an act of repentance and worship for an assembled gathering is reminiscent of an episode of national weeping early in Israel's history.

Judges 2:1-4

Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you." As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the LORD.

God, whose grace has taken the entire initiative in restoration of Judah, now supplies the text for their prayer, which is in the form of a communal complaint similar to those in Psalms and Lamentations.

Psalms 44:21-26

For he knows the secrets of the heart. Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!

Lamentations 3:40-42

Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD! Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven: "We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven.

Lamentations 5:16-22

The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned! For this our heart has become sick, for these things our eyes have grown dim, for Mount Zion which lies desolate; jackals prowl over it. But you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations. Why do you forget us forever, why do you forsake us for so many days? Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old—unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us.

The prayer and praise of Israel tended to take fixed literary form (repetition and consistency) depending on their use in the religious life of the people. The prayer for

deliverance in the first person plural and the appeal to the dignity of God's name are characteristic of communal petitions, which were used in times of national calamity like invasion, famine, or plague. Joel's picture of the priests and congregation filling the temple courtyard and pleading with God gives us an invaluable guide to the role of certain psalms reflecting in real-time Israel's common life.

The desperate tone of the petition (spare us we pray in pity and compassion) is clear and understood for where they were in relationship with God and the judgment they were facing: the name and destiny of the chosen people, their promised inheritance, and heritage, reflect directly on the glory and majesty of their God and not of themselves. In a religious context where each nation honored its own god and looked to it for benevolence, benefits, and favor, any reversal of the nation's fortunes had to be interpreted as evidence of the national god's impotence. Nations and neighbors - hostile and friendly could see Israel's/Judah's fall from favor. Yahweh's refusal to intervene on behalf of his people would be seriously misinterpreted by those neighbors that Israel/Judah had run out of protection and blessing from their God. They were being observed and branded as failures. The very taunt these people would use to deride Israel is cited: 'Where is their God?'

Psalm 42:9-10

I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"

Micah 7:10

I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication. Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, "Where is the LORD your God?"

Their shame becomes God's shame. God's failure to rescue Israel would be thrown in their faces by their foes with the same regularity and intensity with which King Saul's ill-fated attempts at prophesying were thrown at would-be prophets.

With this impassioned plea the first half of the book, with its terrible scourge, comes to a close. Not with the threat of judgment but with an offer of hope. The whole section has moved to a climax in prayer, prayer based not only on the terror of the plague but on the glory of God's name. No higher appeal, no grander motivation, can there be. That is where the return to God begins, and the relevance of repentance is found.

Use Your "R" Words

*Remember - Return - Repent - Remorse - Regret - Rend - Recite - Re-Set - Reform -
Re-Commit - Resist - Replace - Redeem - Rejoice*