








7 studies on the book of Joel

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Notes

In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk by David Prior, the Bible Brief on Joel from The Briefing magazine # 391 April 2011 by Stephen Bell, The Day of the Lord the book of Joel a series of Bible studies written by Naremburn Cammeray Anglican Church, A Fresh Start by John Chapman, The Teaching of the Old Testament by John Job, Gospel and Kingdom and Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture by Graeme Goldsworthy, New Bible Commentary 3rd edition, New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition, Lion Handbook to the Bible Second Revised Edition and the 2012 sermon series, the Fifth Gospel, at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson and various websites.

Ed O'Connor, 2016

Study 1, Introduction to the Old Testament

The book of Joel is in the Old Testament. To refresh our thinking on the Old Testament I thought it would be fun to read some quotes and listen to some sound bites. Your job is to say where the quote is from and its context in the Bible. Some of these are easy and some are quite hard. See how you go.



1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Where? Gen 1:1

Context? creation

2. "The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Where? Gen 12:1-3

Context? God promises Abram that he will become a great nation and lead them to the Promised Land.

3. Play Highway61Short.mp3

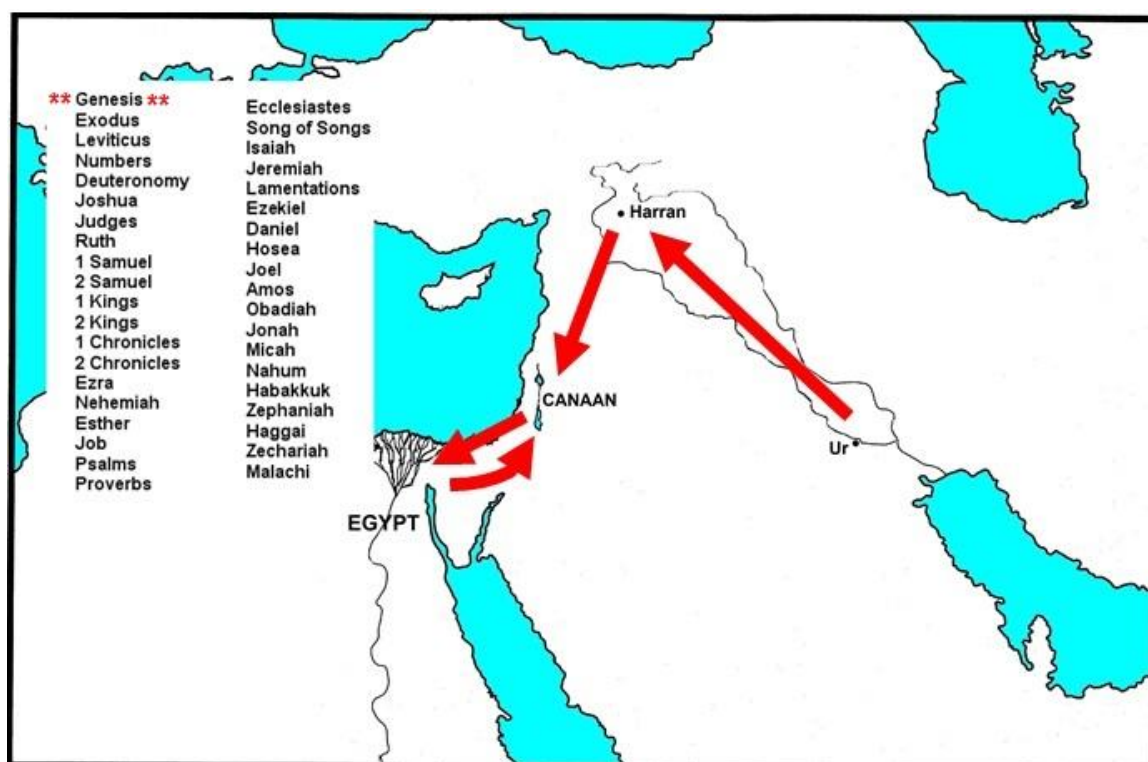
Translation: God said to Abraham "Kill me a son."
 Abe said "Man, you must be putting me on."
 God said "No."
 Abe said "What?"
 God said "You can do what you want to but, the next time you see me coming you better run."
 Well Abe said "Where do you want this killing done?"
 God said "Out on Highway 61."

Bible: Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"
 "Here I am," he replied.
 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

Where? Gen 22:1-2

Context? Bible: Abraham & Sarah finally have a son in their old age but God tells Abraham to sacrifice his only son as a test of Abraham's faith.
 Bob Dylan: You can get away with anything in America, out on Highway 61.

Beginning at roughly 1900 BC, God called Abraham to be a father of a great nation (Gen 12). Genesis relates the story of his travels and eventual settling in the Promised Land, Canaan.



Famine forced God's people to Egypt and they spent more than 400 years in bondage to the Pharaohs. God worked to release them from slavery and, under Moses' leadership, they escaped (the Exodus, roughly 1300 BC) and travelled back to the land God had promised them.

The Egyptians were the major world power from 3000 BC to 1000 BC (these dates are very approximate). The Great Pyramid of Giza was completed in 2600 BC.

The escape from Egypt is described in the book of **Exodus**. The trip of 40 yrs. wandering in the desert before getting to Israel is described in **Numbers**. On the verge of Palestine, Moses lectures his people to prepare them for their new life in a new land as related in the book of **Deuteronomy**.



4. "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour."

Where? Ex 20:12-17

Context? 10 Commandments made at Mt Sinai while God's people were on their way to the Promised Land.

In Israel, God fights for his people to conquer the indigenous peoples. These battles are described in **Joshua** and **Judges**.



Samuel led God's people after the Judges. After Samuel came the kings with Saul as Israel's first king and David as Israel's second and greatest king until Jesus. David began his reign at about 1000 BC. The history of Samuel and Saul is written in **1 Samuel**.

David was a warrior king and expanded Israel's borders (represented by the green area below). David's story begins at 1 Samuel 16 and continues through **1 and 2 Samuel** and **1 Chronicles**, ending with his death in 1 Kings 2. David was also a singer and musician and he wrote many **psalms** describing his feelings, experiences and prayers.

5. As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

Where? 1 Sam 17:48-49

Context? David kills Goliath, the Philistine champion. Israel has a king, Saul, but David will be the next and greatest king besides Jesus.

6. "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want."

Where? Ps 23:1

Context? Psalm of David. Even in the most difficult of circumstances David trusts God to rescue him and bring him goodness and mercy.

7. When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

Where? 2 Sam 7:12-16

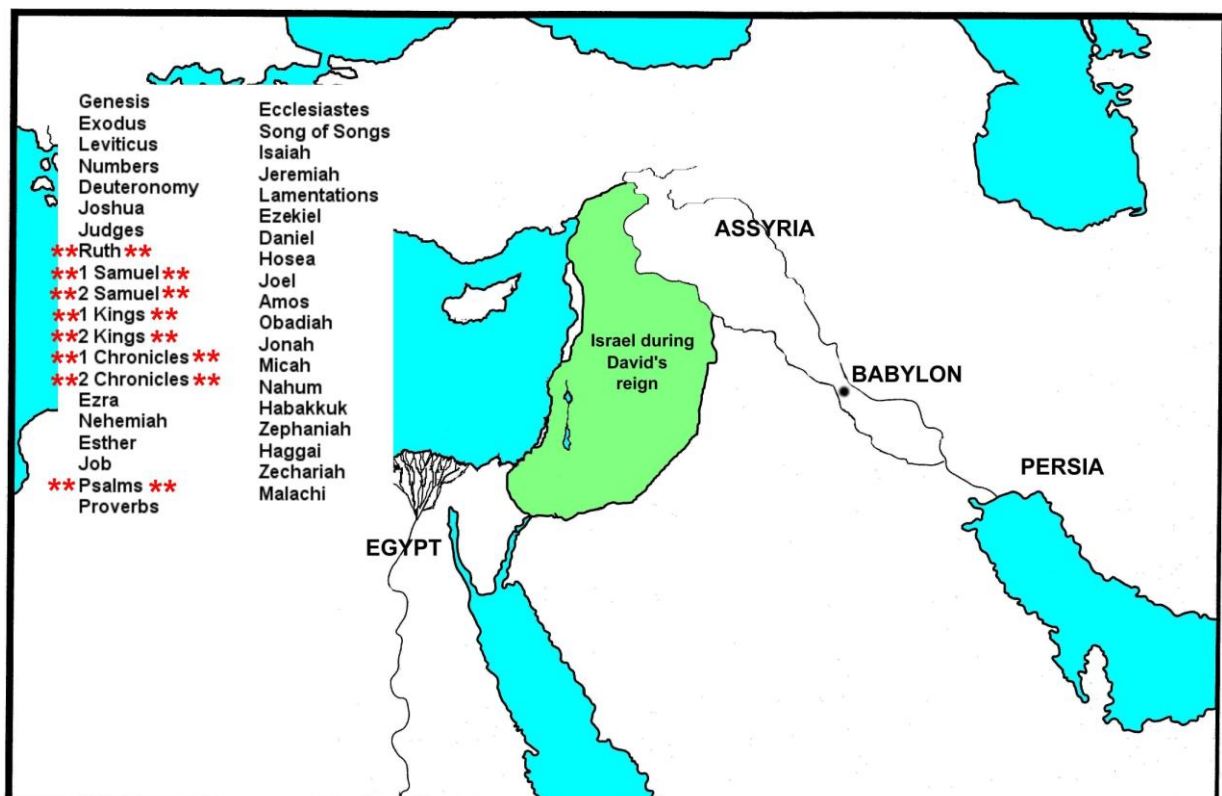
Context? God's line of kings, through David, will be established forever.

Solomon, David and Bathsheba's second son (2 Sam 12), became king in 961 BC. After Solomon Israel was split in two in 922 BC with the northern kingdom called Israel and the southern kingdom called Judah. This division into two kingdoms weakened them both and it wasn't long before other nations threatened them.

1 and 2 Kings account for four centuries of Israel's history with a succession of kings from both the northern and southern kingdoms, ending in exile. 1 and 2 Kings were written as one book from the viewpoint of an Israelite living in exile in Babylon.

1 and 2 Chronicles follow the kings from the line of David, ignoring the northern kings. The Chronicler wrote from the viewpoint of an Israelite who had returned from exile with Ezra and Nehemiah.

In contrast, **Ruth** is a quiet tale of ordinary life where a mother, Naomi, and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, move from Moab to Bethlehem and are treated kindly by Boaz. Boaz and Ruth get married and their great grandson is King David.



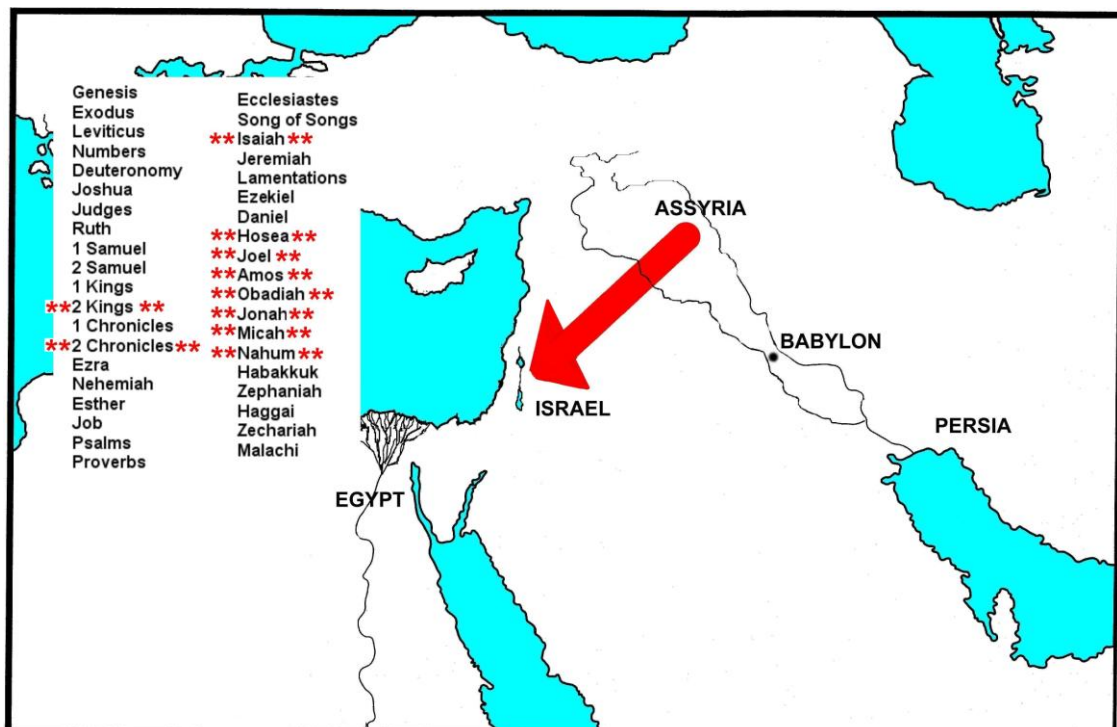
8. Play Redeemer livethShort.mp3

- Translation: I know that my Redeemer liveth, and he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.
- Bible: I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!
- Where? Job 19:25-27
- Context? Bible: Job defends himself against accusations that he has deserved the terrible things that have happened to him. His innocence will ultimately bring him to see God in the flesh.
- Handel's Messiah: Comes immediately after the Hallelujah Chorus

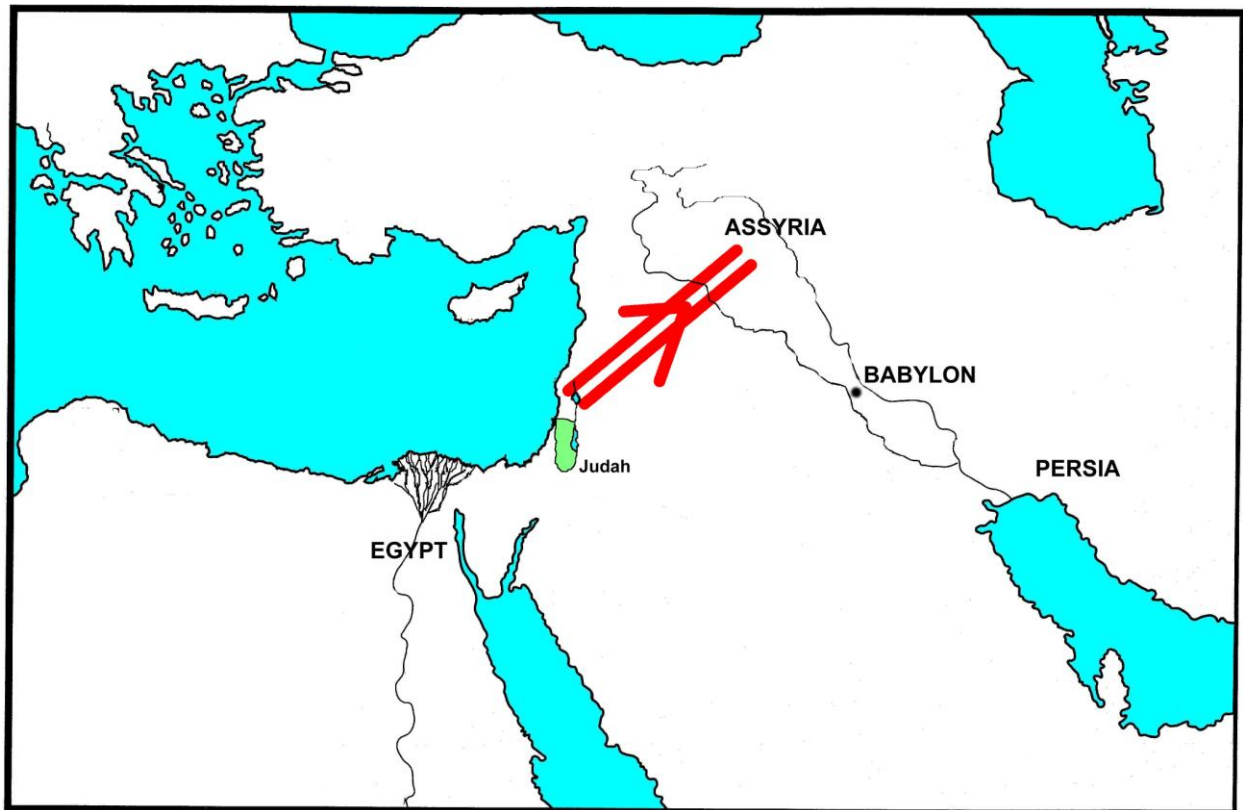
9. Play HisBannerOverMelsLoveSHORT.mps

- Bible: He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.
- Where? Song of Songs 2:4
- Context? Multiple meanings have been suggested for Song of Songs.
The 2 main ones are that it is an allegory for God's love for Israel/the church
OR a poem about the love of a man and a woman.
- We studied this last year when we did Study 2, "How do I trust the Bible", from the Life Under God booklet.

Assyria became the major world power from about 900 BC to 612 BC. **Jonah** preached God's message of repentance to Nineveh, Assyria's capital, at about 800 BC. They did repent and avoided God's judgement for a time only to re-commit their sins bringing on God's warning through **Nahum**. Israel also needed to repent and a number of prophets warned that God's instrument of judgement would be Assyria. **Isaiah**, **Joel** and **Obadiah** warned Judah (the southern kingdom), **Hosea** and **Amos** warned Israel (the northern kingdom) and **Micah** addressed both kingdoms.

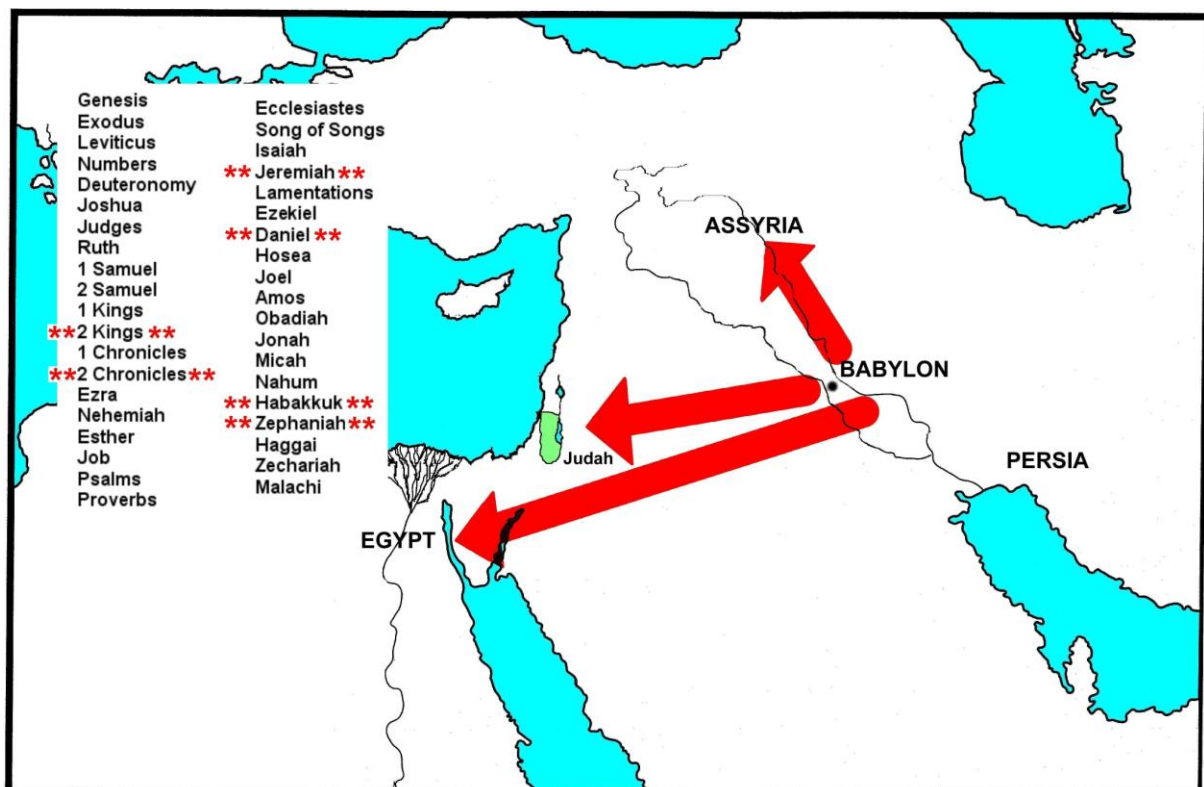


Tiglath-Pileser III became king of Assyria in 745 BC. In 721 BC he defeated Israel (the northern kingdom) and took the people into exile. In 612 BC Nineveh, the capital, was destroyed bringing about the fall of Assyria.



Babylon was the next major world power from 612 BC to 539 BC. They attacked and defeated nearly everybody. **Jeremiah** and **Zephaniah** warned Judah and **Habakkuk** said that, even worse than Assyria, Babylon would be God's instrument of judgement.

Babylon battled with Judah and took people like **Daniel** into exile in 605 BC.



Eventually in 587 BC, Babylon took Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and drove most of the people to Babylon leaving only the poorest behind. This was known as the Exile.

Some **psalms** were written during the exile.

Jeremiah was offered a comfortable life in Babylon but chose to remain in Judah.

Lamentations was written, probably by Jeremiah, about the suffering of the people in exile.

Ezekiel and **Daniel** had already been taken into exile.

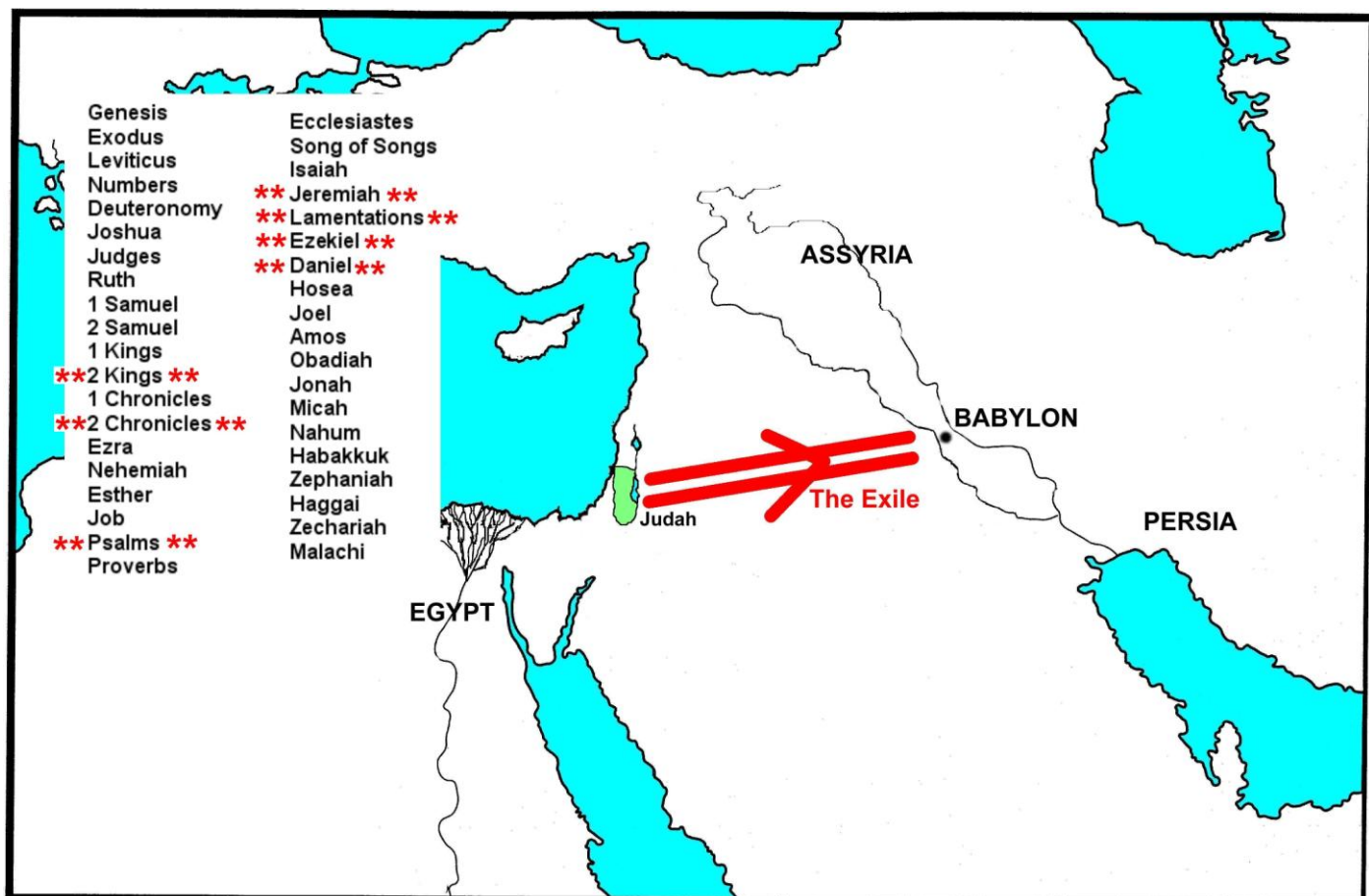
10. Play RiversOfBabylonBoneyMShort.mp3

Translation: By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down. Yeah we wept when we remembered Zion. (twice)
When the wicked carried us away in captivity, required from us a song. }
Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land. } (twice)

Bible: By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.
There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?

Where? Ps 137:1-4

Context? God's people are in exile in Babylon and living in misery.
(Early in Jeremiah he warns the people that they will be sent into exile unless they repent.
They don't repent and most of their best people are taken to Babylon but Jeremiah stays behind
with the poor in Jerusalem.)



Isaiah, **Jeremiah** and **Daniel** prophesied the defeat of the Babylonians and the return of the exiles.

11. Play EricLiddellReadsIsaiahShort.mp3

As read from KJV: Behold, the nations are as a drop in the bucket and are counted as the small dust in the balance. All nations before him are as nothing. They are counted to him as less than nothing and vanity.
He bringeth the princes to nothing. He maketh the judges of the earth as a vanity. Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?
He giveth power to the faint and to them that have no strength he increaseth might. But they that waiteth on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles.
They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint.

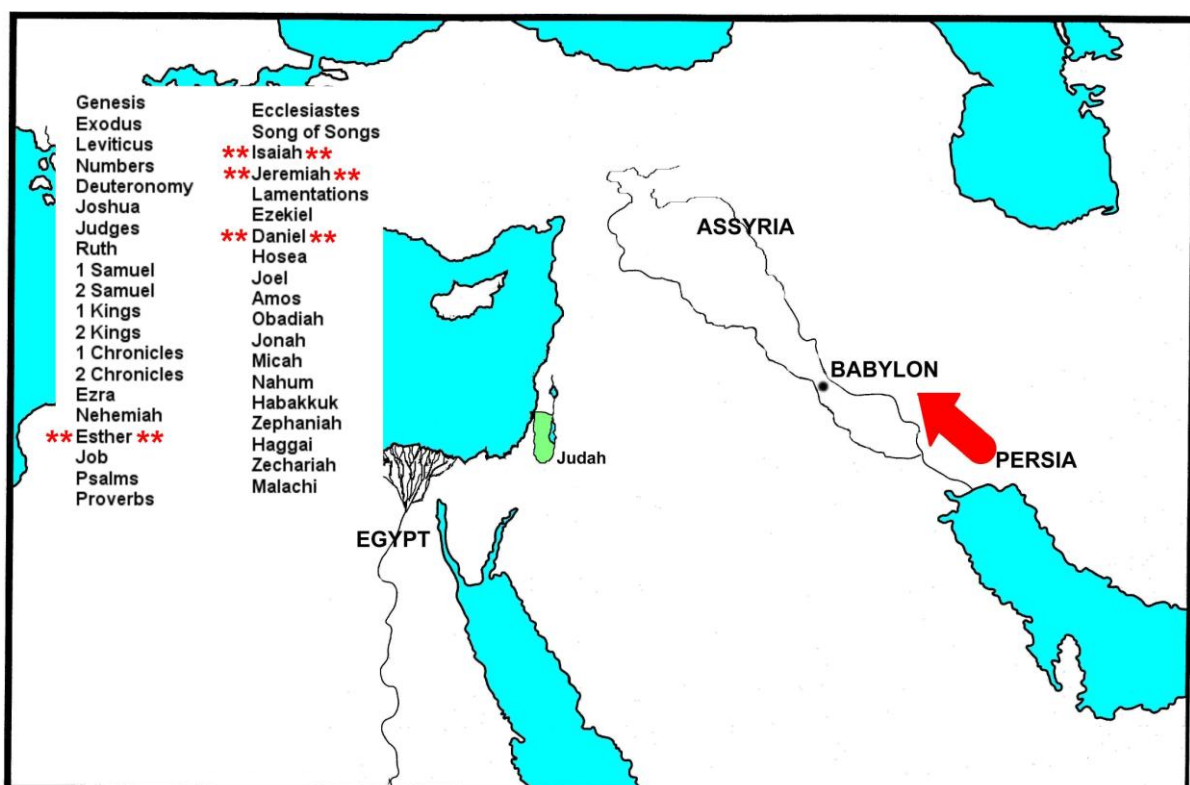
Bible: v 15 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales;
V 17 Before him all the nations are as nothing, they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.
V 23 He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.
V 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary,
V 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.
V 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Where? Isaiah 40:15-31

Context? Bible: God is bringing his people out of exile in Babylon and back to the Promised Land. (Isaiah lived about 100 years before Jeremiah though his prophecies carried over into Jeremiah's time and even after the exile.)

Chariots of Fire: Eric Liddell reads from Isaiah in church before he competes in the 1924 Olympics in Paris.

These prophecies came true when Cyrus the Great defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC and Persia became the major world power.



The Persians allowed the Israelites (the remnant) to return to Judah although some preferred to stay in Persia/Babylon e.g. the Jewish community written up in **Esther**.

In 538/7 the main group of Israelites returned to Judah with Zerubbabel, their leader.

Haggai and **Zechariah** were written during the reign of Darius I of Persia (521-486 BC).

Haggai wrote to encourage the re-building of the walls of Jerusalem.

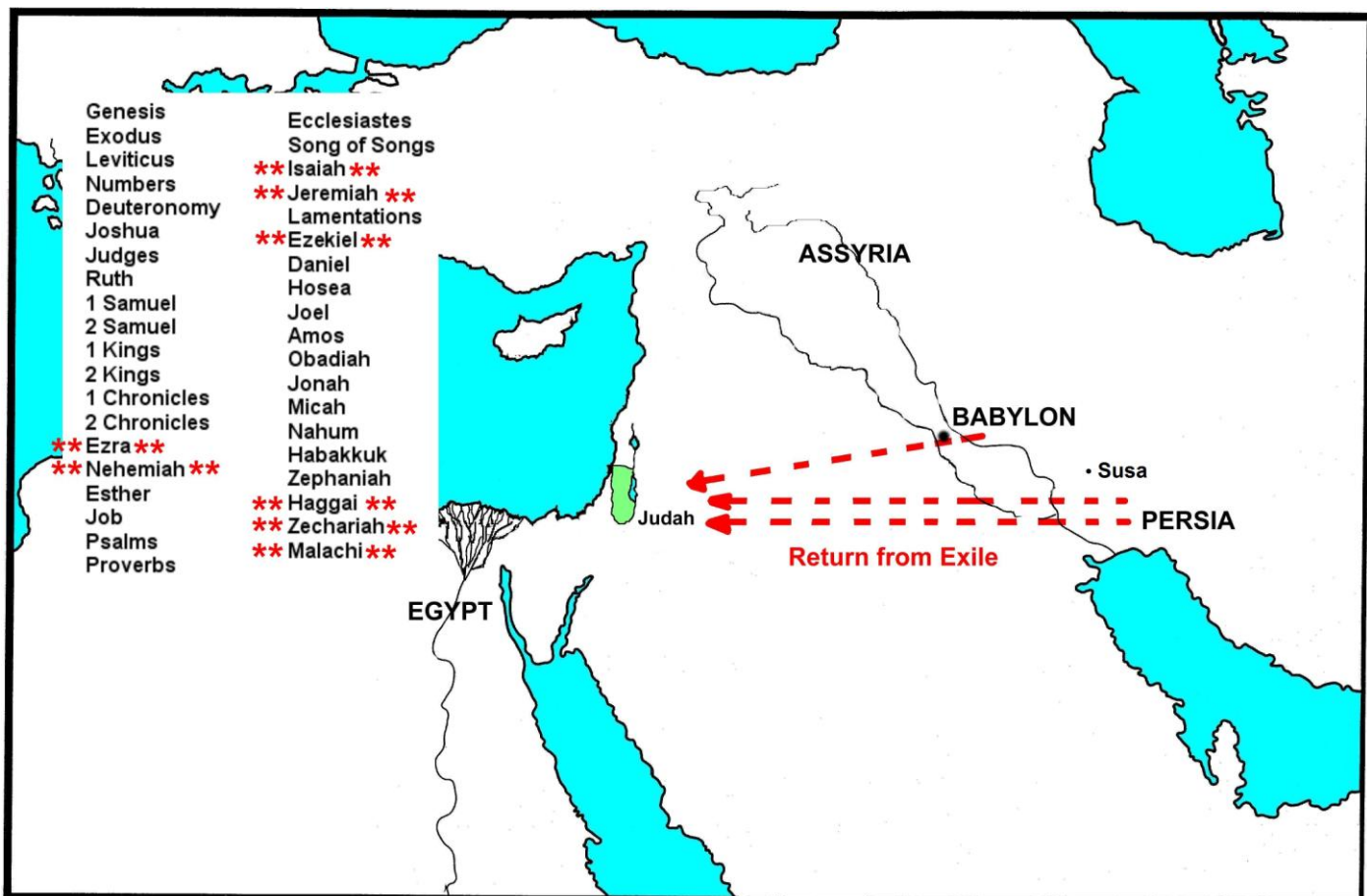
Zechariah looked to the restoration of the Temple and the future of God's people.

(Battle of Thermopylae 480 BC when the Greeks blocked the advance of the massive Persian army under Xerxes I (486-465 BC) depicted in the 2006 movie "300".)

Ezra and a group of Israelites returned to Jerusalem in 458 BC to organise the rebuilding of the Temple.

Nehemiah returned with his group in 445 BC to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. (Artaxerxes I, son of Xerxes I, was king of the Persians from 465-423 BC, see Neh 2:1.)

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah and **Malachi** all looked ahead to a time beyond the exile, to a time of restoration and a time when God's king, Jesus, would come.



12. 'The time is coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD.

'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, "Know the LORD," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'

Where? Jer 31:31-34.

Context? God's people are in exile in Babylon but Jeremiah looks ahead when there will be a new exodus and a new covenant.

Bible scholars are not sure where **Joel** fits into all this. Some favour a time when Assyria became a major world power, others think it was written before Babylon took the people of Judah into exile and still others favour a time after the return from exile. Joel's message is important regardless of the time it was written.

In 331 BC the Greeks, under Alexander the Great, defeated the Persians, under Darius III (336-331 BC).

331-146 BC – Greek rule.

146 BC – 410 AD – Roman rule.

To finish

13. (a) Do you have a favourite Old Testament book?

(b) What is it?

(c) Why is it your favourite?

14. (a) Do you have any difficulties reading the Old Testament?

(b) What are they, if any?

Study 2, Joel ch 1, locust plague

Getting started

1. Have you ever been in the midst of a swarm of bees? What was it like? What did you do?

Bible

Listen to David Turner's introduction to his sermon on Joel chapter 1 (Joel1INTRODavidTurner.mp3).

2. Read Joel 1:1-18.



Listen to a description of the locust plagues in North America (NAmericanLocustPlague.mp3).

3. In Joel 1:1-18 . . .
 - (a) what is being described?
 - (b) what has been destroyed?
 - (c) whose land is it (vv 2, 6-7)?
 - (d) why are the "drinkers of wine" so upset (v 5)?
 - (e) who or what is the "nation" (v 6)?
 - (f) why are the priests so upset (vv 9, 13)?
 - (g) what are the priests told to do (vv 13-14)?

(h) what has the “day of the Lord” got to do with the locust plague?
(We will look more closely at the “Day of the Lord” theme in the next study.)

(i) why has this happened?

4. Read Joel 1:19-20.
(a) What else has happened?

(b) What is Joel doing about it?

It is not certain whether Joel is describing an actual bush-fire here (always dreaded in dry Palestine; see 1 Kings 19:12) or the effects of drought, or, as above, the barrenness left after the locust swarms. But in time of drought, or after the locusts, a bush-fire would be most destructive, and so perhaps a combination is meant. Earlier commentators have seen an allusion to the red wings and legs of some types of locusts.

From New Bible Commentary 3rd edition page 720.

To finish

5. (a) When something bad happens to you do you assume God is punishing you for your sins?
Why/why not?

(b) What bearing does Jesus' death and resurrection have on the idea that you are punished for your sins?

6. Joel chapter 1 does not mention the sins of the people.
(a) What other reason could there be for the locust plague?

(b) Does God have to tell us the reason he does things?

(c) How do you cope with not knowing why something bad has happened to you?

Study 3, Joel 2:1-11, the Day of the Lord

Getting started

1. Before reading any more of Joel what do you understand by the term “the Day of the Lord”?



The story so far . . .

Joel chapter 1 describes a locust plague that destroys much of the land and devastates the people. “Grain, wine and oil were necessary for the staple diet of Mediterranean countries – the grain to make bread; the fruit of the vine as daily drink; olive oil for cooking, cleansing, soothing, lighting and much else besides.” (From The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk by David Prior p 24.) Now it was all gone and Joel calls on the Lord.

Bible

2. Read Joel 2:1-11.
What does this passage tell you about “The Day of the Lord”?

[T]he concept of a ‘day’ which God has in store, which finds mention in seven different prophetic books, provides a focal point for the Old Testament perspective on the future. . . .

We find that the notion of such a day has certain often-recurring features. The most obvious is the warlike situation in which it is almost invariably understood to take place. Another is the ‘apocalyptic’ events which accompany it: the stars fall, the sun is darkened, there are tempestuous storms. In this situation, God’s enemies are supernaturally frightened and his army scarcely needs to fight at all to win the victory.

It is highly significant that battles of this kind are recorded in the early books of the Old Testament. For instance, the story of the exodus itself tells of a conflict in which God intervenes dramatically on behalf of the Israelites. The plagues, the death of the firstborn, and particularly the dividing of the sea, all fit into a pattern of divinely orchestrated events which militated in favour of those whom God was rescuing from the power of Pharaoh. Isaiah 9:4 refers to the ‘day of Midian’. This is most likely to be the supernatural defeat of the Midianites at the Hand of Gideon together with a mere 300 men (Judg. 7). The whole point of the story is that the Israelites were confronted with overwhelming numerical odds against them and that the Lord intervened to bring panic on their enemies. Very similar is the reference in Isaiah 28:21 to the two battles at which David won victories over the Philistines (2 Sam. 5:20, 25). Again panic played an important part, and these events were no doubt seen as instances of holy war similar to Joshua’s campaign to capture the land. . . .

Amos [and Joel] introduces a thoroughly antithetical note into what had been the traditional theological approach to the question of God’s military support for his people. The day that was anticipated with such relish would, he promised, turn out very differently.

From The Teaching of the Old Testament by John Job pp 114-115.

3. What apocalyptic events, mentioned above, appear in this passage (Joel 2:1-11)?

4. Read Amos 5:18-20.

Context: Amos was a layman, a shepherd and looked after fig trees. He lived in the southern kingdom, Judah, but God sent him to prophesy in the northern kingdom, Israel. In the first two chapters you can imagine the people cheering as Amos tells of God's coming judgement on Israel's enemies. But then Amos says that Israel too will suffer God's judgement unless she repents.

(a) Why would Israel long (Amos 5:18) for the Day of the Lord?

(b) What would be the "light" (Amos 5:18, 20) they were expecting (see Gen 12:1-3, 17:1-8)?

5. The "darkness" coming to Israel, described in the book of Amos, is similar to that in Joel. Read again . . . (a) Joel 2:1. Why blow a trumpet?

(b) Joel 2:2-10. Is this . . . - a literal army?

- a figurative army?

- an apocalyptic army?

- the locust plague?

Give reason(s) for your answers.

6. Read Joel 2:11. Put yourself in the place of the original hearers of this message. How would they have felt to know God was behind these disasters?

7. The Day of the Lord is a theme that develops through the Bible.

(a) Read Luke 4:16-21. Context: The first 2 chapters of Luke are about the miraculous births of Jesus and John the Baptist, and some events in Jesus' early life. In chapter 3 Jesus and John are now grown up and begin their separate ministries. Jesus is baptised by John, goes into the desert where he is tempted by the devil and then returns to Galilee.

What is Jesus saying will happen on this day?

(b) Read 2 Cor 1:12-14. Context: After adverse reactions to Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian church he receives good news from them and writes again (this letter of 2 Corinthians). He begins by writing about some of the problems he has encountered but also the comfort he has received from God.

What will happen on this day?

(c) Read 1 Thes 5:1-9. Context: Paul thanks God for this church and reminds them of the circumstances of his previous visit. He begins to answer their questions and give advice.

Why is it that this Day of the Lord is about salvation not judgement?

(d) Read Heb 10:23-25. Context: The writer of Hebrews works his way through Jewish concepts of creation, Law, rule, tabernacle, rest, priesthood, faith, covenant, the sacrificial system and he shows them that they are all superseded and obsolete but Jesus has brought in a way that is much better.

What is the right response as this Day approaches?

To finish

8. Christians both look back to the day of the Lord, as it can be seen fulfilled in various events in the career of Jesus, but also look forward to his future coming in an event which will consummate history. It is precisely this dual perspective that provides the vital link between the theological outlook of the two parts of the Bible when they are viewed as a whole.

From The Teaching of the Old Testament by John Job p 119.

(a) How does Jesus provide a link to the Old Testament?

(b) How can the Day of the Lord be all these things at the same time

- the day of judgement predicted by Joel
- the day Jesus is making things right as described in Luke 4:16-21
- the day of salvation as described in 1 Thes 5:1-9
- the day in the future which is eagerly waited for by God's people (Heb 10)?

For Israel, the good news is as much about God's kingly rule over the world (Is 40:9-10) as it is about his forgiveness (Is 40:1-2). The gospel proclaims both a Saviour who pardons wrong and a King who puts things right.

From the 2012 sermon series on Isaiah at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson.

¹ From Charles Dickens' novel A Tale of Two Cities this phrase points out a major conflict between family and love, hatred and oppression, good and evil, light and darkness, and wisdom and folly. Set at the time of the French Revolution Dickens begins his tale with a vision that human prosperity cannot be matched with human despair. He writes about a class war between the rich and the poor and the time of despair and suffering on the one hand and joy and hope on the other.

John Chapman explains **repentance** as follows:

In essence, repentance is a change of mind towards God with an accompanying change of behaviour. It is the point at which I admit that I have rebelled against God's rightful rule over my life and I declare my intention to obey God in the future to the best of my ability.

A genuine repentance would require that where my rebellion against God involved other people as well then I would need to make restitution whenever that was possible. . . .

Repentance is not basically feeling sorry. . . . Some of our sins make us feel bad. Others leave us fairly unaffected. Some make us feel guilty, others hardly cause a ripple across our pond. You may feel really sorry about something you have done, but have no real desire to start living a new life under Christ's authority. You may feel a strong sense of relief when something which has really been bothering you moves on. That is not repentance. It is possible to experience real sorrow and not be repentant. On the other hand you can be truly repentant and not feel sorry. . . .

1. *You can be sorrowful and not be repentant.* In repentance the question is not "Are you sorry?", but "Why are you sorry?" Is it because you feel bad or because you have sinned against God and have turned your back on Him. . . .

2. *You can be repentant and not sorrowful.* Jesus tells the story about a farmer and his two sons – "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

'I will not,' he answered, but later changed his mind [repented] and went.

Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing.

He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

Which of the two did what his father wanted?" (Matthew 21:28-32).

You can imagine the situation. The father comes to the first son, "Go work in the vineyard," he says.

Whether in his mind or out aloud you can hear the son say, "I'm sick of this place, I'm sick of the farm and I'm sick of work! I'm not going." He doesn't like it. But finally he repents and the reason we know that he did repent was that he went to work. I dare say he didn't like the farm or the farm work any more when he went, than when he said that he wouldn't go. But he did change his mind and exercised his will and obeyed. The second boy was full of good feelings toward his father but he was no real son, he said one thing and meant another. He changed his mind and exercised his will and disobeyed.

From A Fresh Start by John Chapman pages 152-156.

3. Compare John Chapman's explanation of repentance with how Joel 2:12-18 talks about repentance.
 - (a) What is different?

(b) What is the same?

4. What is God's grace in Joel 2:12-18?

5. What reasons are given in Joel 2:17 to suggest that God should show mercy?

Study 5, Joel 2:17-27

Getting started

1. (a) Have you ever “fallen out” with someone?

(b) If so, did you or the other person try to restore the relationship? How did it go?



The story so far . . .

After a locust plague that destroys much of the land and devastates the people Joel describes an unstoppable army who will come on the Day of the Lord. Surprisingly, God will be leading this army. But there is a chance the people will survive if they return to God.

Bible

2. Read Joel 17-27.
The priests beg for mercy (vv 17-18). What is God’s reply, in brief (vv 19-27)?

3. (a) What is the connection between the northern army (vv 20, 25) and the locusts (v25)?

(b) What was the purpose of the northern army?

4. God has a special concern for the land, “his land” (v18).
(a) What is God going to do in the land (vv 21-23)?

Note on v 23: But the greatest need after such a prolonged period of devastation and drought is rain, and lots of it. This is precisely what the Lord begins to give: *he has poured down for you abundant rain* (v 23). A variant reading (*yareh*, teacher, rather than *moreh*, early rain) would give rise to the rendering ‘he has given the teacher of righteousness’.

From The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk by David Prior p 67.

- (b) Why is the land so important (see Gen 12:1-3, 17:1-8)?

The call of Abraham is clearly an event of pivotal significance in the Bible. It was essentially a challenge to set foot on a pilgrimage in search of a land which would be revealed to him. . . .

The exodus and conquest are represented as the outworking of God's promise, though it is not until David overcomes the Jebusites that the process is complete, and the full extent of the land is in Israelite hands – from Dan in the north to Beer-sheba in the south. . . .

There were many warnings to the Israelites not to become like the Canaanites, whether by worshipping their gods (Deut 7:4) or by imitating such practices as divination (Deut 18:9-14) or child sacrifice, incest, fornication, homosexual acts, or bestiality (Lev 18:6-30). Were they to copy them in this way, they could only expect to be treated by God in the same way.

This was indeed what happened. . . .

They took notice neither of the reasons why the Canaanites had been driven out in the first place nor of the reasons why their sister kingdom in the north had been overpowered by the Assyrians. They had insisted on indulging in precisely the same typical sins as had all down the years led to dispossession of the land.

Even the return to Judah after the exile failed. . . . Jesus taught that in hankering for this [the return to the promised land] his fellow countrymen were failing to do justice to the whole sweep of scriptural prophecy. His own interpretation demanded that the promises of land in the Old testament should be understood not in terms of a physical space in which to live – he said himself that 'in the world' his disciples would be subject to vice-like pressure – but rather in terms of spiritual living room. . . .

God had transferred Christians from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his own son. In this way of expressing it, Christians are not on a journey: they have already arrived. . . .

But it is not clear, in spite of much contrary teaching today, that any of the Old Testament promises about the land are to be understood as awaiting a final literal fulfilment. The return of the Jews to Palestine is often viewed as an indication that scriptural prophecies are being realised in our day in just such a material way. But it is arguable that all the hopes held out to the original people of God are to be realised only in and through the person of Christ.

From The Teaching of the Old Testament by John Job pp 52-58.

5. Three times Joel uses the phrase "never again" (vv 19, 26-27) to describe a promise of security for his people. Considering the history of Israel (see study 1) when might this happen?

6. Joel 2:19-27 describes God's promise of restoration for the land and his people. Looking ahead, what part did Jesus play in this restoration?

To finish

7. (a) Why is it so hard to restore broken relationships?

(b) Is it hard for God? Why/why not?

Study 6, Joel 2:28-32, Holy Spirit

Getting started

1. What is a “vision”? Is it different from an idea or a plan? If so, in what way is it different?

2. Have you ever had a vision? What was it?



The story so far . . .

After a locust plague that destroys much of the land and devastates the people Joel describes an unstoppable army who will come on the Day of the Lord. Surprisingly, God will be leading this army. But there is a chance the people will survive if they return to God. In his mercy, God eliminates the invaders and restores the land and his people. But wait, there's more!

Bible

2. Read Joel 2:28-32.
How will the Holy Spirit effect people?

3. “And afterwards” (v 28) sounds vague. When did this happen?

4. How is the promise of Joel 2:27 developed in vv 28-32?

5. What has Joel 2:28-32 got to do with its context of restoring the land and the people?

Older people have always enjoyed respect in Israel. In this passage there may be an indication of a levelling-out of the age-gaps in this regard, as young men feel the impact and show the evidence of God's Spirit in their lives. There will also be a significant change in the positions enjoyed by men and women as a result of the Spirit's activity, which are here presented as equivalent. Although the Old Testament is not uniformly loaded in favour of men, it is essentially portraying a male-dominated society.

From The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk by David Prior p 73.

6. The pouring out of God's spirit didn't happen much in Old Testament times.

There are a few passages that indicate that the Spirit is involved in a more general way with the saving of the people of God [Ps 51:10-12, Isaiah 63:10-14], but the main emphasis in the Old Testament is the Spirit's role in the saving work of God through the anointed saviour figures.

From Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture by Graeme Goldsworthy p 239.

- (a) Why was the Spirit poured out at these events:

Num 11:24-29

Judges 11:29

Judges 15:14

1 Sam 16:10-14

1 Pet 1:10-11

- (b) What has the pouring out of the Holy Spirit got to do with the Day of the Lord?

7. Joel calls on the Lord in Joel 1:19 and again in Joel 2:32.

- (a) What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord?

- (b) What did salvation and deliverance (Joel 2:32) mean for someone in Joel's day?

Why does God move at all to do a work of salvation for a rebellious nation? From the point of view of the Old Testament it is because he is faithful to his covenant made with Abraham as an everlasting covenant (Gen 17:7). God wills to show steadfast love or covenant love to his chosen people (Isaiah 54:7-8, 55:3, Jer 33:10-11, Micah 7:18-20). . . .

God is faithful to the covenant and on that basis he will save a remnant of the people to be his own true possession. Like the judgement oracles [prophecies], the salvation oracles depict two related aspects of saving restoration. God will restore the covenant people to their inheritance and he will also restore the whole universe to a glory which has not been known since man was ejected from Eden.

From Gospel and Kingdom by Graeme Goldsworthy pp 81, 84.

(c) What does salvation and deliverance mean for us?

8. Read Acts 2:1-41.
 (a) How does Peter relate the words of Joel 2:28-32 (= Acts 2:17-21) to what is happening in Acts chapter 2 (hint: Acts 2:32-33)?

(b) What does it mean in Acts chapter 2 to call on the name of the Lord (see Acts 2:21, 37-41)?

God's choice of Pentecost as the time to pour out his Spirit through Jesus on the 120 disciples holds intriguing significance. That particular Jewish festival was to begin seven weeks from the time the sickle was put to the standing grain [Deut 16:9] – parallel to seven weeks since Jesus was crucified. It was the day of the firstfruits of the harvest, brought by the people to the temple, given to God but enjoyed by the priests. Under the new covenant in the blood of Jesus, the 'royal priesthood' [1 Pet 2:9] of all believers in Jesus enjoy God's gift of the spirit to his people as the firstfruits of their full inheritance [Jer 1:18, 1 Cor 15:20, 23, Rev 14:4].

From The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk by David Prior p 77.

To finish

9. Joel says that all God's people will have the Holy Spirit poured out on them. This happened at Pentecost (Acts ch. 2) and it still happening (1 Cor 12:13).
 (a) As a sign of the pouring out of the Spirit today should we expect Christians to prophesy, dream dreams and see visions (Joel 2:28)? Why/why not?

(b) How can we take this prophecy from Joel more seriously?

Study 7, Joel ch 3, judgement

Getting started

1. Play BattleHymnRepublicMormonTchoir.mp3

What does this song mean?

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence in the dim and flaring lamps;
His day is marching on.

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.
[originally ...His day is marching on]

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:
As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free;
[originally ...let us die to make men free]
While God is marching on.
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.
[originally ...While God is marching on]



Julia Ward Howe modified the words of two songs, "Canaan's Happy Shore" and "John Brown's Body". The new song suggested that the soldiers she passed [during the American Civil War 1861-1865] were fighting to build God's Kingdom on earth. In the very first line she proclaimed that this was no common historical event unfolding before them; this war was being fought to bring about "the glory of the coming of the Lord." In other words, crushing the South was part of a much larger series of events—the Second Coming of Christ and the realization of God's kingdom on earth. In the second and third lines, Howe made it even clearer that God was striding alongside man in his resolution to wipe out the evil that plagued the nation. God was trampling things, shooting lightning, and swinging a terrible sword. And for those slow to get the point, Howe stressed again in the first lines of the second verse that God had sided with the North: "I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps."

Nations and armies almost always manage to find God on their side, but "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" employed Biblical passages and quickly recognizable Christian phrases to make a very specific argument. God did not just favour the Union; He was marching alongside the Union soldiers as they paved the way for the Second Coming of His Son and the realization of His kingdom on earth.

From www.shmoop.com

The story so far . . .

After a locust plague that destroys much of the land and devastates the people Joel describes an unstoppable army who will come on the Day of the Lord. Surprisingly, God will be leading this army. But there is a chance the people will survive if they return to God. In his mercy, God eliminates the invaders and restores the land and his people and even promises to pour out his Spirit on all his people – young, old, male and female.

Bible

2. Read Joel ch 3.

(a) Who is going to suffer God's judgement according to this passage?

(b) In the first 2 chapters of Joel God's people were going to suffer God's judgement. What has changed?

Note on Joel 3:2, 12: In both these verses 'Jehoshaphat' (meaning 'Yahweh has judged') is associated with statements that God will judge (Heb. *Sapat*). Therefore it is probable that '**the valley of Jehoshaphat**' like 'the valley of decision' in v 14 is a term symbolic of the judgement, not a current geographical name.

From New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition p 548.

Note on Joel 3:4: **Tyre, Sidon and Philistia** were some of Israel's traditional foes. The Philistines (chiefly through David and Goliath [1 Sam 17], followed by Samson and Delilah [Judges 16]) for several centuries were immensely powerful. . . . Ezekiel summarises the cruelty of the Philistines . . . they 'acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of heart to destroy in never-ending enmity' (Eze 25:15). . . . The Phoenicians, whose main ports were Tyre and Sidon, were probably (through the years covered by the Old Testament) the major seafaring nation of the Mediterranean world. Tyre was the chief trading seaport. . . . It became the marketplace of the world. . . . With Tyre's vast commercial success went brazen arrogance, even to the point of declaring itself a god (Eze 28:2).

From The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk by David Prior pp 86-87.

Note on Joel 3:5-6: There is apparently, no historical record of such plundering by either the Philistines or the Phoenicians. It is likely that their motive was a mixture of opportunism and sheer greed: 'Tyre said concerning Jerusalem, "Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken, it has swung open to me; I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste"' (Eze 26:2). . . . There is solid historical evidence for this slave trade between these Mediterranean cities and the Greeks. . . . Amos also refers to the way Tyre was involved in the wholesale removal of an entire people into slavery [Amos 1:9]. . . . Not only were the Phoenicians happy to sell people, including Israelites, into slavery to fill their own coffers; they were equally happy to take people to be their own slaves in payment for their rich variety of goods: 'Javan [i.e. Greece], Tubal, and Meshech traded with you; they exchanged the persons of men and vessels of bronze for your merchandise' (Eze 27:13).

From The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk by David Prior pp 88-89.

Note on Joel 3:8: The **Sabeans** were an ancient people group mentioned in the Bible as coming from a nation far away from Israel (Joel 3:8). They were a people of stature (Isaiah 45:14) and a rival nation to Israel (Job 1:15). The Sabeans lived in the land of Sheba, which archaeology suggests was a Semitic trading state that existed for 1,000 years in the area that is now Yemen. The capital of Sheba was called Marib (or Ma'rib), and the kingdom existed from 1200 BC to AD 275, trading primarily in spices. . . . The Queen of Sheba, or the Queen of the South, who travelled a long way to hear Solomon's wisdom, was likely a Sabean, and the elaborate riches she gave to Solomon show that the Sabeans were a wealthy people.

From www.gotquestions.org

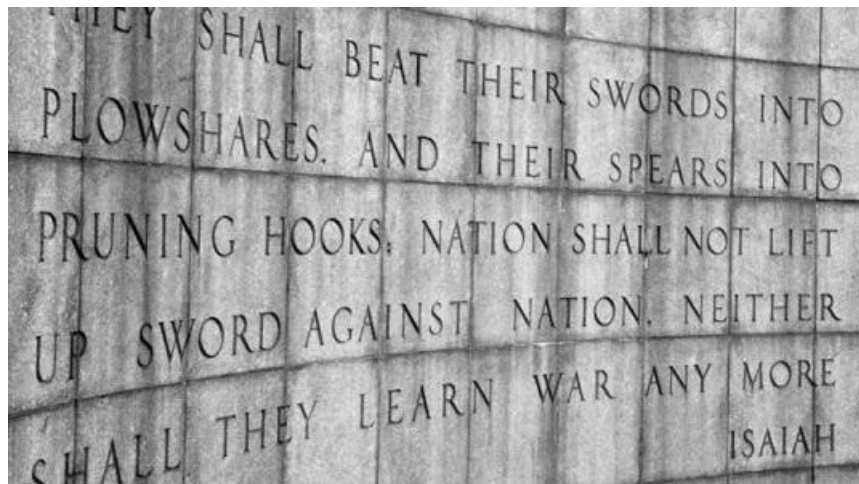
3. Why does God take things so personally (vv 4-5)?

4. How is God's justice presented as fair and equitable (vv 6-8)?

5. Why does God want all the nations to prepare for war (vv 9-11)?

Note on Joel 3:10: The **ploughshare** is the cutting or leading edge of a plough used to cut into the earth followed by a curved piece, the moldboard, which turns the earth over.

Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 reversed Joel 3:10 to use this as an image for peace. It is quoted on a wall outside the United Nations building in New York.



6. What does the "trampling of grapes" image mean (v 13 and see question 1 and Isaiah 63:3-6)?



7. What does Jesus' death and resurrection teach us about the defeat of God's enemies?

8. Joel describes God as a lion, a thunderstorm, a refuge and a stronghold (v 16). What do these images reveal about God's character?

9. (a) How does Joel end (vv 16-21)?

(b) How would these promises (vv 16-21) have comforted the original listeners who suffered from the locust plague?

(c) How are these promises relevant to us?

Note on Joel 3:18: This picture of superabundance surpasses the years of blessing following the restorative work of God after the locust plague. Nothing anyone has experienced, even in the most halcyon days of God's blessing, can begin to compare with what will be available to the people of God on that day. The promised land had originally been 'a land flowing with milk and honey' (Jos 5:6). Now, after all the vicissitudes of famine, war, locusts and other plagues, its fertility was to be assured. This superabundance would also indicate that the curse, pronounced on the land by God after the disobedience of Adam and Eve ('thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you', Gen 3:18), had at long last been lifted.

From The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk by David Prior p 99.

To finish

10. We best remember things that are relevant to us.
See how you go remembering what has been mentioned in Joel about - the Day of the Lord

- repentance

- restoration

- the Holy Spirit

- judgement

