

THE BOOK OF JOEL
Lesson 9, Chapter 4 Continued

We ended our previous lesson discussing the matter of Joel 4:4, where Tyre and Sidon are places God was going to pour out His wrath upon, and how that they were part of Phoenicia, which is modern day Lebanon. Sometimes the biblical names of places can be confusing so it helps to untangle it bit so that we can better picture in our minds where it was then and what it is now. Even the great Greek author Homer called the Phoenicians "Sidonians" (because Sidon was the most important city in Phoenicia), so regions and nations typically were referred to by various names even during the same era.

Modern day Gaza, which is so much in the news in our time , was in Bible times but one of the 5 main city-states that together formed Philistia. This is the Philistia that is spoken of in Joel 4:4. It is fascinating to me that Gaza has retained that same name, for the same place, for at least 3,000 years, and I don't think we should overlook the spiritual, if not geopolitical, significance that all throughout ancient times Philistia was an enemy of Israel, and it has reemerged as Israel's enemy today. This is not a historical accident; God has intended it to be so, I think in order that those with eyes and ears can see that historical relationship of enmity between the two peoples that will not end. The Palestinians of Gaza **are** the modern-day Philistines. In fact, Palestine is but the Greek word for the Hebrew *P'lishtim*, which when translated to English is Philistine... even though (clearly) the modern world is oblivious to this amazing fact as is the Christian Church in general.

Let's re-read Joel chapter 4 beginning with verse 5.

RE-READ JOEL CHAPTER 4:5 – end

In verse 5, Yehoveh is specifically accusing and calling-out Phoenicia (which is here called Tyre and Sidon) and Philistia (of which Gaza was their main city), of taking gold and silver from Judah and Jerusalem and using it in their temples to their gods. At all times we must keep in mind that while on earth the Holy Land (Israel) might seem to be but another political nation with a typical human government, to God this is not the case. Yehoveh, while giving over possession

of the rest of the earth to many different people and nations, has carved out a place that He calls His own particular property to be used only by His own particular and set-apart people. And, even His own people are not to think of their occupation of this land in terms of them owning it. Rather, they are to see themselves as but privileged land tenants living on property that God owns and is most jealous to keep. Thus, whatever possession of His people, their produce or minerals or any natural resource that are wrongly taken from His property, is an offense directly towards Him that will, in a time and manner of His choosing, be severely punished. This is what both ancient and modern Phoenicia (Lebanon) and Philistia (Gaza) are to expect. And when we see, today, what is happening between those places and Israel, it is (for me) astounding to realize how prophetic it is...and so what we are reading about in Joel about is happening right before our eyes! What does this tell us? We are in the End Times and we need to earnestly prepare for catastrophe after catastrophe; we will not go unscathed even though most Americans are blindly confident that we are sufficiently insulated as to avoid severe damage.

Verse 6 speaks of Phoenicia and Philistia (Gaza) kidnapping residents of Judah (Israel), and then selling them to Greek nations. In reality, the Hebrew word used is **Javan**, not Greece or Greek, and so we must understand this term in the way Joel and his hearers and readers would have understood it in the 8th century B.C. Like we see often have to do, wipe clean your brain's memory banks about what you've been taught from a biblical standpoint about Greece and Greeks.

Javan is the name of one of Japheth's 7 sons (Japheth was a son of Noah), and he is listed in the so-called Table of Nations in Genesis chapter 10. As such, Javan was the forefather of the Prophet Elisha, and of Tarshish, the people called the Hittites, and also the **Dodanim** also known in 1Chronicles as the **Rodanim** (these are the exact same people, it is just that there is some confusion in the Hebrew Bible about the spelling of their name because the letters **reysh** and **dalit** look so much alike that they are regularly accidentally mis-copied when the Scriptures were hand copied in ancient times). The **Dodanim** (or the **Rodanim**) occupied that area that later was called Macedonia and Greece. In Joel's time the term Javan was used much the same way as the term Tarshish came to be used in later Bible times. That is, it was used the same way that Westerners might say that something is as far away as Timbuktu. Timbuktu, while on the one hand is

an actual place in Africa, it is (on the other hand) used mostly as an expression to indicate some place...any place in general... that is very, very far away. Thus, when Joel used the term Javan, it simply meant a very distant place...not at all that it was Greece or where there were Greek speakers. Some modern Bible scholars use this verse as evidence that Joel was written no earlier than the 4th century B.C., after there came to be the nation of Greece and the Greek language became prolific, and probably after Alexander the Great conquered so much of the Middle East. I assure you this is not the case. To be clear: **Javan** did NOT mean either Greek speaking places or Greece itself; it was but an expression of people who lived far away. And since the Philistines and the Phoenicians were sea-faring peoples who lived on the Mediterranean coast, they were big in the slave trade business that sent and sold captured people (including Judeans and those who lived in Jerusalem) to other cultures of the distant nations of the known world.

While slavery and the slave trade were simply a normal part of various countries' economies of that time, God was totally against it and labeled it in The Law as a great sin. It was especially an offense against Him when it was His people that were captured and used as slaves. I must pause for a moment and speak of what is happening in Israel as I pen this lesson...October of 2023. Israel has been brazenly attacked (yet again) by Gaza (Philistia), and atrocities were committed against them that go beyond barbarian and are in fact monstrous and inhuman. Over 1300 Israeli civilians were murdered in cold blood. More than 200 Israelis have been kidnapped and taken to Gaza. Old and young men, women and children, even babies and grandmothers in wheel chairs were taken. They are being held to be sold to ransom or to be used as human shields against a reprisal by Israel. While we cannot label these captured victims as slaves, it amounts to exactly the same thing...kidnapping. Here is what God's Law says is to happen to kidnappers:

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

God, through Israel, is (as I write) in process of carrying out actions against Gaza that no doubt will have this result. So, as Believers and worshippers of the God of Israel, we ought not be surprised nor should we be against what Israel is doing;

the curse of The Law upon those who kidnap is being exacted and is just in God's eyes. Although Israel is mostly secular, it has always been so that people at times unknowingly carry out what they believe is their own will, but it actually is God's will. That is what is happening right now.

The idea of Phoenicia and Philistia removing people of Judah and Jerusalem and selling them to people far from their land (as verse 6 explains) is to keep them from accessing their God, Yehoveh. In far away lands it was believed these Israelites would have no means to access Yehoveh, nor could they sacrifice and atone for their sins, or ever be in a ritually clean state. Thus, the thought is less of exile as a corporate nation and more on individuals being kidnapped and sent away. Nonetheless, the blossoming concept here is of the Philistines and the Phoenicians suffering the same as they did to Israel; being forced out of what they consider their homeland never to return again. We can probably expect such a thing to happen to the modern-day Philistines, the Gazans, in this latest conflict between Israel and Gaza for their kidnapping of Israelis. In Deuteronomy we read this:

CJB Deuteronomy 30:2-3 ***² and you (Israel) will return to ADONAI your God and pay attention to what he has said, which will be exactly what I am ordering you to do today- you and your children, with all your heart and all your being. ³ At that point, ADONAI your God will reverse your exile and show you mercy; he will return and gather you from all the peoples to which ADONAI your God scattered you.***

However, as Moses will say a couple of verses later, the opposite will happen to those enemies that kidnap individuals and/or haul off the Israelites en masse to foreign nations.

CJB Deuteronomy 30:7-8 ***⁷ ADONAI your God will put all these curses on your enemies, on those who hated and persecuted you; ⁸ but you will return and pay attention to what ADONAI says and obey all his mitzvot which I am giving you today.***

That is, just as we read in Joel, Israel's and the nations' fates shall be the opposite of each other. Thus Joel 4:7 – 8 says:

CJB Joel 4:7-8 ***7 I will rouse them from the place where you sold them and pay you back right on your own head- 8 I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Y'hudah; and they will sell them to the men of Sh'va, a nation far off; for ADONAI has spoken.***

Sheva today could best be described as Saudi Arabia. So, it may well be that many members of the Gaza community could see themselves winding up as refugees in Saudi Arabia, or some other Arab speaking nations.

Verse 9 begins: ***'Proclaim this among the nations: 'Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men approach and attack.'***

This war being spoken of is not a regular war; rather it is a God-driven Holy War. Therefore, the game is rigged; God (and therefore Israel) can't lose. The nations are doomed. This call for war is written in a poetic fashion. When God says to "proclaim" this call to war among the nations, it means for those of each nation who are the spokesmen and leaders to have a thought supernaturally conveyed to them, which they announce to their people, to come against Israel. There will be some kind of a sign that the Lord will initiate to cause the nations to, in concert, assemble to attack God's people. So, to get the best idea of what this means it is NOT God declaring war per se, but rather He is saying to **prepare** for war; that is, every nation's messengers... their heroes and respected military commanders and (in our day) news and social media... is to awaken and arouse the people of every nation to a fury and passion that they demand war against Israel. Yet, this is but God drawing these nations unwittingly into a death trap due to their hatred for His people, Israel. This verse harkens back and directly connects to verse 2: ***I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Y'hoshafat [ADONAI judges]. I will enter into judgment there for my people, my heritage Isra'el, whom they scattered among the nations; then they divided my land.***

The nations think this will be the final, decisive battle for the heart and soul of the world that depends upon eradicating the trouble-maker Israel, which will automatically include eradicating the 2 great faiths it has spawned: Judaism and followers of Yeshua as Lord and Savior. But, in reality... because it is a God-ordained Holy War... it will not be the end of Israel, rather it will be the end of the gentile nations and their constant drumbeat of oppression against, and

now a determination to annihilate, Israel, the Jewish people, and (I am now certain it will include) all people of faith in Jesus. We see today that the nations, in wholesale manner, are quickly marching towards such a mindset and outcome.

These verses in Joel point directly to a prophecy that would be written some years later in Ezekiel. As Bible students we need to be particularly familiar with this connection; and as Believers in Yeshua, living in a time that I believe these events will happen in our lifetimes (perhaps our children's lifetimes) it is critical that we know these prophecies so that we can recognize what is happening when it finally happens, but also to teach others who simply don't know or understand. Therefore, I'm going to pause for several minutes as we, together, read Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 that fleshes out what God is telling us through Joel. So, open your Bibles and follow along with me.

READ EZEKIEL CHAPTERS 38 AND 39

This battle with God and Magog is exactly what Joel is speaking about: the judgment of the nations by means of God drawing them into war and destroying them. Obviously there will be those left alive from each nation, but I believe other Bible authors explain that those who are left alive from each nation will only be Believers. Now; let me be clear. Whatever you think the Rapture to be (and, for me, it is not at all clear exactly what this is or what it is going to look like), it will NOT have occurred yet... the battle of Ezekiel 38 and 39 will occur with Believers still here on earth to suffer right along with everyone else. This means that we must prepare to experience sufferings and shortages and damage right along with our neighbors who are not Believers. What is described in Ezekiel and Joel in this regard is a national, corporate judgment and not a judgment of individuals. Trust in Yeshua is salvation for individuals, and not for nations. Whatever nation we reside in will be decimated, and we will all experience it. So, as I have prescribed in other lessons on the Minor Prophets... PREPARE! Prepare your souls and spirits through biblical knowledge and a trusting relationship with God. But, also be practical and prepare your pantries and households. Buy preparation supplies and learn how to use them...NOW! This is something you all can do and should do to be responsible, to whatever level you think best and are able. I realize that most of us don't really have much knowledge of how to

properly prepare or what to obtain. For instance, I wouldn't recommend buying an entire pallet of long-term freeze-dried foods for your family that could, theoretically, last you a year or more. That's probably a bit of overkill and impractical. Rather, a reasonable amount is warranted and needed, and it won't break the bank to obtain it or to store it. Most people need help to make wise and informed decisions about this matter, and so as important as this is I'm going to take the unusual step of recommending a place online to go to learn and then to obtain the needed preparation supplies in a level-headed type and amount, because I am confident in their integrity. Go to www.practicalprepco.com and there you'll get the info and products you need to protect you and your family, but also it will help you to avoid overdoing it or buying the wrong things or getting scammed. Preparing is a process, not a sudden large purchase. I'm sure that the day Covid struck many people wish they would have done some amount of general preparedness beforehand. In our day, these earth-shattering events happen quickly, with little warning, and realities can change literally overnight. But, for Believers, we HAVE been warned. We have no excuse NOT to prepare, so we need to take heed and act, and not put it off.

If anyone knows the Bible well, verse 10 is for them somewhat ironic. Here, the nations (Israel's enemies) are told to beat their plough-blades into swords and their pruning-hooks into spears. That is, the metal objects used for peaceful food production must now be melted down and re-formed into weapons of war. No doubt this is at least partially meant as an expression of a nation moving from peacetime to a war footing. I say ironic, because we read the following in Isaiah:

CJB Isaiah 2: 1-4 This is the word that Yesha'yahu the son of Amotz saw concerning Y'udah and Yerushalayim: ² In the acharit-hayamim the mountain of ADONAI's house will be established as the most important mountain. It will be regarded more highly than the other hills, and all the Goyim will stream there. ³ Many peoples will go and say, "Come, let's go up to the mountain of ADONAI, to the house of the God of Ya'akov! He will teach us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths." For out of Tziyon will go forth Torah, the word of ADONAI from Yerushalayim. ⁴ He will judge between the nations and arbitrate for many peoples. Then they will hammer their swords into plow-blades and their spears into pruning-knives; nations will not raise swords at each other, and they will no longer learn war.

Just as Ezekiel was directly connected to Joel, so is Isaiah 2. Notice how this addresses Judah and Jerusalem, just as we're reading in Joel. The irony is that after Joel tells the nations to beat their farm instruments into weapons of war, now Isaiah says that the nations will beat their weapons of war back into implements of farming and agriculture because there will be no more conflicts and wars. No more war against Israel and no more of nation against nation. A new age has dawned. God has drawn the nations into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the war has happened, the nations have been judged and defeated, and all that is left are Believers in Yehoveh, and I must assume that also means these same people are Believers in Messiah Yeshua. Thus, because of that, gentiles from all the nations will say "Let's go to Israel...to the holy mountain in Jerusalem and worship". And we're told that out of Tzion (which is a word reserved for a redeemed Jerusalem), will go forth....what? Torah. Most English Bibles have it that Isaiah 2:3 says "the law will go forth". This is a bad translation. The actual, original Hebrew word is Torah. Now remember: this is depicting a time long after Christ's first advent and perhaps during this great war Yeshua has returned. The Battle of Armageddon is over. War is over, the nations are at rest, and the Prophet Isaiah says that knowledge of the Torah will go forth from Jerusalem to the nations that now (in my estimation) consist only of Believers. Hebrew Roots and Messianic folks, it's kind of nice to have a head start on this, isn't it? How I pray that our brothers and sisters in the Lord...those who call themselves Christians and go to many different denominational Churches... would finally see that the Torah is for them, too, and realize this fact BEFORE all these horrific events take place.

The final words of verse 10 probably better belong as the first words of verse 11. That is, verses 10 and 11 would read better if verse 11 said: ***Let the weak say, 'I am strong.' Hurry, come, you surrounding nations, gather yourselves together!' Bring your warriors down, ADONAI!*** This arrangement would be better because "the weak" who say they are strong is referring to those who want to be warriors and fight Israel. But, by ancient (as well as modern) standards, the weak don't fight as warriors; that's a job only for the strong. These words are simply God telling every nation to "bring it on". Bring every person who is even remotely capable of fighting, and who wants to fight Israel, to the Valley of Jehoshaphat so that He can judge them there, too, for their intent to harm His people.

The idea of hurry and suddenness is also introduced. While this could indicate a few different things, I believe it means that this war is going to come about all of a sudden. One day, while there might be a lot of vitriol hurled towards Israel, overnight that vitriol turns to a rabid determination by the nations to attack Israel, which they do... whether as a coalition or separately. What that final provocation to attack might be, I don't know. What we should grasp here is that this prophesied rapid and sudden aspect of war wasn't really possible for militaries in ancient times. It took months to plan for battle and to get the logistics in place. Only in modern times do we have nearly all nations with substantial standing armies that can react quickly. These armies typically have vast supplies of weapons, ammunition, food and support items stored away for a potential conflict that can be quickly tapped. We have swift ways to deploy troops (by air), and even faster ways to deliver damaging munitions upon an enemy (via rockets and missiles) that can reach Israel from anywhere on the globe in 30 minutes after launch. So, whatever Joel is picturing as coming is going to happen suddenly with little to no warning.

Verse 12 continues the same thoughts by more or less repeating earlier statements. This war God is calling the nations to is the judgment of the nations. This war is the vehicle of God's wrath on the nations. They are doomed the minute they decide to fight, even though I don't know exactly how long the fighting will go on before the nations' forces are wiped out and the armies simply no longer exist. One thing that we need to notice (especially after the mention of the Philistines and of Phoenicia) is that God seems to be directing this instruction to the nations arraying for battle that are primarily those nations surrounding Israel. That is, the nations of what we could loosely call the Middle East. This certainly doesn't exclude other nations, but we must understand that from the worldview of the 9th century B.C., it was the nations nearer to Israel that regularly harassed them, and would in time exile the people, as opposed to far away nations from places no one even knew existed.

In verse 13, 3 illustrations that are metaphors using agricultural terms that were familiar to all people of that era are used in explaining how God will deal with Israel's (Judah and Jerusalem's) enemies. The grain, the grapes, and the olives (representing all the wicked nations that have gathered, but not intending to

divide those nations into 3 groups) are said to be ready for the harvest. There are so many New Testament statements and statements of earlier Old Testament prophets that speak precisely of this event. In one of Yeshua's famous parables, He said this:

CJB Matthew 13:36-43 ***³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His talmidim approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world. As for the good seed, these are the people who belong to the Kingdom; and the weeds are the people who belong to the Evil One. ³⁹ The enemy who sows them is the Adversary, the harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send forth his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all the things that cause people to sin and all the people who are far from Torah; ⁴² and they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where people will wail and grind their teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let him hear!***

So, we see Joel chapter 4 being played out here. In Jeremiah we find a similar theme.

CJB Jeremiah 51:33 ***For here is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el, says: "The daughter of Bavel is like a threshing-floor at treading-time. Just a little while longer, and the time for harvesting her will come."*** And, again in Revelation:

CJB Revelation 14:18-20 ***¹⁸ Then out from the altar went yet another angel, who was in charge of the fire; and he called in a loud voice to the one with the sharp sickle, "Use your sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because they are ripe!" ¹⁹ The angel swung his sickle down onto the earth, gathered the earth's grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's fury. ²⁰ The winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress as high as the horses' bridles for two hundred miles!***

There are other passages using the same agricultural motif to describe the End Times battle of the war to end all wars, which results in the decimation of the gentile nations of the world...and especially those nations of the Middle East who have harmed Israel at one time or another for so long. The point of all of these statements is that the nations are now fully ripe and finally ready to harvest. That is, they have slowly over the millennia developed and embraced such wickedness that they are now fully matured, overflowing to the maximum with evil. And that evil is especially expressed as a hatred for Israel and the Jewish people. Thus, all the opportunity has now passed for those relative few who see the wickedness and determine instead to turn to righteousness and to run into the waiting arms of our God and Savior ...and so no more time is allotted by God; the earth's nations are ready to harvest. Only this harvest won't be put into the barns, or made into wine to be symbolically used by our Heavenly Father. No. He is harvesting only to burn up these crops (that, to Him, are but weeds and brambles), destroying them once and for all. It is just like in the time of Noah, and the same agricultural metaphors and illustrations for the centuries of man's growing wickedness could have been used (although they are not used in Genesis concerning the Great Flood) because the end result is the same. Only the righteous in the Lord will survive God's wrath.

We'll stop here and continue in Joel chapter 4 next time.