

IV. *The Judge Is Coming!*

26-Dec-04 Joel 3:1-21 Robertson Chapter 5

Theme: Christ will return again to judge the nations and to restore His people to eternal paradise on the final Day of the LORD.

Key Verses: Joel 3:12-14 ¹²Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. ¹³Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; For the winepress is full, The vats overflow – For their wickedness is great. ¹⁴Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

Review

Last week we ran out of time looking at 15 verses – Joel 2:18-32. It divides into two parts: the fifth and sixth sections of this short book. **The fifth section of Joel (2:18-27) is a parallel panel to the first section (1:2-14). In it, the devastation due to the swarming locust, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust is reversed. God hears the repentant prayers of His people and has pity on them. He renews their physical and spiritual prosperity. He removes the reproach and shame of their sin and destroys their enemies. Instead of a call to mourn, there is a call to rejoice in the goodness of God’s blessings. God promises to restore the years that the locusts have eaten – a wonderful promise that sin can be forgiven and that the sinner can be restored to fellowship with the living God. Finally God promises the ultimate blessing – Himself.** The covenant is renewed and God dwells in the midst of His people – “I will be your God and you will be My people” – The Immanuel Principle, come to perfection through Jesus Christ.

The blessings of the fifth section are taken up a notch in the sixth section (2:28-32), where the gift of the Holy Spirit is promised. “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My spirit on all flesh.” This promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to the Church, and it is continually being fulfilled as Christians are added to the Kingdom of God day by day. The gift of prophecy was given to that first generation to enable them to write the Scriptures of the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That Day of the LORD – the day in which the Lord came in power upon the Church – was truly a day of cataclysmic change, as symbolized by the eclipse of the heavenly bodies as described by Joel. But the key to that Day of the LORD was in the salvation that came to those who called on the name of the Lord, among those whom the Lord called. We continue to rejoice that God is still in the business of saving sinners through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Today we look at the seventh and final section of Joel’s prophecy, 3:1-21. **The second half of Joel’s book continual increases the scope of God’s blessings: first in the reversal of the locust invasion; next in the gift of the Holy Spirit; and now in this passage, in the culmination of history at the final judgment and the ushering in of the final Kingdom.** Joel has worked his way from a local, historical locust plague to the consummation of all things. Let’s take a look.

Exposition

We've looked at the Day of the LORD in the book of Joel. We've seen the Day of the LORD refer to the locust invasion of Joel's day; we've seen it refer to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. **Now, we are looking at another Day of the LORD, the final Day of the LORD, when He comes again to sit in judgment upon the nations.** As we look at Joel 3 today, think about Matthew 25:31-46 – the judgment of the sheep and the goats. Also Revelation 14 draws heavily upon Joel chapter 3.

Robertson writes: "Judgment begins with the house of God. But God will not fail to judge the nations of the world. First multitudes of locusts bring judgment; now multitudes of people undergo judgment. First the locusts create a sparseness of crops; now the nations form a harvest of multitudes. Once more the sun and moon are darkened. But now Judah has completed passing through its judgment and the time has come for the nations of the world to give account. This, then, is **the theme of the final chapter of Joel: the judgment of the nations will take place with the coming of the Day of the LORD (3:1-21).**"

The final section of Joel can be divided into three parts, each one dominated by a valley: The Valley of Jehoshaphat (3:1-8); the Valley of Decision (3:9-16); and the Valley of Acacias (3:17-21). The first two valleys describe essentially the same thing – the judgment of the nations; the final valley is the valley of eternal life.

A. The Valley of Jehoshaphat (3:1-8)

1. The Courtroom (3:1-2a)

God declares that He is going to hold a trial against all nations. That trial will take place "in those days and at that time." When is that? In connection with what Joel has said before, it likely means after the events of the locust plague of Joel's day. Joel had been dealing with the locust plague, but he stepped it up a notch when he said that the Spirit would be poured out "afterward." We know the Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, so perhaps 750-850 years after Joel. Now he is linking chapter three with that time period, "in those days and at that time."

We know from other parts of scripture, that **the time from Christ until now is considered 'the last days.'** Peter himself, in introducing the quote from Joel 2:28-32 at Pentecost, says "And it shall come to pass in the *last days*" (**Acts 2:17**). The writer of Hebrews says that God "has in these *last days* spoken to us by His Son" (**Heb. 1:2**). So, "in those days and at that time" is linked to these "last days." **From the context of the rest of the chapter, it seems evident that Joel is in fact talking about the end of the last days, or the Final Judgment to come.**

"When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem" (NIV, 3:1a) thus cannot refer to the locust invasion era, but the Christian era when the Church is being built up.

The defendants in this trial will be all nations. The courtroom will be the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There is no physical valley of that name in Judah or Israel. The reference could be to an event in the life of King Jehoshaphat of Judah (cp. 1 Kgs. 22; 2 Chr. 20). However, it is more likely that **the significance of the name is in its meaning: "the valley where the LORD will judge."** This seemed confirmed by the assertion of God that He "will enter into judgment with them there." The Valley of Jehoshaphat will be the courtroom where God judges the nations. "All rise! Here comes the Judge!"

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2. The Crimes (3:2b-3)

Next, Joel describes the crimes of the defendants against the victim, “My people, My heritage Israel.” Already it doesn’t sound good for the defendants if the Judge refers to the victim in this possessive way!

Three charges are brought: 1) they have scattered God’s people; 2) they have divided up God’s land; and 3) they have bought and sold God’s people as slaves. Prior reminds us that since this trial takes place after Pentecost, “this day of reckoning will essentially focus on the way nations have treated the church of Christ, God’s people under the new covenant, the Israel of God (Gal. 6:10).

Gal. 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We are commanded to love one another, especially the Church. **What are the nations being judged on? How they treated the Church.** Remember the judgment of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46. What is the judgment against the goats?

Matthew 25:44-46 ⁴⁴Then they also will answer Him saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?” ⁴⁵Then He will answer them, saying, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these [My brethren – vs. 40], you did not do it to Me.” ⁴⁶And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

The goats are judged on how they treated the brethren of Christ – his people, the Church. What separates the sheep from the goats? What they did, and didn’t, do. Let us love one another in this Body, that we may fulfill the law of Christ.

3. The Culprits (3:4-6)

In verses 4-6 we have two specific culprits listed: Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia. These nations were guilty of the slave trade in Joel’s day, as we will see in two weeks when we study chapter 1 of the book of Amos. I believe that **Joel is giving his readers a contemporary example of a universal theme.** If we were writing the book of Joel today, perhaps we would have substituted Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as the “axis of evil.” The important thing is to realize that **no nation, no individual will escape the Judge in the final Day of the LORD.**

4. The Consequences (3:7-8)

The consequences meted out to these culprits follows the *lex talionis*: where the punishment is fit for the crime. Because these nations were guilty of selling Jewish slaves, who had no love of the water, across the sea to Greeks, God will sell these sea-faring nations into slavery to the desert-dwelling Sabians. How about that for a fit punishment? Historically, we know that “the incursions of Artaxerxes III Ochus led to Sidon’s enslavement (343 BC), while Alexander [the Great] sealed the fate of Tyre and Gaza (332 BC)” (Hubbard).

This is the end of the first part of chapter 3 – The Valley of Jehoshaphat. It has introduced the theme of God’s judgment upon the nations. That theme will continue and intensify in the next valley – the Valley of Decision.

B. The Valley of Decision (3:9-16)

The Valley of Decision intensifies the theme of God’s judgment because it now presents it as a “holy war.” The valley of decision is more than a courtroom; it is a battlefield in which the forces of the nations are arranged against the Sovereign LORD and Judge of the world.

1. The LORD Calls (3:9-13)

a. *The Warriors (3:9-10)*

The heavenly herald, perhaps God Himself, issues the clarion call to war. The phrase *prepare for war!* uses the same word used earlier by Joel to *consecrate a fast* (1:14, 2:15) and to *sanctify the congregation* (2:15). **This war is to be consecrated, sanctified, or set apart from the common use. It is not a normal war. It is a holy war.** Robertson explains: “**This war is ‘holy’ because the Lord himself instigates this war to establish His holiness.** God does not summon people to judgment when they decide they are adequately prepared with a defense for their actions. Judgment comes when the Judge is ready.”

God calls the warriors of the nations to prepare for this holy war. Notice the reversal of the more familiar description regarding plowshares and pruning hooks found in Isaiah and Micah:

Isaiah 2:4 ⁴He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; *They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks;* Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.

Micah 4:3 ³He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; *They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks;* Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.

Now, at the beginning of this quarter, I “supposed” that Joel was written about 100 years before Isaiah or Micah. That means that rather than Joel reversing the quotation from Isaiah and Micah, Izzy and Mike are using Joel as their source material. It is interesting, isn’t it? **Joel talks about taking farming implements and turning them into weapons of war to fight against the Lord at the Final Judgment. Isaiah and Micah talk about turning those weapons back into the farm tools after the Judge has rendered His verdict and ushered in the everlasting Kingdom.** Joel will eventually get to that subject as well, but first he has a bit more to say regarding the judgment of the nations.

b. *The Mighty Ones (3:11)*

The warriors of the nations finish converting their plowshares and pruning hooks into weapons so that they can gather against the Judge. I am reminded of Psalm 2:

Psalm 2:1-2 ¹ Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? ²The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.

As the nations gather for war, Joel prays that God will also gather His warriors: *Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. Who are God’s Mighty Ones?* God is the LORD God of Hosts – He is the Captain of the Heavenly Host of angels. **God’s angelic host is now called into battle array to confront the warriors of the nations.** Prior suggests that there may be a “subliminal reminder of the locusts, which God had clearly called ‘My great army’ (2:25). Joel’s conviction is that an army of angels, on a par (numerically at least) with God’s locust army, will

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be needed in this great showdown with the nations.” Remember what Christ says about His second coming?

Matthew 25:31-32 ³¹When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and *all the holy angels with Him*, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

c. *The Judge (3:12)*

So, the angels come to face the nations who are at war with God. The place is again named as the *Valley of Jehoshaphat* – the valley where the LORD will judge. It is later called the Valley of Decision in verse 14, which has essentially the same meaning. **Notice what God says He intends to do in this valley of decision. “For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.”** *I will sit to judge.* Once again, I will repeat Matthew 25:31-32. This time notice not who comes with Christ, but what Christ does:

Matthew 25:31-32 ³¹When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then *He will sit on the throne of His glory.* ³²All the nations will be gathered before Him, and *He will separate them one from another*, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

When Christ returns at His Second Coming, He will sit in judgment. That is the picture of Matthew 25:31-32, and that is the picture of Joel 3:12. The LORD God, Jesus Christ, is coming again to judge the nations.

d. *The Harvest (3:13)*

The metaphor changes in verse 13. We are now transported from a battle, from a courtroom, to a grape harvest. The picture here should be fairly familiar. A portion of the book of Revelation is based on this verse:

Rev. 14:14-19 ¹⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a *sharp sickle*. ¹⁵And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “*Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.*” ¹⁶So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. ¹⁷ Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. ¹⁸And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “*Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.*” ¹⁹So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into *the great winepress of the wrath of God.*

Rev. 19:15 ¹⁵Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads *the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

These words are better known from the first verse of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, by Julia Ward Howe:

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,

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He has loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword
His truth is marching on.

God the Farmer-Judge calls His Mighty Ones, His farm hands, His angelic host, to begin the harvest of the wicked. God told Abraham in **Genesis 15:16** that “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” However, here **at the Final Judgment the wicked are ripe for judgment.**

Prior observes: “The language of harvesting grain and wine again evokes the locust devastation. God’s army had then chomped the fields bare and stripped the vines of their grapes (1:10-12). This destruction had been reversed by the goodness of the LORD (2:22-24). Now the harvest was ripe again — for judgment, not joy. The vats were again overflowing (2:24; 3:13) – with wickedness, not wine.”

2. The LORD Roars (3:14-16a)

a. *Decision (3:14)*

The Final Judgment is now described for us in the Valley of Decision. Boice ironically points out that **“this is not the decision of the evangelistic meeting. It is the decision of the court, and the one making the decision is not the one who has rejected Christ but the Christ he or she has rejected. This is God’s decision, a decision that will determine people’s destinies forever.”**

b. *Darkness (3:15-16a)*

We are reminded again that this Final Judgment is also a Day of the LORD – the final Day of the LORD. By now, we should be getting used to this cataclysmic language of “the sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake.” **This is the final downfall of the powers of the earth. Their lights are going out. Christ uses exactly the same language when He talks about His Second Coming:**

Matthew 25:29-31 ²⁹Immediately after the tribulation of those days *the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.* ³⁰Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹And He will send His angels with *a great sound of a trumpet*, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Paul describes essentially the same thing:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with *a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.* And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.

3. The LORD Shelters (3:16b)

When Jesus Christ comes again, He will roar as the Lion of Judah. It will sound like a shout or trumpet blast. The powers of this earth will be shaken and cast down forever. But His elect will be gathered together, and we will be with the Lord forever. Joel is saying the same thing when

he talks about the LORD being a “shelter for His people.” **On that great and final Day of the LORD, God Himself “is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1).**

The Valley of Decision against the nations has become the Valley of Blessing for God’s people. The enemies of God’s people, the foes of the Church, the nations who rage vainly against the Ruler of the Earth, have been judged and destroyed. Robertson comments: “**A summons to judgment should terrify the unbeliever.** He will be brought to account for all the wrong he has done. **But for the believer in Christ, the valley of God's judicial decision has been transformed into a door of hope (cp. Hos. 2:15).** The one who trusts the Lord for his salvation already stands acquitted of his crimes, and awaits expectantly his entrance into glory. The last section of Joel talks about that expectation of glory.”

C. The Valley of Acacias (3:17-21)

Fittingly, **this final portion of Joel’s prophecy is arranged as a seven-part chiasm:**

- A. The LORD dwells in Zion (3:17a)
- B. Jerusalem is holy (3:17b)
- C. No aliens shall every pass through (3:17c)
- X. Paradise restored (3:18)
- C’. Egypt/Edom destroyed (3:19)
- B’. Jerusalem/Judah abides forever because they are acquitted (3:20-21a)
- A. The LORD dwells in Zion (3:21b)

As such, I will deal with the parts chiastically.

1. *The Presence of God (3:17a, 21:b)*

Bracketing this final section about the future state of glory is the fitting statement that “The LORD dwells in Zion.” Again we are reminded that **the Lord is a covenant God in relationship with His people. This is the Immanuel Principle again** – God dwelling in the midst of his people. The prophet Ezekiel saw the same thing in his vast vision of the New Jerusalem and its Temple. The final word of Ezekiel is as follows:

Ezekiel 48:35 ³⁵All the way around shall be eighteen thousand cubits; and the name of the city from that day shall be: *THE LORD IS THERE.*

It doesn’t matter where “there” is as long as the Lord is there. John saw the same thing in his vision of the heavenly city Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth:

Revelation 21:1-3 ¹Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ²Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.*”

Jesus Christ came to dwell among us, to tabernacle with His people for a time (John 1:14), and He will tabernacle with us again throughout all eternity. **Joel thus reminds us that heaven, eternity future, will be the place in which the Lord dwells with His people.**

2. The Perfection of God's People (3:17b, 20-21a)

The place where God dwells with His people will be made holy. Our sin will be forgiven, our guilt acquitted. The Judge has tried the nations and found them guilty; but the people of God will be found not guilty. Thus we shall dwell with the Lord forever, from generation to generation without end. Prior says: “**Holiness is the result of the presence of God. God makes Jerusalem ‘the holy city’ because He dwells there with His people.** There is no other way to holiness, no other kind of holiness. A holy people, a holy life, a holy place, a holy city come from the presence of a holy God.”

3. The Purge of God's Enemies (3:17c, 3:19)

Prior continues: “**Holiness is gloriously positive — nothing less than the nature of God — but it also excludes anything or anyone unholy.**” **The new Jerusalem will be purged of God's enemies.** “No alien shall ever pass through her again.” There will be no chance of corruption, no opportunity for sin to return. The holy Lord will not permit it. Egypt and Edom seem to be eschatological types of the alien nation that will not be allowed in because of their sin against the people of God. In that day of final judgment, they are made desolate like an empty desert wilderness. Meanwhile, the new Jerusalem is described as a beautiful garden.

4. The Paradise of God (3:18)

Verse 18 is the focal point of the final chiasm of Joel. It represents nothing less than a return to the Paradise of the original creation – Eden. The Bible starts with a Garden but ends with a City. The new Jerusalem is really a Garden-City, a glorified place of beauty and perfection. Robertson points out that “the Lord has indeed restored the years that the locust has eaten.”

The imagery of Joel reflects the Promised Land description as a “land flowing with milk and honey” (described 20 times in the OT; e.g., Ex. 3:8; Lev. 20:24; Num. 13:27; Dt. 6:3; Jos. 5:6). Amos picks up on Joel's mountains that drip with wine (Amos 9:13). Obviously the damage done by the locust invasion has been fully reversed.

The imagery of Paradise is further extended by Joel's portrayal of abundant flowing waters. Eden was watered by a river that split into four headwaters (Gen. 2:10-14). From Eden, the rest of the world was watered. **Joel pictures abundant water springing forth from Paradise, with the source of that water being the “house of the Lord.” God is always the life-giving source.** This picture of a fountain flowing from the Temple is picked up later in Scripture:

Zechariah 14:8 ⁸On that day *living water will flow out from Jerusalem*, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.

Revelation 22:1-2 ¹Then the angel showed me *the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb* ²down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Ezekiel 47:1-12 ¹The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and *I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east* (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south

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of the altar. ²He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was flowing from the south side. ³As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. ⁴He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. ⁵He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in-a river that no one could cross. ⁶He asked me, "Son of man, do you see this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. ⁸He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh. ⁹Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. ¹⁰Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds-like the fish of the Great Sea. ¹¹But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. ¹²Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing."

This then is the Valley of the Acacias – acacia wood being the wood used to build the first dwelling place of God – the tabernacle (Ex. 26:15). It is a place where the purified people of God dwell in perfect peace and harmony with the Lord forever and ever.

Conclusion

What a conclusion! What a book! Joel started off talking about locusts. Locusts everywhere. The day of the locust quickly gave way to the Day of the LORD. We've seen the Day of the LORD in Joel as a temporal judgment upon His people, but we've also seen it transformed into a great blessing upon the Church as well through the gift of the Holy Spirit, poured out on all flesh. And finally, we've seen both sides of that final Day of the LORD – when Jesus Christ returns at the end of human history to judge the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the Valley of Decision. The nations will be destroyed, but the people of God will be sheltered by the Lord forever in the Valley of Acacias – the valley of the dwelling place of God. Our God dwells in Zion, and we will dwell with Him forever in a place free from sin and corruption, sorrow and pain.

This concludes our studies in the book of Joel. Next week we will begin looking at the prophecy of Amos. We'll start out with the 2 introductory verses of Amos chapter 1, and then skip ahead to chapter 7, where we have an autobiographical moment to further introduce us to the prophet from Tekoa.

Next week: Lesson 5 – The Prophet from Tekoa – Amos 1:1-2; 7:10-17 – Keddie Chapters 1, 10
Close in Prayer.