

**“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
September 8, 2016**

Joel 3:1–21. God’s people restored.

Acts 7:54–8:25. Stephen the martyr.

Job 19:1–12. Job’s agonizing trials.

COMMENTS:

Joel 3:1–21. This section vividly describes divine judgment on the enemies of Israel during the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 14:14-20; 16:16; 19:11-21). After the judgment is announced in **3:1-8** and described in **3:9-16**, Israel will be restored as she will finally recognize her true Lord (Jesus Christ), **3:17-21**. Note in **3:18**, “in that day” when Messiah will reign over His people in the Millennium) the land will be a virtual paradise, enabling the Lord’s people to enjoy His agricultural blessings to the fullest. The grape harvest will be so bountiful that “wine will” seemingly “drip” from “the mountains” and “milk” will be just as plentiful. The last verse of Joel ends with the marvelous grace of God as He declares complete forgiveness of His elect nation of Israel. Over the centuries, the land of Israel had been ravaged by war, famines, droughts, and the invasions of marauding insects such as Joel wrote about in the first chapter of his book, but there is coming a day when the land will be like the Garden of Eden for beauty and fruitfulness.

Growing in proper knowledge and proper love of God: In the first chapter of Joel’s prophecy, the people were wailing because they had no food, but that will not happen when God restores His people and their land. It will not only be a “land of milk and honey,” but it will have plenty of wine and water as well. But what good would it be to have a restored land if it were populated with a sinful people? God’s people must be cleansed before they can enter into His promised kingdom. And God promises to cleanse His people of their sins, forgive them, and restore them to Himself. This also rings true of our Christian lives. As Christians, we live in a cursed world that longs for redemption. We all have various ailments and problems related to this world in areas of our thought life, health, conflicts with others, loneliness, or simply standing by helplessly as we watch our loved ones suffer. We must remember that apart from being forgiven and restored to God, apart from cleansing and power over our sins (sanctification), God’s solving of the temporal problems would only lead to more and worse problems of spiritual apathy and idolatry as one would continue to live under the power of sin and thus inevitably sleeping with the enemy (world) as a way of life.

Acts 7:54–8:25. This reading includes the death of Stephen. The death of Stephen reveals the nature of religion that is filled with self-righteousness. This problem has not changed in our “enlightened” age today: taking hostages, bombings that kill or maim innocent people, assassinations, and all in the name of politics or religion. The heart of man has not changed, nor can it be changed apart from the grace of God. What were the results of Stephen’s death? For Stephen, death meant *coronation* (Rev. 2:10). He saw the glory of God and the Son of God standing to receive him to heaven (see Luke 22:69). Our Lord sat down when He ascended to heaven (Ps. 110:1; Mark 16:19), but He stood up to welcome to glory the first Christian martyr (Luke 12:8). This is the last time the title “Son of man” is used in the Bible. It is definitely a messianic title (Dan. 7:13–14), and Stephen’s use of it was one more witness that Jesus is indeed Israel’s Messiah. Stephen was not only tried in a manner similar to that of our Lord, but he also died with similar prayers on his lips (Luke 23:34, 46; Acts 7:59–60). For Israel, Stephen’s death meant *condemnation*. This was their third murder: they had *permitted* John the Baptist to be killed; they had *asked* for Jesus to be killed; and now they were killing Stephen themselves. When they allowed Herod to kill John, the Jews sinned against God the Father who had sent John (Matt. 21:28–32). When they asked Pilate to crucify Jesus, they sinned against God the Son (Matt. 21:33–46). When they stoned Stephen, Israel sinned against the Holy Spirit who was working in and through the Apostles (Matt. 10:1–8; Acts 7:51). Jesus said that this sin would not be forgiven (Matt. 12:31–32). Judgment finally came in A. D. 70 when Titus and the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Growing in proper knowledge and proper love of God: Atheists and other skeptics will often ask why God does not help His people when they are murdered. “Why didn’t God do something for Stephen when they were stoning him?” Of course, the answer is, “God did do something for Stephen. He gave him the grace to forgive his murderers and to pray for them!” God gave Stephen the supernatural power that we see in Christ when He forgave His persecutors. Perhaps that is why God has not removed the thorn in your life, that person who causes you grief. God is far more interested in us developing love and forgiveness than in delivering us from some temporal difficulty.

Job 19:1–12. In this section Job depicts the trials of his life in seven ways. **First**, he felt like *an animal trapped* (19:6). Job saw himself caught in God’s net, not because of his sins but because God had trapped him. Bildad described six different kinds of traps that would catch a fleeing criminal, but Job did not put himself into that picture. He was not running away from God, nor was he guilty of sin. It was God who had suddenly caught him for reasons Job did not understand. **Second**, he also felt like *a criminal in court* (19:7). God had wronged him by arresting him and bringing him into judgment. What had he done? Why were the charges not read to him? Why was he not permitted a defense? “Though I call for help, there is no justice” (19:7). Throughout the book, Job pleads for justice and cries out for an advocate to defend himself before God. What Job did not realize was that *he was the advocate defending God!* It was Job’s faith and endurance that proved Satan wrong and brought glory to the Lord. **Third**, Job saw himself as *a traveler fenced in* (19:8). Satan had complained that God had “walled in” Job and his family so that they were protected from trouble (1:9–12). Now Job is complaining because God has blocked his path, and he cannot move. Job could not see what lay ahead because God had shrouded the way with darkness. **Fourth**, Job’s suffering left him feeling like *a king dethroned* (Job 19:9). Before his calamities came, Job had been the leading man in Uz and the greatest man in the East; but now all that honor and authority were gone. God had taken from

him his royal robes and crown, and now he was the lowest instead of the highest. What humiliation! **Fifth**, he compared himself to that of *a structure destroyed (19:10)*. It could be a wall or a building that God's "troops" swooped down on and left in ruins. Job may have been looking back at his business affairs or his household; or perhaps he was contemplating his emaciated body. In any event, what was once strong and useful was now useless and destroyed. Bildad had spoken about a tent being destroyed, and Job knew what this meant. In the **sixth picture**, Job borrowed the image of *a tree uprooted (19:10)*. Job had used the tree as a picture of hope, but now he sees it as a symbol of *lost* hope. But in Job 14, Job was speaking about a tree that was chopped down, while here the tree is *uprooted*. Without a root system, the tree cannot live. Job's **seventh** and final picture is that of *a besieged city (19:11-12)*. God has declared war on Job (13:24) and is treating him like an enemy. His troops have attacked him and settled down for a long, hard siege. Imagine a large army building a ramp just to attack a tent! Once again, Job cannot understand why God has sent so much suffering.

Growing in proper knowledge and proper love of God: At times God permits His children to experience darkness on a dead-end street where they don't know which way to turn. When this happens, *wait for the Lord to give you light in His own time*. Don't try to manufacture your own light or to borrow light from others. Follow the wise counsel of Isaiah, "Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God" (Isa. 50:10). Never doubt in the darkness what God has taught you in the light. In fact, what God teaches us in the light will become even more meaningful in the darkness. Keep the main thing the main thing: growing in proper knowledge and proper love of God. It really is all about the Lord and His plan and the gift of life He has graciously given us. *Quo Vadis?*

Life in the Lord by proper knowledge and by proper love,

Pastor Don