

# Joel Lesson 34

## Joel 3:12

**Joel 3:12** - Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

Last week, we looked at the question of whether the soldiers in verse 11 are fighting **for** God or fighting **against** God. I favored the view that they are fighting **against** God. And I think verse 12 supports that view.

If those soldiers were God's soldiers, then we might have expected to see a great battle here in verse 12 between the soldiers of Satan and the soldiers of God - but that is not what we see in verse 12. Instead, what we see is judgment. **What happened to the battle?**

What happened is that the outcome of this battle is so certain that the text skips right over it! By the time God's people show up, the battle has been won and the judgment has begun.

And doesn't that once again remind us of the Valley of Beracah in 2 Chronicles 20? When King Jehoshaphat and the people showed up there, the battle had already been won by God! Here in verse 12 the nations come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, not to wage war, but to be judged.

And, again, we are reminded of Daniel 2. We don't see a battle in Daniel 2 between the golden statue and the stone. Instead, we see that stone striking that statue and shattering it into dust. In Daniel 2, we see the judgment, but not the battle. And, likewise, here, we see the judgment, but not the battle.

## Joel 3:13

**Joel 3:13** - Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.

Once again we are reminded of a prophecy from the book of Isaiah.

**Isaiah 63:3-6** - I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments,

and stained all my apparel. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.

There, as here, the overflowing winepress depicts the great evil of those who are being judged.

If our view of the date for Joel is correct, then the book of Joel was written about 100 years after the book of Isaiah. And I think we find some support for that in verses such as this one that seem to be referring back to imagery used by Isaiah. And while the reliance could be in the reverse direction (if there is reliance), that direction is harder to justify with the reverse imagery that we also find in Joel 3, such as we see in verses 10 and 11.

One difference between Isaiah 63 and verse 13 is that in Isaiah 63 the verbs are **singular** - "I have trodden the winepress alone" - but here in verse 13 the verbs are **plural**.

Perhaps that fact should make us rethink what we said about the soldiers in verse 11, but I think not. The plural in verse 13 is not describing the battle, but rather the plural is describing the judgment - and we know that we have a role to play in God's judgment.

**1 Corinthians 6:2-3** - Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

That verse is talking about the final judgment, but perhaps verse 13 is telling us that the church likewise had a role to play in God's judgment of the nations in Acts 2. We didn't fight the battle, we didn't win the war, but perhaps we shared in the judgment.

After all, what is that stone that rolled down that hill and struck that statue? That stone was the church in its infancy, which began in Acts 2. That stone was people - people who obeyed the gospel of Christ and were added to the church of Christ. So doesn't even Daniel 2 show us that the church shared in the judgment of those nations? I think we are seeing the same thing in verse 13, but with a different metaphor.

And, verse 13 tells us, their evil is great. Whose evil?

Again, we are talking about nations here. God has gathered nations to face judgment in this valley. We are not seeing individual judgments here like we will see at the end of time, but instead we are seeing the judgment of nations like we see in Daniel 2. This evil is *national* evil.

And elsewhere in the Bible we find evil described in national terms.

**Proverbs 14:34** - Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

The nations of this world are **all** opposed to God. And, yes, I mean **all**.

That opposition to God is easy to see with some nations such as North Korea, where being found with a Bible means that you and three generations of your family will be sent a prison camp.

But is that opposition to God also true of our own nation? Is the United States included on the list of nations opposed to God?

If so, how could that be? After all, God has used the United States to accomplish great things for the church. Most of us are Christians today because of the religious freedom in this nation that allowed many to freely restore the New Testament church according to the pattern given to us in the Bible.

And that is all true, but that fact that a nation is used by God to further the purposes of God does not mean that nation is on God's side. It does not mean that nation is not opposed to God.

Babylon and Assyria were both used by God to fulfill his purposes, but we know that both Babylon and Assyria were opposed to God. Rome, likewise, was used by God to further the proclamation of the gospel, but we know that Rome was opposed to God.

The fact is that, yes, the United States is opposed to God. There is but one eternal kingdom, and the United States is not it. Every nation of this world will crumble to dust before God's eternal kingdom, and that includes the United States.

And, yes, we should be thankful that we live in this great nation, and we should pray for the welfare of this nation as God told the people to pray for the welfare of Babylon in Jeremiah 29:7, and we should use the freedoms and blessings that we enjoy in this nation to spread the gospel all around the world. God has opened a great door for us with this nation, and we need to use that great door as long as it remains open.

But we should not wrap ourselves in the flag. We should not act as if this nation is a “Christian nation,” whatever that means. We must stand beneath the cross of Christ, not beneath the flag of some earthly nation. And we need to always remember that our Savior sits, not behind the Resolute Desk, but at the right hand of God!

If we want to know the relation between the church and the nations of this world, then we should look at one of the great prophecies about the church:

**Psalm 2 - Why do the nations rage** and the peoples plot in vain? **The kings of the earth** set themselves, and **the rulers** take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and **I will make the nations your heritage**, and the ends of the earth your possession. **You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.**” Now therefore, **O kings**, be wise; be warned, **O rulers** of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. **Blessed are all who take refuge in him.**

The nations are raging and plotting at the beginning of Psalm 2, and the nations are being broken in pieces in the middle of Psalm 2. Does any of that sound familiar? Don't we see it in Joel 3? And what do we see at the end of Psalm 2 - “Blessed are all who take refuge **in him.**”

And what will see later when we get to verse 16 of Joel 3? “The LORD is a **refuge** to his people!” Can there be any doubt that we are looking at the church in Joel 3?

## Joel 3:14

**Joel 3:14** - Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

I suspect that most of us have heard a sermon or two about people in the Valley of Decision who need to decide whether or not to obey the gospel. And I won't deny that such a person could be accurately described as residing in a Valley of Decision. **But I will certainly deny that that valley is this valley!** This Valley of Decision in verse 14 has nothing at all to do with someone deciding

whether or not to obey the gospel.

First, the subjects of the judgment in Joel 3 are nations, not people. And, second, the one doing the deciding in verse 14 is God, not nations and not people. This Valley of Decision is where God decides what to do with those who were judged in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

We certainly know that fact from the context and the time frame, but we also know that fact from the Hebrew word used in verse 14 for “decision.” The Hebrew word implies a negative verdict. As one commentator explains, the Hebrew word “connotes the irrevocably determined sentence of destruction.”

And, also, the Hebrew word translated “multitude” means more than just a lot of people, but rather it refers to a **mob** of people.

I think a better translation of the opening phrase in verse 14 would be this: “Mobs, mobs, in the valley of sentencing!”

And, yes, I suppose we finally see some individuals here, but they are not being treated individually. They are acting like a mob, and they are being treated like a mob. They were all brought here as nations, and they are all receiving the same negative sentence together.

The imagery used here is a common way for the prophets to depict the restless nations of the world. We see it in Isaiah, for example.

**Isaiah 13:4** - The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle.

**Isaiah 17:12** - Ah, the thunder of many peoples; they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations; they roar like the roaring of mighty waters!

And isn't that the perfect illustration for the nations of the world? Just like the thundering and the roaring of the restless unsettled sea?

With the nations of this world, we both hear and see the great sound and the great fury, but all that ultimately happens is that the sea continues to beat against the seashore. I think we see those same restless unsettled nations here in verse 14.

**“For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.”**

So far we know at least two important things about the day of the Lord in the book of Joel. First, it is a theme of the book - and perhaps it is the major theme of the book. And second, we have seen at least two different days of the Lord so far in the book.

In Joel 1:15, we saw a day of the Lord that was coming and that was near in Joel's day, and in Joel 2:31 we saw a day of the Lord that occurred much later (as Peter confirmed for us in Acts 2).

What about this day of the Lord in verse 14?

The first thing we should notice in answering that question is the little word “near” that we also find in verse 14. That word “near” certainly helped us in Joel 1:15. Does it help us here?

Not as much. Why not? Because verse 14 does not just say that this day is near - it says that this day is near **in the Valley of Decision**. In other words, Joel is not telling his listeners that this day of the Lord is near to them, but rather he is writing that this day of the Lord is near to those who find themselves in this Valley of Decision.

And that time frame should not surprise us. What usually follows the decision of a sentence is the execution of that sentence - and that execution, I think, is what is being called a day of the Lord here in verse 14.

And this execution, we are told, is **near** to the day of the decision. I think that tells us that we are not seeing the final execution here. Instead, I think we are seeing the same execution here that we see in Daniel 2. I think we are seeing the shattering of the nations that occurred when they were struck by the stone in Daniel 2 that was not man-made and that struck the statute shortly after the creation of that stone.

And, if that is true, then this day of the Lord (just like, I believe, the day of the Lord in Joel 2:31) is the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. We know that it was on that day that the great prophecy of Daniel 2:44 was fulfilled.

**Daniel 2:44** - And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

I think we are seeing that same prophecy here in Joel 3. And, again, we know that it was fulfilled early in the church's history. That is what Daniel tells us in that same chapter.

**Daniel 2:35** - ... But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

When that stone broke in pieces all the kingdoms of the world and brought them to an end, that stone was still just a stone. That stone had not yet become a mountain that filled the whole earth. I think the stone in Daniel 2 was the same stone at the same time that we find in Acts 2.

## The Day of the Lord: A Recap

Now that we have looked at verse 14, that means we have looked at all of the occurrences of the phrase "the Day of the Lord" in the book of Joel.

As we said in our introduction, most commentaries consider the Day of the Lord to be the primary theme of the book of Joel, and perhaps it is. We certainly see that phrase a lot for such a short book. In fact, we have seen that phrase five times in these three chapters.

**Joel 1:15** - Alas for the day! **For the day of the LORD is near**, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

**Joel 2:1** - Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, **for the day of the LORD is coming**; it is near.

**Joel 2:11** - The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. **For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome**; who can endure it?

**Joel 2:31** - The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, **before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes**.

**Joel 3:14** - Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! **For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision**.

We have already looked at the question of how those verses **differ**, and what we have found is that they are **not** all discussing the same event.

The first three occurrences of the phrase are describing the invasion by Babylon that, in Joel's day, was coming and was near.

But not so with the final two occurrences of the same phrase. There was a big shift in our time frame and our context in Joel 2:28, and so we know that Joel 2:31 and Joel 3:14 are no longer looking at the invasion by Babylon. I think both of these final two occurrences of the Day of the Lord are describing the Day of Pentecost.

That is how the verses differ. But how are they the **same**? What do they have in common? If the Day of the Lord is the theme of Joel, then how does that one theme relate to these two different events? What do the invasion by Babylon in the 6th century BC and the Day of Pentecost in the first century AD have in common?

When we first saw "the Day of the Lord" in this book, we came up with what we called a working definition of the phrase:

“a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before.”

And why did we call it a *working* definition? Because we wanted to have all the evidence on the table before we made a decision on the meaning of the Day of the Lord in this book.

Well, we now have all the evidence on the table. So the time has come for us to either stick with our working definition or change it.

And I think we should stick with it. I think our working definition holds up perfectly well for either the invasion by Babylon or the Day of Pentecost. I think both events were perfect examples of "a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before."

That is what a Day of the Lord is. It is day when God shows up to remind everyone about who is really in charge. It is a day when God shows up to remind everyone about what is really important. It is a day when mankind receives a divine attitude readjustment. No one is the same after a Day of the Lord. Their world is always completely different after that day.



Was that all true when Babylon invaded Judah? Absolutely it was true. For the Jews who experienced that event, everything changed. Nothing was the same for them after that event.

And was that also true for the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2? Absolutely it was true. For all who experienced that day, everything changed. The eternal unshakable kingdom of Christ had been established, and Jesus was ruling the entire universe at the right hand of God and from the throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords! The nations of this world, both past and future, had been judged and sentenced. They could not save. They offered no place of refuge. They offered no stronghold. Those things were available only from Christ and only in the kingdom of Christ.

So, yes, I think we can say that our working definition is the right definition. A Day of the Lord is "a sudden intervention by God into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people that leaves those people with a world that is completely changed from what they knew before."

And, yes, such days have occurred in the past. We have studied two such days in this short book of Joel, and there have been others. But not all such days are in the past. As the song says, there's a great day coming!

**2 Peter 3:10-12** - But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

And if we want to talk about a divine attitude readjustment, that's it! But that final Day of the Lord is very different from the prior such days. How? Unlike the earlier days of the Lord, that final day of the Lord will not come as a warning. Why not? Because it will be too late for a change of attitude to make any difference on that last great day of the Lord.

I think every Day of the Lord in the Bible is intended, in part, to be a warning for that final Day of the Lord when it will be too late for any more warnings.

And now for the million dollar question: are all of those commentaries correct? **Is the Day of the Lord really the central theme of the book of Joel?**

In my opinion, the answer is yes. The Day of the Lord is the central theme of this book of Joel. That theme is the glue that connects everything we see in this book - from locusts to the church!

- We see that theme in Joel 1 with the invasion by the locusts intended to warn the people of a second invasion that was coming and that was near. (And even though the locust invasion is not called a day of the Lord, I think it qualifies as one.)
- We see that same theme in Joel 2 with the invasion by Babylon, which we know was intended to teach the people about the importance of obedience and faithfulness to God and the law of God.
- And we see that same theme in the closing verses of Joel 2 and in Joel 3 with the establishment of the eternal kingdom of Christ and the judgment of the kingdoms of this world.

In each case, God suddenly intervened into the affairs of a self-satisfied complacent people, leaving them with a world that was completely changed from what they knew before.

One thing is certain about a Day of the Lord - it leaves things very different than how they were before.

How different? Keep reading.

## Joel 3:15

**Joel 3:15** - The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

**True or false?** Every time we see the sun and moon darkened and the stars not shining in the Bible, the same event is always being described, and that same event being described is always the end of the world. **False!** (And I really hope everyone got that question correct!)

We know that similar language is used in the Bible to describe various events, most of which have nothing at all to do with the end of the world.

In fact, We saw such language earlier in this book of Joel when the text was describing the great army that was coming and that was near, and which we have now identified with Babylon.

**Joel 2:10** - The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

We see such language in Ezekiel with the description of Egypt's fall.

**Ezekiel 32:7-8** - When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness on your land, declares the Lord GOD.

We see such language in Isaiah with the description of Babylon's fall.

**Isaiah 13:10** - For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

And we see such language with the description of Jerusalem's fall.

**Matthew 24:29** - Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

And, elsewhere we see a Day of the Lord described as a day of darkness, as we also see here in verse 15.

**Ezekiel 30:3** - For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.

**Amos 5:18** - Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light.

**Amos 5:20** - Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

So what can we say about such language?

First, we can say that such language is not always describing the end of the world. We just looked at numerous examples that were not at all about the end of the world.

Second, we can say that such language is often used to describe times of judgment when God comes to judge the enemies of his people.

Will that happen at the end of the world? Yes, it will. Is that the only time it will happen or has ever happened? No, it is not.

It also happened with Assyria. It also happened with Babylon. It also happened with Egypt. It also happened with Tyre. It also happened with Edom. It also happened with Jerusalem. It also happened with Rome.

And here in Joel 3:15? What are we seeing here?

We are again seeing a great judgment. And, as we have shown now in several different ways, this judgment is the judgment of the nations of this world on the day that the kingdom of Christ was established in Acts 2. It is the judgment that we read about in Daniel 2.

Is there even more evidence for that fact somewhere in these verses? Yes, there is, and we find it in the next verse.

## Joel 3:16

**Joel 3:16** - The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

“The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem.” Now where have we seen that event before?

That event is something else that happened in Acts 2, and that event is something else that was prophesied in Isaiah 2.

**Isaiah 2:2-3** - It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” **For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**

That is the same as what we just read in Joel 3:16 - "The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem."

And, yes, I think we also see that event in Daniel 2 - "But the stone that struck the image **became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.**" That great increase in size and scope could not have happened had the word of the Lord never gone out from Jerusalem.

And when was that great promise fulfilled? As it does with so many prophecies, the New Testament answers that question.

**Luke 24:45-47** - Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, **beginning from Jerusalem.**"

**Romans 1:16** - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first** and also to the Greek.

A part of the great prophecy of Isaiah 2 is that the gospel would be proclaimed **first** in Jerusalem, and that happened in Acts 2. And that great prophecy of Isaiah 2 is the same great prophecy that we find here in Joel 3:16. "The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem."

Verse 16 is further evidence of our time frame for Joel 3. We know with certainty that we were looking at Acts 2 at the end of Joel 2. And now I think we also know that we are still looking at Acts 2 here in Joel 3. Neither the context nor the time frame has changed.

The next thing we see in verse 16 is that **"the heavens and the earth quake."** And once again we see commonly used language for God coming in judgment against the enemies of his people.

We see such language with God's destruction of the nations that came against Jerusalem.

**Isaiah 29:6** - You will be visited by the LORD of hosts with thunder and with **earthquake** and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire.

We see such language with a description of the reign of God.

**Psalm 99:1-2** - The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim;  
**let the earth quake!** The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.

We see such language in the description of God's judgment of Assyria.

**Nahum 1:5** - **The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him,**  
the world and all who dwell in it.

And, once again, we see such language earlier in this same book of Joel when the text describes the great Babylonian army that was coming and that was near.

**Joel 2:10** - **The earth quakes before them;** the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

So, again, we see judgment here in verse 16. And, again, this judgment is the judgment of the nations that was prophesied in Daniel 2 and that happened in Acts 2.

**“The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake.”** I think the first half of that sentence and the second half of that sentence happened on the same day - the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Yes, many wonderful things happened in Acts 2, but so far Joel 3 has been focused almost entirely on the great judgment of the nations that happened on that day. That judgment of the nations had been prophesied in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 and Zephaniah 3 and Zechariah 12, and it happened in Acts 2.

But God was not just acting **against** the enemies of his people on that great day. God was also acting **for** his people on that great day. And that is what we see at the end of verse 16.

#JOEL