



First Baptist Church At The Villages

COMPANION STUDY TO SERMON: REDISCOVERING CHURCH (7/26) •

STUDY TITLE: THE THREAT OF JUDGMENT AND GOD'S OFFER OF GRACE •

JOEL 2:18-3:21 • FOR USE 7/26 THROUGH 8/1/2020

MAIN POINT

The more we understand God's infinite power and perfect justice, the more deeply we will treasure His grace.

INTRODUCTION

As your study time begins, use this section to focus your mind and heart on the subject of this lesson.

How do you think popular culture views God's judgment? What are some ways you see that view expressed in movies, books and television?

How does pop culture's view of God's judgment differ from the Bible's?

Popular culture tends to one of two extremes with regard to God's judgment: it either sensationalizes God's judgment or dismisses it altogether. Perhaps this is because we do not like to acknowledge the reality of God's perfect justice out of we fear we might not measure up to it. In contrast to such responses, Joel calls us to acknowledge God's perfect justice and power so that we might run to Him for the grace we so desperately need.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about this topic.

| READ JOEL 2:18-27.

How did God respond to the people's show of repentance (vv. 18-24)? What promise did God make (vv. 25-27)?

Joel 2:18-32 is the wide-reaching promise God made to the people of Judah if they would repent. His promise contains both physical and spiritual blessings. Verse 18 implies God's people repented somewhere between the time described in Joel 2:17 and in 2:18.

What would be the results of God's blessing in the lives of the people?

Verse 25 gives God's promise to repay or restore the loss the people suffered from the locusts. God promised to repay His people by making food plentiful again. Fruitful crops were a sign of God's favor. God's blessings would produce three important results. First, the people would have their physical needs satisfied. Next, God's people would praise the name of their God, Yahweh, for dealing so mercifully and so wondrously with them. Also, God's people never again would be put to shame. They had been shamed by their belief that God had abandoned them, and thus they felt they needed to look elsewhere for food instead of looking to God. Also, they were shamed in the face of other nations whose people thought God had forsaken Judah.

Why can we rejoice that God is rich in mercy and will save all who call on Him? How does a believer accept God's mercy? How do God's promises cause a believer to rejoice?

The people of Judah learned that though He judges sin harshly, He will forgive. They found God was present in Israel with them because He delivered them from their disaster and restored His provisions to them. They also knew God and no one else was their God. He is sovereign over all and faithful to His people. Also, they knew He and not some idol was the only God. They knew He would protect His faithful people and ultimately they would never again be put to shame. All of these same blessings and promises are ours in Christ today.

| READ JOEL 2:28-32.

With verse 28, Joel moved to events of a more distant time in his prophecy. The Old Testament often tells of God giving the Holy Spirit to people He chose and called out for service such as prophets, priests, and kings. Joel 2:28-32 announces God's promise to pour out His Spirit on all humanity.

Now Read Acts 2:14-21. How was Joel's prophecy fulfilled at Pentecost? What would you say are one or two of the greatest blessings of having the Holy Spirit dwell within you?

Are there parts of Joel's prophecy that are not yet fulfilled? What does this tell you about our future? Read Revelation 6:12 and 8:7 for additional insight.

Joel's prophecy did not end with Peter at Pentecost. In fact, Joel 2:30-32 has yet to be fulfilled, even in our lifetime: "I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth: blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awe-inspiring Day of the Lord comes." Revelation 6:12 and 8:7 suggest that these events, prophesied thousands of years ago, are still on the horizon.

What is the hope for you in this portion of Joel's prophecy?

Unlike the earlier description of the Day of the Lord, this one includes the promise of deliverance. Deliverance on the Day of the Lord will come to everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh. To call on the name of the Lord means to acknowledge God as one's God and to ask Him for salvation. Those who call on the Lord sincerely and in faith will be saved. Everyone needs to accept God's mercy. A person who confesses sins and asks for forgiveness receives God's mercy and is prepared for the Day of the Lord whenever it may come.

| READ JOEL 3:1-21.

Everyone needs to accept God's mercy. A person who confesses sins and asks for forgiveness receives God's mercy and is prepared for the Day of the Lord whenever it may come.

For what five things will the nations be judged (vv. 2-3)? How will they be repaid?

Compare Joel 3:10 with Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3. Why do you think Joel reversed the traditional prophetic vision of peace?

God would judge the people for the nations for the way they mistreated His people, the people of Israel. They didn't value God's people and had even sold them as slaves. As repayment, God said He would revive His people and build them up against these nations. (vv. 7-8).

How are God's judgment and salvation linked? What about His justice and mercy? Hope and despair?

What message does Joel intend with the contrasting images of 3:18-19?

In verses 18-21, Joel summarized the result of the Day of the Lord and Israel's ultimate restoration. The land of Israel will have miraculous fertility and fruitfulness. Traditional enemies will be punished. God will dwell with His people, and they will receive pardon for their sins.

APPLICATION

Identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to your life.

What are some practical ways you could remind yourself that God is rich in mercy this week?

If the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem made it holy (3:17), then what does the Lord's presence in your life mean?

How are the disasters and struggles of this world (represented by the plague of locusts) put into perspective by the hope of eternity and God's promises for the future (3:18-21)? How does the hope of eternity with Christ change your perspective on your present life?

PRAYER

For your closing prayer time, spend some time in quiet, reflective prayer, asking God to reveal potentially hidden sins. Confess your sins, thank God for both His justice and mercy, and ask Him to reveal how He wants you to live in light of what we learned from Joel.

COMMENTARY (for additional insights and background for these scriptures)

| JOEL 3:1-21

Chapter 3 describes a final, climactic battle with the nations of the world and Yahweh's condemnation of those nations. Depending on how one has read Joel up to this point, this is either a logical and appropriate development in the text or an abrupt change apparently unconnected to what precedes. Interpreters who contend that Joel has through chap. 2 spoken only of a locust plague on Jerusalem can only artificially tie these chapters to chap. 3. After all, the Gentile nations had nothing to do with the coming of the locust plague on Jerusalem. Earlier critical scholars were perhaps more honest in their assessment of the situation than some recent interpreters who see only locusts in chapters 1 and 2.

The situation is altogether different, however, when one recognizes that in 2:1–11 Joel shifted away from literal locusts to destruction and captivity at the hand of the northern army, an army he described under the metaphor of a locust invasion. Viewed in this light, the movement from locusts, to the ultimate calamity of the exile, to forgiveness and restoration, and finally to the judgment on the nations is not only logical but necessary. Had Joel not included this chapter, the book would be without a resolution.

3:1-2. Moses predicted that the Jewish people would be scattered among the nations, and that when they came to their senses and returned to God, He would restore them to their land and cause them to prosper (Deut. 30:1-10). Sometime after this the Lord will gather and judge the

nations (Isa. 66:18; Zeph. 3:8; Rev. 16:14-16; 19:11-16). The Valley of Jehoshaphat is literally "the valley where Yahweh judged," but no valley by this name is known. Most likely this is the valley of Jezreel near Megiddo where the battle of Armageddon will take place (Rev. 16:16).

3:3-4. When Israel lost wars, their children would be sold by their enemies as slaves. Tyre and Sidon were trading hubs for slaves. The Lord is the defender of widows and orphans and will bring retribution on the guilty.

3:5-6. The crimes of these enemies were not only against Israel but also against Yahweh. It was God's silver and gold that they took. The slaves were sent as far away as Greece.

3:7-8. The Latin *lex talionis* (Deut. 19:21) will be applied, where punishment for wrongdoing is meted out "life for life, eye for eye," etc. The Jews were sent in exile to the northwest, and so those who exiled them would be sent to the southeast. The Sabaeans dominated the trade routes to the south.

3:9-12. The nations are summoned to battle (in Rev 16:14 demonic spirits are used to motivate the nations for the final battle). The nations are to mobilize for war (see the opposite in Isa. 2:4; Mic .4:3).

3:13. The Lord will trample His enemies like grapes in a winepress (Isa. 63:1-6; Rev. 14:14-20).

3:14-17. Multitudes, multitudes are hordes of people in the valley of decision. The decision is the verdict that Yahweh is pronouncing on an unbelieving world, not a decision that people are making to follow God. It is too late because it is judgment day for Israel's enemies but salvation day for the people of God— a refuge, a stronghold. This will be a time of revelation to Israel and the nations because Yahweh will be known as He is.

3:18-21. Joel summarized the result of the Day of the Lord. The land of Israel will have miraculous fertility and fruitfulness. Traditional enemies will be punished. Yahweh will dwell with His people, and they will receive pardon for their sins.