

Message #3**Joel 2:1-20**

One of the most majestic animals in Yellowstone National Park is the bison or buffalo. Many people love going to Yellowstone to see those animals. Now some people think those bison are nice little pets. In fact, there have been people killed because they look at a bison and think these are gentle big animals who want to be petted. Those buffalo can be ferocious.

There are some people who look at the “day of the Lord” that way. They think it is going to be a wonderful time when God’s people get to enjoy all the blessings of God. What many of God’s people do not realize is that before they reach a point when God will bless His people, He will take them through the horrors of a ferocious judgment because they are not right with Him.

The day of the Lord refers to the entire stretch of time that runs from the Rapture of the Church until the end of the 1000-year Millennial Kingdom. Apparently the early church feared the horrors of the day of the Lord because the thought that the Thessalonians had that they were in the day of the Lord really shook them (II Thess. 2:2).

When the church thought of the day of the Lord, it scared them. There was almost a panic at the thought that the church was in the day of the Lord time. It should scare people. The day of the Lord should scare Israel and the nations and out of that fear, people should cry out to God for salvation. What most people don’t realize is that when we lose our perspective of a future judgment, we lose our sense of a need to cry out to God for salvation from judgment. But a day of the Lord judgment is coming and the point Joel makes here is this:

IN THE MIDST OF THE DAY OF THE LORD JUDGMENT, IF ISRAEL WILL GET HER HEART RIGHT WITH GOD AND CRY OUT TO HIM FOR SALVATION, HE WILL TURN HIS JUDGMENTS INTO HIS BLESSINGS.

Now this is not only a grace truth for Israel, but for individuals and nations. If people will call out to God for salvation in the face of future judgment, God will save them. Look at what happened in Ninevah, in the book of Jonah. Ninevah was just 40 days away from complete annihilation by God and she repented and called out to God and was saved. Now Joel presents six prophetic revelations in these verses that come directly from God.

PROPHETIC REVELATION #1 – God warns the day of the Lord is coming. 2:1

The words “blow the trumpet” and “sound an alarm” is an equivalent to our modern air raid sirens or loud city whistles that announce take cover, something horrible is coming. Notice where this alarm needs to be sounded—the land of Israel. All people in the land of Israel need to realize “the day of the LORD is coming.” Disaster is coming. Now the problem with Israel is she basically believes that when that day comes, she is just going to be ushered into a wonderful kingdom. Do you see what the threat of judgment should do? **It should cause people to tremble.**

If you are here without Jesus Christ, you should be shaking right now at the thought that you can drop into eternal hell and burn forever.

PROPHETIC REVELATION #2 – God describes the horror of the day of the Lord judgment.
2:2-11

There are eight descriptions He gives here that are scary:

Description #1 - The day of the Lord will be a day of darkness. **2:2a**

This word describes a misery and adversity that leaves one very sad (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p.313)

Description #2 - The day of the Lord will be a day of gloom. **2:2b**

This word describes this as a time of very unusual thick darkness that leaves one very weak (*Ibid.*, p. 71).

Description #3 - The day of the Lord will be a day of clouds. **2:2c**

This refers to a literal cloud cover that will veil heaven (*Ibid.*, p. 644).

Description #4 - The day of the Lord will be a day of thick darkness. **2:2d**

These words describe a terrifying darkness (*Ibid.*, p. 656).

Description #5 - The day of the Lord will feature an invasion of major people and powers. **2:2e**

Like the dawn spread over the mountain there will be a major invasion of such a great and mighty people, the likes of which has never been seen before. There has never been nor will there ever be another military event that will come close to what God will do during this time the day of the Lord.

Description #6 - The day of the Lord will feature total and complete destruction. **2:3**

God will cause nations to view the Promised Land as the Garden of Eden spot and they will move in and destroy everything.

Description #7 - The day of the Lord will feature a fast, ferocious and unstoppable military.
2:4-10

This military will come riding war horses (**2:4**) and chariots (**2:5**). They will come over mountains and consume everything in a very organized attack (**2:5**). People will be terrified and will turn pale (**2:6**). This enemy has great speed and strength and organization (**2:7**).

They are very disciplined and do not break ranks even when attacking (2:8). They take over cities, tear down walls and take peoples' houses (2:9).

Description #8 - The day of the Lord will feature God sovereignly doing His great and sovereign Judgment Work. **2:10-11**

As all of this is happening, there will be signs in the heavens indicating God is monitoring and controlling every bit of this.

PROPHETIC REVELATION #3 – God invites His people to turn to Him. **2:12-17**

The reason why this horrible judgment is going to come against Israel is because His people had wandered far away from Him to the point that He was angry and pouring out His judgment. This will be the reason for the Tribulation. But in spite of that, the amazing reality of this passage is that God still invites His people to turn to Him and get into a right relationship with Him.

Notice verse 12, “yet even now.” Even when God sends His judgment, He invites people to come to Him.

Now God specifically tells the people what steps to take. There are four steps:

Step #1 - Return to God will all your heart. **2:12a**

God is not interested in half-hearted repentance. If you want to be right with God, you must deal with things with a whole heart. To return to the Lord is a decision of the heart.

Step #2 - Return to God with a fasting. **2:12b**

Now fasting was a national matter pertaining to Israel, specifically in acknowledging sin in view of pending judgment. We are not commanded by God to fast in this N.T. Age of Grace, but we are challenged to deal with sin. When we sin we need to truly focus on getting it resolved with God, even if it means missing a meal and not eating.

Step #3 - Return to God with emotional sorrow. **2:12c**

The point of weeping and mourning is the point of being sorry for sin that has caused the breach in a relationship with God. There should be a real, deep emotional contrition involved in our confession of sin. This is not just some physical and verbal action. Our hearts should be broken. If your heart is not broken in your confession, you do not know what confession is. True confession is heartbroken because it recognizes the depth of the sin and depravity. This is not some physical confession that says, “if we have sinned forgive us” or “forgive us for our sins”; this is a broken, contrite confession that is from one's heart. This is very emotional. A person is doing honest business with God and is broken over their sin.

Step #4 - Return to God internally from your hearts. **2:13**

Now God's people could physically take off or tear their garments as a sign of mourning, but God says I am not interested in the physical religion; I am interested in the internal heart.

PROPHETIC REVELATION #4 – God reveals that His character permits Him to invite sinners to return to Him. **2:13b-14**

God has revealed certain qualities about His character that can potentially move God to lift judgment if His people seek to get into a right relationship with Him. Our doctrine about God is formed from the revealed Scriptures. It is what many call it a “propositional theology proper.” These are “God is” statements that God has given which are designed to reveal truth about Himself.

Divine Character Quality #1 - God is gracious. **2:13b**

Divine Character Quality #2 - God is compassionate. **2:13c**

Divine Character Quality #3 - God is slow to anger. **2:13d**

Divine Character Quality #4 - God abounds in lovingkindness/mercy. **2:13e**

Divine Character Quality #5 - God might relent from evil He has authorized. **2:13b-14a**

God is the one who sovereignly sends disasters. That Hebrew word “relent” is intriguing. It is a word that refers to vengeance, comfort and lament or grief (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 544). God has it within His revealed character that He could offer grace and mercy even when His focus is angry judgment.

Now what seems to me to be revealed here is that when God is pouring out His anger against His people, which they deserve, He has a nature that grieves over this and desires to comfort Himself and His people. So if His people turn to Him with all their hearts, instead of judging them He may start blessing them.

But notice carefully how **verse 14** begins “who knows.” The only thing we may do when we have sinned to the point where God is angry with us and is allowing bad things to happen to us is to go to God with our broken hearts and ask for His forgiveness, knowing that there is a side to God that is gracious and merciful. If we will do that, God may turn cursing into blessing. This is certainly not some name it and claim it doctrine.

At the end of **verse 14**, God could turn the locust-plagued land back into producing grain and grapes for grain offerings and drink offerings. **So the character of God permits Him to be gracious even when His people have blown it and do not deserve His grace.** So let us say that you are being hammered right now and you know the reason for it is because you have sinned grossly against God.

This is why you are in the condition you are in. If you will turn back to the Lord with all your heart, God's character is such that He stands ready to actually start blessing you again.

PROPHETIC REVELATION #5 – God reveals that the leaders need to lead the people into corporate repentance and worship. **2:15-17**

Now this would take a true humility and true repentance. Israel's leadership must call the people to turn to God. They need to gather the people together in a very sacred way. There are some observations we may make about this ceremony:

Observation #1 - The gathering is to be publicly announced—"blow the trumpet in Zion." **2:15a**

Observation #2 - The congregation must be corporately sanctified and set apart. **2:16a**

Observation #3 - The elders must be assembled. **2:16b**

Observation #4 - The children and babies must also be gathered. **2:16c**

Observation #5 - The newly married couples must be gathered. **2:16d**

Observation #6 - The priests and ministers must minister with proper attitudes and words. **2:17**

There are two specific actions these priests and ministers must take in a corporate way.

(Action #1) - They must weep at a certain place. **2:17a**

One of the things we may observe from this is that the Temple is obviously standing during the Tribulation period, which means it will be rebuilt. This mourning and weeping must be done between the porch and the altar. Now why is this? Because this nation rejected Jesus Christ and His cross work and it is His cross work that is the only thing that can get this nation into a right relationship with Him. Secondly, the antichrist will set himself up in the Temple and demand to be worshipped as God.

(Action #2) - They must pray a certain prayer. **2:17b**

They must ask God to spare His people and not make His inheritance a reproach and a byword among the nations. Why should people say where is their God?

Part of the job of leadership is to challenge people to deal with sin. Many today think their job is to entertain people and make them feel good and happy.

PROPHETIC REVELATION #6 – God promises deliverance if His people turn to Him.
2:18-20

If Israel would do these things, God promises that He would do some wonderful things for her:

Promise #1 - He would be zealous to bless His land. **2:18a**

Promise #2 - He would have pity on His people. **2:18b**

Promise #3 - He would answer His people and deliver His people. **2:19-20**

There are three realities brought out here:

(Reality #1) - God would prosper them physically. **2:19a**

God would see to it that they had a wonderful amount of grain, new wine and oil. They would have so much that they would have full satisfaction.

(Reality #2) - God would remove the reproach from His people. **2:19b**

Israel has been a reproach to many nations. This is a judgment of God. If Israel would turn back to God, God would bless her by lifting that reproach and the nations would esteem her as the nation of God.

(Reality #3) - God would remove all the enemies from His people. **2:20**

There have been many political powers that have come and done horrible things to Israel from the north. Assyria came from the north; Babylon came from the north; and other invaders also came from the north.

Now the amazing thing is this passage sits in a context that deals with “the day of the Lord,” which means it sits in a context of “the Great Tribulation.” We know that there will be a converging on Israel from the north during the Tribulation, and according to Ezekiel, this converging will be as far north as Russia (Ezek. 38-39).

The Great Tribulation will be an unprecedented time in animosity against Israel. The reason why God will permit this is because Israel has so turned away from Him. But God says I will Personally wipe out all of Israel’s political enemies to the north, east and west to the point that the stench of dead bodies will put a foul smell in the air. When God does that, according to Ezekiel, He will restore the fortunes to Israel and all Israel will know God has done this (Ezek. 39:25-29).

But if Israel would turn back to Him now even before this Tribulation, “who knows” what God would do. If Israel would turn to God in the middle of the Tribulation, “who knows” what God might do.

If you will turn to God even though you have done horrible and evil things, who knows what God will do with you. He might lift all the negatives from your world and start blessing you in every way. That is the kind of God He is.