

God's Judgment on Nations

WILL GOD JUDGE WICKEDNESS?

Focal Verses • JOEL 3:9-16

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson we will ANALYZE the Lord's right to judge nations, MOURN the times we choose sin instead of repentance, and COMMIT to responding to God's judgment with humility instead of pride.

In Focus

"The civil war is finally over. After thousands of lives lost and many years, the people of Ethiopia are finally free!"

Alex was glued to his phone as he watched the news. He had heard about the civil war in the African nation of Ethiopia. He had not paid much attention because it seemed so far away, but he was inspired as he saw the video of people dancing in the streets, shouting, and waving flags. The long serving dictator had fled the country and all of his close officials had been placed in jail. Alex couldn't imagine what it was like to live under an oppressive dictatorship where people were jailed and killed for speaking out against the powerful leaders. He was worried about what he had been seeing with immigrants in the U.S. who were being forced into cages and treated like animals. Alex had read about authoritarian governments in school, but never thought he would see it at home. But as he saw the images of freedom and celebration, it gave Alex new hope. If oppression couldn't last in Ethiopia, maybe it wouldn't last anywhere. If God could bring freedom to people after years of turmoil in Ethiopia, it meant there was hope for everywhere.



How does seeing hope fulfilled for others help us to have hope for our situations?

Keep in Mind

"Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about" (Joel 3:12, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Joel 3:9 Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up:

10 Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong.

11 Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD.

12 Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about.

13 Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great.

14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

15 The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.

16 The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.

The People, Places, and Times

Joel. Joel's name means "whose God is Jehovah." Little is known of Joel except that he was the son of a man named Pethuel. It is believed that Joel wrote the book named after him during the time of Judah's return from exile. Others believe that it was written right before the death of King Josiah, just one generation before the exile.

Background

Judah was a small province under the power of the Babylonian Empire. During a prior period of unification, Judah was the Southern Kingdom, composed of two of the twelve tribes of Israel with its capital at Jerusalem (1 Kings 12–2 Kings 25). Joel's message comes to Judah as a matter of urgency. It will mean the life or death of Judah, and all future generations. The first two chapters of Joel are prophecies against Judah for their sinfulness and unfaithfulness to God. The Lord sends a plague of locusts on them that causes devastation, famine, and death. But the Lord's judgment on His people is to call them to repentance. They are

invited to return to God in humility and see God's salvation and restoration as a result. For Christians, the prophecy of Joel extends to us and to Christ's church even today. The Apostle Peter, speaking to the newly born church on the day of Pentecost, delivers a sermon reciting from Joel 2. Joel 3 addresses God's message to the nations that have plundered and conquered Judah. There will be judgment for the violence nations perpetuate against God's people. In the same way the nations destroyed one another, God will allow them to be destroyed if they choose to continue war against God's will.

At-A-Glance

1. The Lord's Judgment (Joel 3:9–12)
2. The Lord's Power (vv. 13–16)

In Depth

1. The Lord's Judgment (Joel 3:9–12)

As chapter three begins, Joel prophesies judgment on all the nations that have oppressed

Israel and Judah. This judgment against the enemies of God's people is then envisioned as the ultimate judgment against all sinfulness, violence, and wickedness. The ultimate Day of the Lord will be God's judgment for all people meaning condemnation for the wicked and salvation for the righteous. Joel is prophesying the vengeance of God on those who have mistreated His children. We can imagine the Lord saying to wicked nations, "since you wanted to mistreat my children, meet me outside and bring your fighting clothes." Everyone in the wicked nations from the greatest to least is being called to what they think is a battle. Because of their pride, they are preparing for war instead of asking for mercy. But they are no match for the Lord and will instead experience God's final judgment.

2. The Lord's Power (Joel 3:13-16)

These same images of God's final judgment are echoed by Jesus and in the book of Revelation (Mark 4:29, Revelation 14:14-16). Joel is making God's power abundantly clear. The Lord will destroy the wicked and violent nations as a farmer crushes grapes to bring forth wine. The heavenly bodies being darkened is a sign that this judgment will be even greater and more final than the judgment on God's people in the previous chapter. But in the midst of the multitudes of people being judged by the Lord, it will be a day of salvation for His people. The Day of the Lord is judgment to the wicked, but redemption for the righteous.

Search the Scriptures

1. What are the nations preparing to do on the Day of the Lord?
2. What will happen to God's people during the Day of Judgment?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How should we respond to the promise that God will judge all wickedness?

2. Can you name a time in history it seemed like God brought judgment on a nation or nations for their injustice?

3. The remnant or survivors of Judah who repent and return to the Lord are saved in the Day of Judgment, but God had already sent judgment on them first to call them to repentance in Joel 1-2. Why does it matter that God judges His people before He judges the nations?

Liberating Lesson

In our society today we do not like to talk much about judgment. We avoid being judged and yet judge others. We condemn people who talk about judgment, especially God judging people or nations. But God is the only one who can rightly judge every person and every nation. God promises judgment against nations for their wickedness. Throughout the Bible, God brings judgment on nations through conquest, natural disasters, or supernatural punishment. And yet we would be arrogant to think we know who is or is not worthy of God's judgment. As Jesus says in Matthew 7:1-3, we should not judge, or we will be judged in the same way. The Lord is merciful, compassionate, and forgiving, but God is also the only righteous judge. The Lord knows every mind and heart and all our actions and inactions. One day, the Lord will judge all wickedness and injustice. Those who try to fight the Lord will see that His power is greater than any on earth. But those who repent and receive His forgiveness will be saved.

Application for Activation

Take time this week to think about how you would respond to God's correction. Do you stubbornly choose your own way or repent and try to do better? Choose one area you feel like you have been resistant to God's leading in and pray about it. Ask for forgiveness and commit to responding to God's direction instead of waiting until you face a crisis to return to God.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Collins, John J. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible: Third Edition*. 3rd ed. Augsburg Fortress, 2018.

Say It Correctly

Jehoshaphat. Ji-HAH-she-fat

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 148

Job 38–39

Psalms 62:1–8

DAY 149

Job 40–42

Psalms 62:9–12

DAY 150

Songs of Solomon 1–8

Psalms 63:1–5

DAY 151

Isaiah 1–4

Psalms 63:6–11

DAY 152

Isaiah 5–8

Psalms 64:1–6

DAY 153

Isaiah 9–12

Psalms 64:7–10

DAY 154

Isaiah 13–17

Psalms 65:1–8

Notes
