

Lesson 19

Joel 2:15, Continued

Joel 2:15 – Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly;

Is this solemn assembly in Joel 2:15 the same solemn assembly that we saw in Joel 1:14?

As we recall, the solemn assembly in Joel 1:14 occurred after the locust invasion as an expression of the great sorrow over what had just happened to the people and to their city. And in Joel 1:15, they were told that something even worse was coming and was near. That was why that had a solemn assembly in Joel 1.

But I think this assembly in Joel 2 is different. Why? Because something has happened between Joel 1:14 and Joel 2:15 – and we saw that something in Joel 2:12 – “**Yet** even now!” That something was hope! That something was a possibility of restoration! The situation had changed, and so I think this solemn assembly in Joel 2 is different from the one we saw in Joel 1.

Yes, the people are fasting again. And yes, the trumpet is sounding again. And yes, the people are once again gathering in a solemn assembly. But this time there is

a hope! This time their future is not just bleakness and despair.

God has called them to repent and to return in verses 12-13, and while a call to repent is a reminder of the sin that led to that call, that call to repent is also a reminder of the hope that always accompanies such a call.

If there was no hope of restoration, then there would be no need to repent. But that God was calling upon them to repent meant that they could be restored. And so, with this solemn assembly in Joel 2 following the call to repent, we see a hope of restoration. We did not see that hope with the assembly in Joel 1.

Joel 2:16

Joel 2:16 – gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.

Verse 16 tells us something very important about this solemn assembly – it was to include everybody. Everyone was required to gather, and no excuses would be allowed for not gathering.

Everyone was required to gather. How do we know that?

We see that fact from the range of people who are commanded to gather – from elders to nursing infants. No one was too old to assemble, and no one was too young to assemble. Everyone from the very young to the very

old was commanded to gather together in this solemn assembly.

And no excuses would be allowed for not gathering. How do we know that?

We see that fact in the final part of verse 16: "Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber."

If anyone would have had an excuse to skip this assembly, it would have been newlyweds on their wedding night! But even they are called to gather, and if they had no excuse to miss this assembly, then no one had an excuse to miss this assembly.

Now, let's pause for a moment and look at verse 15-16 in the context of what we all know is coming at the end of Joel 2.

Peter told us in Acts 2 that the context of Joel 2 includes the establishment of the Lord's church, which would happen many years later as described in Acts 2. We know that fact with complete certainty.

But **when** does that context begin in Joel 2? When does Joel 2 start telling us about the church?

We have already seen some hints of the church with the use of the word "Zion" in verses 1 and 15 and with the phrase "holy mountain" in verse 1. But is that it?

Do we see anything else here that might be pointing us to the establishment of the church? We know we will see that great event at the end of Joel 2 – do we see it anywhere earlier in Joel 2?

I think the answer is yes – I think we are seeing some hints of **Pentecost** right here in verses 15–16.

And, if that is true, then I don't think we should be surprised. As we know, the church was established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1), and Peter opened his great sermon on that day of Pentecost by quoting Joel 2. And so, I don't think we should be surprised at all if we see some hints about Pentecost in this chapter.

But where is Pentecost in these verses? Before we look at that question, let's back up and ask another question: Why was the church established on the day of Pentecost? Was that day just a coincidence or was there something special about the day of Pentecost that was related to the church?

I think we can rule out the coincidence theory immediately. There were no coincidences in God's plan to establish the eternal kingdom of Christ! Everything was planned out to the smallest detail! And if we ever have any doubts about that, then we need to go back and study Daniel 11 again. That chapter is one of the great prophecies of the Bible, and it describes the events that would occur between the days of Daniel and the days of Christ in great detail. God had everything planned out, and it all happened just as God said it would happen. So much so that liberal theologians are willing to lose their credibility by twisting or shifting the text of Daniel in their attempts to avoid the obvious conclusion that it contains prophecies from God.

God left nothing to chance when it came to the kingdom of Christ. And that was certainly true about the great

and awesome day on which the church was established – the day of Pentecost.

But what is Pentecost? Why did God **choose** that day? Or, perhaps, we should ask why did God **design** that day the way that he did?

The word “Pentecost” comes from the Greek word *pentekostos* for “fiftieth” that was used to describe the Jewish Feast of Weeks.

Why 50? That number came from the fact that Pentecost was observed on the fiftieth day (seven weeks plus one day) after the Passover Sabbath.

Leviticus 23:15-16 – You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count **fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath**. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD.

And what can we say about the “day after the seventh Sabbath”?

What we can say is what we can say about any day after a Sabbath day – that day is a **Sunday**. Sunday always follows Saturday! Pentecost was celebrated on a Sunday – the first day of the week.

And how many Jewish feasts always occurred on a Sunday? I think we are looking at it! I think Pentecost is the only such event. Most Jewish feasts were tied to certain days of the Jewish lunar calendar (such as the 15th day of the first month), which meant they could

occur on any day of the week – but not Pentecost, it always happened “the day after the seventh Sabbath.”

And although Pentecost was later celebrated to thank God for the giving of the Law, Pentecost was originally intended as a celebration of thanksgiving to God for the harvest.

Deuteronomy 16:9–10 – You shall count seven weeks. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you.

And on the day of Pentecost, the Jews, even up until the present day, read the book of Ruth. Why?

One reason is that the setting for the book of Ruth is harvest time and Pentecost is a harvest festival.

But there is also another reason – the book of Ruth looked forward to a day when Jew and Gentile would worship God together. We see that when Ruth, a Moabite, comes to know and love God. And, of course, we also know that Ruth was the great grandmother of King David.

We also saw that same promise with the Feast of Tabernacles that we looked at earlier when we looked at Joel 1:11–12. Despite the great animosity that ran both ways between Jew and Gentile, the Jews had long looked toward a day when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together.

We also see that same great anticipation in one of the most remarkable prophecies found anywhere in the Bible.

Isaiah 19:24-25 – In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”

There is no way to explain that prophecy apart from the church. Israel a third? Egypt and Assyria the other two thirds? Egypt, my people? Assyria, the work of my hands? All of them, “a blessing in the midst of the earth”? Again, **there is no way to explain that prophecy apart from the church.**

That great day in Isaiah 19:24 was the day of the church. That great promise was fulfilled by the peace that exists between Jew and Gentile in the church. That great peace was prophesied in Isaiah 2, and that great peace is described in Ephesians 2.

Isaiah 2:4 – He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Ephesians 2:13-16 – But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create

in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And the Feast of Pentecost looked forward to that day. We see that in the reading of Ruth, but we also see that in the description of what was done during that feast of Pentecost.

Leviticus 23:16-17 – You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwelling places **two loaves of bread** to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked **with leaven**, as firstfruits to the LORD.

Why **two** loaves of bread?

Whenever we see **two** of something in the Bible (and especially in the prophets), we should ask ourselves whether we are looking at something about the church.

Yes, we know about all of those “Church Chapter Two’s” that were listed on the Handout for Lesson 11 – but, of course, those chapter divisions did not come about until long after the Bible was written. I’m not talking about those two’s – I’m talking about the two’s that we see right here in the text itself.

It is remarkable how many times the one church is described in a way that involves two of something. (See the Handout for Lesson 19.)

- We see that in Ephesians 2:15 with **Jew and Gentile** – “by abolishing the law of commandments expressed

in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man **in place of the two**, so making peace.”

- We see that in Revelation 21:3 with **God and man** – “Behold, **the dwelling place of God is with man**. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”
- We see that in 1 Peter 2:9 with the combination of royalty and the priesthood – “But you are a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.”
- We see that in Zechariah 6:13 with the crown placed on the head of the high priest – “It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be **between them both**.”
- We see that in Galatians 4:24 regarding the relationship between spiritual Jerusalem and physical Jerusalem – “Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are **two covenants**. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.”
- We see that in Hebrews 8:8 with the restoration of the united kingdom in the church – “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with **the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**.”
- We see that figuratively with the number 144,000 (12 times 12 times 1000) used in Revelation 7:4 to

depict God's faithful people, first under the old covenant (depicted by the number 12) and then under the new covenant (also depicted by the number 12) – "And I heard the number of the sealed, **144,000**, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel."

- We see that in Ephesians 2:20 with the foundation of the church – "built on the foundation of **the apostles and prophets**."
- We see that in Zechariah 4:11-14 with prophetic descriptions of the church – "**two** olive trees," "**two** golden pipes," and "the **two** anointed ones."
- We see that in Revelation 11:3-4 with similar descriptions of the church – "And I will grant authority to my **two witnesses**, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the **two olive trees** and the **two lampstands** that stand before the Lord of the earth."
- We see that in Hebrews 9:28 with the church on earth positioned between the two appearances of Christ – "so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear **a second time**, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."
- We see that in Revelation 21:1 with the victory of the church described as a new heaven and a new earth – "Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven."

- We see that in Revelation 21:9 with the church described as the bride of the lamb – “Come, I will show you **the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.**”

In fact, when we study the book of Revelation we find a battle of the two's! We find the royal priesthood of Christ arrayed against the royal priesthood of Rome. That is why Rome is pictured as two beasts in Revelation 13 – one for the royal side of Rome (Caesar), and one for the religious side of Rome (Caesar worship).

And, like the church, Rome could also be described using the number two. Rome had been founded in myth by the twins, Romulus and Remus. Rome had been built on the combination of Roman might and Greek philosophy. First century Rome was ruled by two dynasties ending with Nero and with Domitian. And Roman rule was based on a false royal priesthood based on Caesar worship.

And, of course, we know the outcome of that battle between the royal priesthood of Christ and the royal priesthood of Rome! The church was triumphant. And the message of Revelation is that the church will always be triumphant!

So, as I said, whenever we see two of something in the Bible, we should pause and ask whether we are seeing something about the church. It is certainly not always the case, but it is often the case.

But what about Pentecost?

As we read a moment ago, in Leviticus 23:16–17 God commanded the Jews to “bring from your dwelling places **two loaves of bread** to be waved.”

Why two loaves of bread? Is there something about the church here?

Yes, I think there is. The very next sentence in Leviticus 23:17 gives us an important clue: "they shall be baked **with leaven.**"

As far as I can determine, Pentecost is the only Jewish feast where leavened bread is used. Why? As we know, leaven often denotes sin in the Bible.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8 – Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So what can we say about the two loaves of bread baked with leaven that were used in the Pentecost celebration?

I think what we are seeing **figuratively** in that command is the same thing we see **literally** in the book of Acts – both Jew and Gentile obeying the one gospel to have their sins forgiven and to be added by God to the one church.

I think Jew and Gentile are the two loaves of bread baked with leaven.

Just as the Feast of Tabernacles looked forward to the day when Jew and Gentile would be one in Christ, so I think Pentecost also looked forward to that same day. That is why the Jews read the book of Ruth, and that is why they baked those two loaves of bread.

And I think we also see that same thing again with the two lambs that were sacrificed on Pentecost – peace between Jew and Gentile in the church.

Leviticus 23:19–20 – And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and **two male lambs** a year old as a sacrifice of **peace offerings**. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with **the two lambs**. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest.

And when did Pentecost occur? It occurred 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits. What do we find when we count back 50 days from the day of Pentecost in Acts 2?

1 Corinthians 15:20 – But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep.

And, of course, we find our Passover lamb.

1 Corinthians 5:7 – Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, **our Passover lamb**, has been sacrificed.

And so what can we say about Pentecost? I think we can see that it was God's plan from the very beginning that the eternal kingdom of Christ would be established on the day of Pentecost, which was always held, not on a Saturday Sabbath, but on a Sunday – on the Lord's day (Revelation 1:10).

It was on that great day that God opened the doors of his kingdom to all who would obey his gospel – both Jew and Gentile.

It was on that great day that, as we will soon see, God poured out his Spirit on **all** flesh – both Jew and Gentile.

And what better way to inaugurate that great day than with a celebration of the harvest!

Luke 10:2 – And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Pentecost was the perfect day for the establishment of the church of Christ – the eternal kingdom in which all men, both Jew and Gentile, could enjoy the worldwide blessing in Christ that was promised to Abraham. Isaiah 2 **prophesied** it. Acts 2 **describes** it. Ephesians 2 **explains** it.

But where in Joel 2:15–16 do we see Pentecost?

I said earlier that I think there are some hints about Pentecost in these verses, but what are they?

I think the best way to answer that is to put ourselves in the place of those who first heard the prophet Joel proclaim these verses.

If those locusts had not come, then those people would have been calling a solemn assembly – not to mourn the lost harvest, but to celebrate the successful harvest with this feast of Pentecost. Listen again to the description of that great event.

Leviticus 23:21 – And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. **You shall hold a holy convocation.** You shall not do any ordinary

work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

And what do we see in Joel 2:15-16? "Call a solemn assembly; gather the people; consecrate the congregation."

In short, it seems that God was still calling upon them to celebrate the harvest even though there was no harvest. Rather than feasting, they were fasting. But, although the physical harvest had been destroyed, God would soon be telling them about a restored harvest (verses 25-26) that was coming!

And I think everyone listening to Joel would have recognized the similarity between what they were being commanded to do here and what they would have been doing anyway had the harvest not been destroyed.

They would have been looking forward to Pentecost to celebrate their harvest. But now their harvest had been destroyed. And yet they are still being commanded to gather together like they would have done for Pentecost. Rather than feasting though, they are fasting because their physical harvest has been destroyed. But later in this same chapter we are going to find out that there is a restored harvest on the way (verses 25-26). And then at the end of the chapter, God is telling them about the church. Don't we think we are looking at Pentecost in these verses?

I think any Jew reading these verses and certainly any Jew experiencing these verses would have been thinking about Pentecost.

We know that Joel 2 ends with a description of Pentecost. I think we are already seeing some hints of Pentecost right here in verses 15-16.

Joel 2:17

Joel 2:17 – Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, “Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

Once again we are reminded of something we have already seen in this book – the temple was standing when Joel was written. The priests are told to do something “between the vestibule and the altar.” That means that Joel must have been written either before the temple was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar or after the temple was rebuilt under King Cyrus. But we already knew that.

The priests are told to gather “between the vestibule and the altar” – why there specifically? Was there something special about that location?

While some have suggested deep spiritual significance to this spot, I think the simpler explanation is likely the better explanation – that area between the vestibule and the altar was just a large open area where they could all gather together.

The priests are commanded to weep and speak, and I suspect many of them did not need a command to weep given what they had all just gone through.

But I think this weeping is more than just sorrow over a lost harvest; I think this weeping is sorrow over a lost people. I think that this command to weep is part of the repentance that was commanded in verse 12 – “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with **weeping**, and with mourning.”

As we know, the priests stood between God and the people. They interceded with God on behalf of the people.

Hebrews 5:1 – For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

And what were they commanded to say here in verse 17 on behalf of the people?

“Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’ ”

I think the ASV provides a much better translation of this verse:

Spare thy people, O Jehovah, and give not thy heritage to reproach, **that the nations should rule over them:** wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?

As one commentator explains, some of the modern translations use “a byword among the nations” apparently because that phrase is very close to the word translated “reproach” – but that translation cannot be correct. According to that commentary, the Hebrew phrase can only mean, “Do not let the nations rule over them” as we (almost) see in the ASV.

Why is that distinction so important? Two reasons – it is important because of the context in Joel 2 and it is important because of the context in Acts 2.

First, the context in Joel 2 is all about a nation ruling over the people. If the pre-exile view for when Joel was written is the correct view, then that nation ruling over them would soon be Babylon.

And, yes, when Babylon carried them off, God's people would suffer reproach, and the nations would ask, "where is their God?" And, in fact, we know that both of those things happened with regard to Babylon.

Psalms 137:3 – For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

Ezekiel 36:6 – ...You have suffered the reproach of the nations.

Lamentations 2:15 – All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?"

Daniel 9:16 – ...Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.

Psalms 115:2 – Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"

And so the immediate context favors the translation "that the nations should rule over them." That was why the people would suffer this reproach.

But there is a second reason why the translation "that the nations should rule over them" is important here.

It is important because of the relation between Joel 2 and Acts 2.

There is no earthly nation that could ever rule over the kingdom of Christ.

If any earthly nation could ever have ruled over the church it would have been ancient Rome.

The world had never seen a kingdom like mighty Rome, and the conflict between Rome and the church occurred when Rome was at the height of its power and when the church was in its infancy.

No one looking at that conflict with an earthly perspective would ever have bet on the church to win over Rome.

But Rome did not win. The church prevailed over Rome.

Yes, the meaning of Revelation is debated, but the central message of Revelation is not. The central message of Revelation is simple – **we win!**

Revelation 19:11-16 – Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of

the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Is there any earthly nation that can stand against that? Is there any nation that can defeat the one called Faithful and True? Is there any earthly king who can prevail over the King of kings and Lord of lords?

And, yes, I know that sometimes in this auditorium we are asked to sing a song that says Jesus is not King of kings and Lord of lords! ("We Bow Down") But don't do it! Don't sing it! Instead, read Revelation 19 and rejoice that Jesus Christ **is** King of kings and Lord of lords!

Let me say it again: **There is no earthly nation that could ever rule over the kingdom of Christ.**

And, in fact, we see that great promise all the way back in Daniel 2. That was not just something Rome learned the hard way, but it was also something that Babylon learned the hard way. And something Persia learned the hard way. And something Greece learned the hard way. It is a lesson that every nation of this world will learn the hard way!

Daniel 2:44-45 – 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, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and

the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

That stone is the kingdom of Christ established in Acts 2 during the days of those Roman kings – and it is that kingdom of Christ that Daniel says “shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end.”