

Joel Lesson 35

Joel 3:16, Continued

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.

When we ended last week, we were about to discuss the second half of verse 16. **“But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.”**

That little word **“but”** confirms what we said about the first half of verse 16. In the first half, we saw two events from Acts 2 – the gospel going out first from Jerusalem as prophesied in Isaiah 2, and the judgment of the nations as prophesied in Daniel 2.

But! But things are different for the people of God. They have escaped, as we saw in Joel 2:32. They have escaped the judgment of God, as suggested by Romans 2:3. God is their refuge. Not the nations of this world, which have crumbled to dust, but God. God is their stronghold.

How can we avoid being caught up in the judgment of the nations of this world? There is only one

way – Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. He is our refuge. He is our stronghold. He is our refuge.

We are seeing the same things here in Joel 3 that we saw in Psalm 2 – the kingdom of Christ on Zion, God’s holy hill; dashing the nations of the earth in pieces like a potter’s vessel; and, finding our refuge in Christ.

If we want to avoid suffering the fate of the kingdoms of this world, we must make sure that we are citizens of a different kingdom – the kingdom of Christ. We must be in Christ, in the kingdom of Christ, in the body of Christ, in the church of Christ. Those are all the same thing, and they all happen when we obey the gospel of Christ.

And what happens when we are in God’s stronghold? What happens is that no other stronghold can ever stand against us.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 – For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have **divine power to destroy strongholds.**

There is only one eternal kingdom. There is only one eternal stronghold. All other kingdoms and all other strongholds will be destroyed.

And there is no way for them to change that fact. There is no great battle coming where the kingdoms of this world might have a chance to reverse their fate. They have already been judged and sentenced, and that happened in Acts 2 as foretold in Daniel 2 and Psalm 2.

Joel 3:17

Joel 3:17 – “So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.

When the book of Joel opened, Judah was in very bad shape after a terrible locust invasion.

But when the book of Joel ends, Judah is in great shape! We see nothing but blessings for Judah in these closing verses. As the section heading says in the ESV, these final verses are all about the glorious future of Judah.

But what is Judah? What is Jerusalem? What is Zion? What is God’s holy mountain? Are we still talking about a **physical** city with a **physical** mountain in a **physical** nation? No, we are not.

And we know we are not. How do we know that? We know that because Peter told us that in Acts 2

and because the other prophets and the other New Testament writers told us that as well.

And I think we could figure that out all by ourselves just by reading verse 17, which is filled with references to the church. In fact, I count at least **seven** references to the church in this one short verse!

- (#1) “So you shall **know** that I am the LORD your God”

Jeremiah 31:33-34 – For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ **for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest**, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

- (#2) “who **dwells** in Zion”

Ephesians 2:22 – In him you also are being built together into a **dwelling place for God** by the Spirit.

- (#3) “who dwells in **Zion**”

Hebrews 12:22–23 – But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.

- (#4) “my holy **mountain**”

Isaiah 2:2 – 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.

- (#5) “And **Jerusalem** shall be holy”

Revelation 21:2 – And I saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

- (#6) “And Jerusalem shall be **holy**”

Ephesians 5:25–27 – Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, **that she might be holy and without blemish.**

- (#7) “and **strangers** shall never again pass through it”

Ephesians 2:19 – So then you are **no longer strangers** and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Can there be any doubt that we are reading about the church in verse 17? We see the church seven times in that one verse! The book of Joel is ending with a beautiful description of the church and the wonderful blessings that we enjoy in the church.

But let’s ask this question – **why?** Why is the book of Joel telling these people of Joel’s day about the church?

I think we can answer that question with a single word: **faithfulness.**

Although Joel does not get specific about the sins of his listeners, Joel does tell them that they need to repent in Joel 2:12, so we know that Joel had some specific sins in mind.

And if we are correct that this book was written shortly before the Babylonian exile, then we know what those sins were. We know that the people had become faithless. Jeremiah tells us that they had a stubborn and rebellious heart (Jeremiah 5:20–25).

And we know that the locusts in Joel 1 were sent by God as a warning to these faithless people (Joel 1:15, 2:25). They needed to change their ways. They needed to repent. They needed to be faithful to God.

But why? Why did they need to do those things? Joel gives two answers – a **negative** answer and a **positive** answer.

The **negative** answer is **Babylon**. The people needed to repent because otherwise Babylon would invade, would destroy their city, and would carry them away in exile.

And the **positive** answer? The positive answer is the **church**. The people needed to repent because God was planning to use them to bless the entire world through the Messiah and the eternal kingdom of the Messiah. That is why Joel ends with this wonderful description of the church. The coming kingdom of Christ was an encouragement for the people to be faithful to God.

Joel 3:18

Joel 3:18 – “And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a

fountain shall come forth from the house of
the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim.

The beautiful descriptions of the church continue in verse 18, but we also see something else in verse 18 – another reminder of our time frame!

“And in that day.” What day? We have seen the word “day” or “days” four times in this closing section of Joel (2:29, 2:31, 3:1, 3:14). And now, in Joel 3:18, we find a fifth and final occurrence: **“in that day.”**

In my opinion, all five of those phrases are looking at the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. I think they are all looking at the establishment of the church in the first century.

And, no, I don't think we need to split hairs between “in that **day**” and “in those **days.**” I think they are both included in the phrase **“at that time”** that we also find in Joel 3:1. We are not looking here at a 24 hour period of time. We are looking instead at a time when the wonderful promises of God about the eternal kingdom of Christ were fulfilled – and we can read all about that wonderful time in the book of Acts.

We find something very similar in the book of Zechariah, which, like verse 18, also mentions a fountain.

Zechariah 13:1 – **On that day** there shall be a **fountain** opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

I think both Joel 3 and Zechariah 13 are describing the church, which is the body of the saved – those saved by the blood of Christ in the watery grave of baptism.

And so, we now have our time frame for the blessings in verse 18. But what are those **blessings**?

“The mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water.”

If you wanted to promise great blessings to the people of Joel’s day, it would have been hard to come up with a better promise than that one.

The people of Judah were used to streams that would flow with water during the rainy season but those streams would then dry up for the remainder of the year. But that is not what we see here. The promise here is that **all** the streambeds shall flow with water. The promise is that everyone will have an unending supply of fresh water. And so the plants and the cattle will produce wine and milk.

And, of course, there is no way to think about that great promise apart from the promised Messiah

and the promised pouring out of God's Spirit that we studied earlier in Joel 2. And we also think about what Jesus proclaimed in John 7.

John 7:37-39 – On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

When we read Joel 3:18, we need to remember where this book started! When the book of Joel opened, the people had just suffered a terrible locust invasion.

Joel 1:10, 12 – The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes. ... The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man.

Now, three chapters later, what do we find? A complete reversal!

Earlier, in Joel 3:10, we saw a complete reversal of fortunes for the people of this world, and now,

in Joel 3:18, we see a complete reversal for the people of God. God is turning the tables!

When we studied the book of Esther, we found that reversal was the central theme of that book. I think reversal is also a major theme of the book of Joel.

The blessings continue in the final phrase of verse 18.

“And a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim.”

This image is remarkable! If the people wondered about the source of this promised unending supply of water, this phrase answers their question – the water would come from the house of God! The temple was the source of this water!

But, while remarkable, the imagery here is not unique to Joel. We also find it in Ezekiel and Zechariah.

Ezekiel 47:1 – Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, **water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east** (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

Zechariah 13:1 – On that day there shall be **a fountain opened for the house of**

David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

Both of those prophecies are telling us about the church. And I think we could also add Psalm 46 to that list.

Psalm 46:4-6 – There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

A river from the city of God? God dwelling in the midst of his holy habitation? The nations raging? The kingdoms tottering? God uttering his voice? The earth melting? Now where have we seen all of those same things? Right here in Joel 3.

We really lose a lot when we fail to study the Bible as a unified whole! Every verse in the Bible is connected to every other verse in the Bible.

The great blessings in verse 18 are the great blessings of Christ. They are the great blessings that were promised to Abraham in Genesis 22:18. They are the great blessings provided by the gospel of Christ. They are the great blessings enjoyed by everyone who has been added to the kingdom of Christ by God.

But we are not yet through with verse 18. We still need to talk about one more puzzling valley. “And a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim.”

What does that mean? What and where is the Valley of Shittim? What does it mean that this water from the temple would water the Valley of Shittim?

I think Ezekiel provides some help for us in answering those questions. A moment ago we read Ezekiel 47:1 where, as here, we find a stream of water coming out of the temple. Let’s now skip down a few verses in Ezekiel 47.

Ezekiel 47:8-9 – And he said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters **the sea**; when the water flows into **the sea**, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of **the sea** may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.

That “**sea**” in Ezekiel 47:8 is the Dead Sea. And so the beautiful picture in Ezekiel 47 is that this water flowing from the temple would turn the Dead Sea into the Living Sea!

I think the Dead Sea in Ezekiel 47 corresponds to the Valley of Shittim in Joel 3. I think both

images are showing us the same thing – that this water from the temple would cleanse and restore and make alive that which was previously dead. And, once again, we are reminded of the verse from Zechariah that we read a moment ago.

Zechariah 13:1 – On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

In Ezekiel 47 we find **cleansing life-giving water**. In Zechariah 13 we find **cleansing life-giving water**. And here in Joel 3 we find **cleansing life-giving water**.

Now, where else do we find **cleansing life-giving water**?

Ephesians 5:25–27 – Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, **having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word**, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

1 Peter 3:21 – **Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I think we are on to something here! But why does Joel 3 use the Valley of Shittim in place of the

Dead Sea? What happened in that valley? How is that valley associated with death?

The answer is that the Valley of Shittim was the location of a great moral collapse of God's people.

Numbers 25:1-3 – While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

Phinehas then takes a spear and kills a man and a woman who were flaunting their sin in front of the whole congregation. And what does God then promise to Phinehas?

Numbers 25:11-13 – Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him **my covenant of peace**, and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him **the covenant of a perpetual priesthood**, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.'

And so what can we say about the Valley of Shittim? It was a place of sin and death that was cleansed and that from that day on was associated, not with

sin and death, but with a covenant of peace and perpetual priesthood.

And then, later, when the people are just about to cross over the Jordan River into the promised land, from where did they set out?

Joshua 3:1 – Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over.

The Valley of Shittim is a place where the people pass from death to life. The Valley of Shittim is a place where the people leave the fleeting pleasures of sin behind to instead enjoy the permanent promises of God.

And what was it that stood between the Valley of Shittim and the land of promise in Joshua 3? **Water.** The Jordan River.

Can anyone possibly be surprised when God also placed water between the lost and the saved in the New Testament?

Romans 6:3-4 – Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of

the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

What are we seeing here in the closing verses of Joel 3? I think we can answer that question with a single word – gospel! We are seeing the gospel of Christ!

We are seeing the gospel that is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). We are seeing the gospel by which we are buried as a dead person and raised as a living person in the waters of baptism (Romans 6).

Joel 3:19

Joel 3:19 – “Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the people of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

One of the great blessings that we enjoy in the kingdom of Christ is victory over our enemies. We have seen that blessing described in many ways in Joel 3, and, in fact, that particular blessing is the focus of Joel 3 – God’s judgment of the kingdoms of this world.

Here in verse 19 we find another description of that great blessing. Earlier in Joel 3 we saw God’s judgment against Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia.

Here in verse 19 we see God's judgment against two more enemies of his people: Egypt and Edom. Egypt and Edom were both longstanding, prominent enemies of Israel.

It has been said that, other than Israel, Egypt receives more coverage in the Old Testament than any other nation. We find lengthy oracles against Egypt in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

As for Edom, it has been said that no other nation receives more vitriolic condemnation in the Bible. We find oracles against Edom in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, and Malachi. While related to the Jews through their father Isaac, the Edomites rarely passed up an opportunity to cause trouble for their cousins.

But why are Egypt and Edom being judged here? Verse 19 answers that question, and it is the same answer we saw earlier for Philistia and Phoenicia – Egypt and Edom had caused great harm to the people of God. They had committed violence, and they had shed innocent blood.

Joel 3:20

Joel 3:20 – But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations.

Why did God circle back to Egypt and Edom in verse 19? I think it was so he could make the contrast that we see here in verse 20.

Verse 19 told us that Egypt would become a desolation and Edom would become a desolate wilderness. But not so with Judah. Verse 20 tells us that Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations.

The message of verse 20 is the same message that we find earlier in Joel 3 and that we find in Daniel 2 – there is only one eternal kingdom!

The message here is not that only Edom and Egypt will be desolate. Instead, the message here is that every earthly kingdom will be desolate. Every earthly kingdom will be a desolate wilderness. They will all crumble to dust before the kingdom of Christ!

Judah and Jerusalem in verse 20 are spiritual Judah and spiritual Jerusalem. God's message is not that some earthly kingdom will outlast all of the other earthly kingdoms. Instead, God's message is that the spiritual kingdom of Christ will outlast every earthly kingdom.

In John 18:36, Jesus said "my kingdom is not from the world." Rome was a kingdom from the world. Egypt was a kingdom from the world. Edom was a

kingdom from the world. And they were all destined for the dust bin, along with every other kingdom from the world.

But the kingdom of Christ is not from the world. The kingdom of Christ is not a product of man. The kingdom of Christ is not man-made. And the kingdom of Christ will never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44).

That eternal kingdom is the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). And that new Jerusalem is the same Jerusalem in verse 20 that will be inhabited to all generations.

Ephesians 3:20-21 – Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus **throughout all generations**, forever and ever. Amen.

Joel 3:21

Joel 3:21 – I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged, for the LORD dwells in Zion.”

Yes, after 35 lessons you might have started to wonder, but the book of Joel does in fact have a final verse – and we have finally arrived there!

“I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged.”

What blood is being avenged here? The immediate answer is that it is the blood that was shed by Egypt and Edom in verse 19, but I think the blood here in verse 21 includes more than just that blood. I think it includes the blood shed by all the nations gathered in verse 2 for judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

I think the message here is simple – **God knows!** God knows what has been done to his people, and God knows who has done it. And while God may not yet have avenged all of that bloodshed (as he says here in verse 21), that does not mean that God will never avenge that bloodshed. In fact, the promise here is that God will avenge it – “I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged.”

I think we would all likely agree that over the years the people of God have been a pretty easy target for the people of the world. I think that is what Peter tells us.

1 Peter 4:3-5 – For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. **With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery,**

and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

“But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” That is the same promise that we find in the final verse of Joel: “I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged.”

And, yes, I think that promise includes more than literal bloodshed. I think it includes all of the persecution faced by the people of God. God knows about all of it, and one day the tables will be turned.

Hebrews 10:31 – It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And what do we find at the end of Joel? What is the very last thing we read in this book? **“The LORD dwells in Zion!”**

We know that Zion is referring to the church here. We know that from the context and from the time frame.

- We know that Joel 2:28–32 is about the church, and verse 32 referred to the church as Mount Zion.

- We know that Joel 3:16 is a prophecy about the church, and that verse referred to the church as Zion.
- We know that Joel 3:17 is a prophecy about the church, and that verse referred to the church as Zion, the holy mountain of God.

And now, at the end of Joel, we read that God dwells in Zion.

And, yes, we know that God dwells in heaven, but we also know that God dwells in the church. In fact, the church is God's household.

Ephesians 2:19–22 – So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of **the household of God**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into **a dwelling place for God** by the Spirit.

Yes, we are built together into a dwelling place for God! God dwells in Zion!

In Exodus 25:8, God said “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” In many ways the rest of the Bible is simply a variation on that theme. God wanted to dwell among his people,

and yet his people were sinners. What was the solution? John tells us the solution.

John 1:14 – And the Word became flesh and **dwelt among us**, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Christ came to this world so that God could dwell with his people forever. And not just starting in heaven when we all get there. God is dwelling with us now in the church.

“The LORD dwells in Zion!” What a beautiful way to end this book!

When the book opened, the people were reeling from a terrible locust invasion. And I suspect they thought God had abandoned them. Why would God or anyone else want to live in such a desolated city?

And then Joel told us about a coming invasion by Babylon that would leave even greater destruction and desolation. And again, I suspect that the people thought God had abandoned them. Why would God or anyone else want to live in such a desolated city?

But Joel does not end with a city desolated by locusts. And Joel does not end with a city desolated by Babylonians. Instead, Joel ends with a beautiful coming city where God would dwell with his people.

That city would not be desolate. That city would not flourish for a while and then pass away. Instead, that city would be eternal. That city would be inhabited forever. That city would be available to all generations.

From locusts to Pentecost. That is the pathway in Joel, and isn't that the pathway for each of us in the church? Haven't we all gone from locusts to Pentecost?

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

From locusts to Pentecost! That in a nutshell is the gospel of Christ, and it is also the message of Joel!

It has been my great privilege and honor to study the books of Hosea and Joel with you, and my prayer is that we will all continue to study these wonderful books! Yes, I think we have learned a lot, but there is always a lot more to learn. No matter

how deeply we dig, we will never exhaust all of
the treasures in the word of God!

Eric Hall

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