

# ***SOUNDING THE TRUMPET: STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF JOEL***

— GARY WIENS

## ***SESSION 2: THE DAY OF THE LORD***

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### **I. THE THEME OF JOEL –THE DAY OF THE LORD**

- A. The primary theme of the Book of Joel is the “*day of the Lord*,” which is mentioned four times (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 31; 3:14). This day indicates a unique time frame ***when God acts in unusual manifestations of power for His people and against His enemies***. This is the time when God manifests Himself as the Warrior King going to war against sin as He decisively intervenes against His enemy with open displays of His power.
- B. Because of God’s patience with judging sin (2 Peter 3:9), the wicked assume His judgment will never happen. Solomon affirms this reality saying, “***Because the sentence of an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil***”(Ecc. 8:11). Settled in complacency, they believe in their heart that the Lord will neither do good nor evil (Zeph. 1:12), that He is ambivalent or passive concerning the affairs of men.
- C. Occasionally in history has God altered His usual mode of operation by breaking into the natural realm to confront sin openly on a large scale. These open demonstrations of His zeal are called the judgments of God and their time frame is called the day of the Lord. He displays His sovereign power over sin as He calls into account rebellion in a unique way. When He shows His power and wisdom in this way, it is ***His day***, and thus He calls it, “The day of the Lord.”
- D. When the Lord defines a crisis in history as a “day of the Lord,” it is He who is the primary orchestrator of events. This does not mean that no other influence plays into the catastrophes.
- E. There is an overlapping of ***three influences working together*** in times of crisis – God’s discipline, Satan’s rage and man’s sin.
1. Man, in his free will, presses into sin;
  2. Satan rages against the righteous and
  3. God judges against rebellion.

Under His sovereign wisdom and power, God causes a ***complex overlapping of these three distinct realities to work together for good*** according to His perfectly designed plan (Rom. 8:28). Yet above all the secondary influences, it is the Lamb of God Himself who is the primary actor in His judgment events related in history.

- F. In Revelation 5, Jesus, not the Devil, is the one who breaks open the seals around the scroll and then releases His end-time judgments. In this act of loosing the judgments, He reveals Himself as the *Lamb*.

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1. The fact that Jesus is the one releasing the end-time judgments described in the Book of Revelation is an offensive message both to the world and to the Church.
2. Yet, this is the message that God trumpeted through Joel and the Old Testament prophets and will trumpet through the end-time Church. “It shall come as a destruction from the Almighty” (Joel 1:15).
3. ***God wants the people to know that He is the one who is doing it***, and He does not want that message watered down in any way. If they do not know who is behind it all, they cannot respond rightly. They must grapple with and come to grips with this reality in order to respond to God in the wholeheartedness and partnership He is after.

## **II. THE LOCAL AND LESSER DAYS VERSUS THE GLOBAL AND GREAT DAY**

- A. The day of the Lord speaks specifically and mostly about that final hour of natural history, relating to the Second Coming of Christ, as depicted in Revelation. That is the “great Day of the Lord,” and what I call the “Capital ‘D’ Day of the Lord.” ***There is only one great Day of the Lord and it is at the end of the age.***
  1. Yet what the Book of Joel teaches us, along with other Old Testament prophets, is that there are also precursory days to the great Day. These are lesser days that prefigure the great Day of the Lord at the end of the age.
  2. Though an entire country might be affected, it is still a limited scope compared to the great Day of the Lord which is global in nature with a full measure of intensity.
- B. We study the lesser, local days of the Lord to understand the great and global Day of the Lord.
  1. These “lesser days” teach us about the “great Day” coming at Second Coming of Jesus. The progression of judgment seen in Joel illustrates this divine principle. Of the three “days of the Lord” in Joel, the first two are precursors to the final and ultimate great Day. The judgments of God are progressive, intensifying gradually in severity so that people have opportunity to change their mind about sin.
  2. The release of God’s judgments in these “lesser days,” affecting smaller geographic areas, are ultimately statements of His mercy because they are preparatory for the great Day. With these precursory days, He documents in history His zeal against sin and His desire to release revival. The history of revivals is an inspiring record of God breaking in when His people respond in repentance and prayer with fasting.

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- C. World War II is one of the most significant examples of the day of the Lord in history. However, it was an example of a local day of the Lord in Europe, Asia and many other nations. It was clearly a time when God was calling men to account for their sin, saying, “Enough!” It instructs us of what that final day will be like. It gives us a small taste of the unparalleled bitterness that the whole earth will encounter in God’s final end-time judgments.
- D. On the final great Day of the Lord, all the lesser days of history will take their place in God’s historical preparation of His Church. He has not left us unaware of His ways. ***He does not leave us to guess at His model of judgment.*** History tells the story. What He has done in the past, He will do again. The invitation to all generations to be wholehearted is still the response He is after.
- E. One message of the Book of Joel is that God never changes. His personality does not change, nor does His way of dealing with His people. The little days of the Lord through history help those in the final generation to look at history knowing, “God’s ways are unchangeable. God always does what exactly what He said that He would do.” God has made known His unchanging ways in history, so we have clarity in the coming hour. We have no reason to flounder in confusion; we can know what He is doing and how He wants us to respond as His judgments unfold.
- F. Three “days of the Lord” in the Book of Joel each progressively reach greater heights of intensity. These three days each portray different expressions of the day of the Lord.
  - 1. The first act in the drama is a locust plague compounded by a severe drought—an agricultural disaster (Joel 1:15).
  - 2. The second act is a military disaster brought by the invasion of Babylon (Joel 2:1-11).
  - 3. The third part of the drama speaks toward the end-time events depicted in the Book of Revelation surrounding the Second Coming of Jesus (Joel 2:31; 3:1-21).

### **III. THE PAST DAY OF THE LORD**

- A. The first expression of the day of the Lord in the Book of Joel the calamity of the locust plague and drought that came upon Israel in one of the decades just before 600 BC. It caused several years of distress (Joel 1:15; 2:25a). This was a “lesser day of the Lord” in that it was limited to one nation and one small time frame. It brought agricultural and economic disaster that threatened to lead Israel nearly to the brink of starvation.
- B. The people called the locust plague and drought a “natural disaster.” However, Joel interpreted it as the hand of *God*. It was just the beginning, as another “day of the Lord” calamity was soon to follow. The locust plague had just finished (possibly only a few years earlier), when the word of the Lord came to Joel concerning the crisis of the Babylonian military invasion.

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- C. The locust plague was still fresh in everyone’s mind. Joel used this occasion to call the people together in a solemn assembly of prayer with fasting (Joel 1:14) in light of the coming military invasion. God’s answer to the coming crisis was very simple. He wanted a sacred gathering of the people in fasting and prayer. The call to repentance could still impact (even minimize) the agricultural crisis (caused by locusts and drought), though the main part of it was past tense.
- D. This divine requirement is not just for Joel’s day, it is the response God always requires of His people. ***“If My people will humble themselves and pray and seek My face...” (2 Chron. 7:14).*** The profound part about this divine requirement is that *anybody* can do it. It does not require education, special skill, money or fame. Any group of weak people can fast a few days as they gather together in a room and cry out, “O God, forgive and help us!”

## **IV. THE NEAR DAY OF THE LORD – BABYLONIAN MILITARY INVASION (JOEL 2:1-9)**

- A. The second “day of the Lord” that Joel prophesied was the Babylonian invasion; it may have still been possibly ten to twenty years away (Joel 2:1-11, 25a). The Lord began to prepare that very people for a “near day of the Lord” a coming military invasion upon Israel so much more severe than the locust invasion. The locust plague caused crisis for three to five years (Joel 2:25), yet this coming military crisis would distress Israel for seventy years (Jer. 25:9-14; 29:10).
- B. Joel also prophesied of this as a “day of the Lord.” Why? He wanted Israel to know that just as the locust invasion was not just a natural disaster, the Babylonian military would not be merely a political power play. It was orchestrated from heaven. God called the evil army of Babylon “His army” as He did the locusts (Joel 2:11, 25). God said of them, in essence, “they are My instrument that I will raise up to discipline My people.” God would eventually judge Babylon for their wickedness (Isa. 47:4-11; Jer. 25:9-14).
- C. The locust invasion was sent by God to wake up His people to righteousness and prayer, but they would not be stirred. Then, God sent a military invasion to cause them to return to Him with all their hearts (Joel 2:12).
  - 1. The military invasion of Babylon came in three different waves (BC 606, 597, 586) leaving Israel in much difficulty (economic, agricultural, political, social, etc.) after each one. This gave them time to repent before the next wave came. Unfortunately, Israel did not take advantage of the opportunity to secure God’s favor in that time.
  - 2. Following that first twenty years, Israel spent fifty years in work camps, totaling a “day of the Lord” period of seventy years.

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- D. Israel's history has witnessed numerous lesser days of the Lord in preparing them for the final Day of the Lord. Israel has known many great crises that were orchestrated by God, thus, constituting a day of the Lord.
  - 1. In 70 AD, the Roman army outdid the Babylonians in their brutal devastation and destruction of Jerusalem.
  - 2. Nearly two thousand years later, in the 1940s, the Jewish people underwent the worst persecution and annihilation yet experienced, at the hands of Nazi Germany. Any Jewish individual who lived in any of these crises might have a hard time with us calling them "a lesser day of the Lord," and understandably so.

## **V. THE DISTANT DAY OF THE LORD – AT THE END OF THE AGE**

- A. The final day of the Lord will be a global season of revival and judgment at the end of the age. It is called a great and awesome Day of which the lesser days, such as the locust plague and the Babylonian invasion, were only precursors (Joel 2:31).
- B. The length of this ultimate Day of the Lord is not just a twenty-four-hour period in which Jesus appears in the clouds with all of the saints and angels. Though that is a very important part of this final Day, the full Day is longer than the time it takes for the Lord to appear in the clouds to rapture His Church. The great and final Day of the Lord is related to the Great Tribulation, the Second Coming and the Millennial reign of Jesus over all the earth for 1,000 years (Rev. 20).
- C. The coming crisis of the Jewish nation at the hand of the Antichrist will exceed all of the previous military conflicts that they have ever known (Zech. 12-14). This military invasion of Israel will far surpass the Babylonian devastation of Joel 2:1-9.
- D. Israel will be assaulted by a coalition of nations, which will once again lead to its being taken into captivity at the hands of its enemies (Joel 3:1-3, Zech. 12-14.). Anti-Semitism will increase worldwide and concentration camps will once again be established.
- E. Israel will be backed into a corner as all the nations will gather against it to annihilate it. Many Jewish people will die. Yet in the end, God will show Himself as Deliverer and He Himself will fight against Israel's enemies (Zech. 14).
- F. In the dark hours before Jesus returns, the Church will be required by God to do what most of the Church in Europe did not do in the 1940s. That is, to stand fearless *for* and *with* the Jewish people. We will take our stand as voices of mercy and messengers of goodness to comfort Israel in the midst of the greatest calamity the earth has yet witnessed.

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- G. *This same reality of military invasion by the Antichrist's evil worldwide empire is true of many nations of the earth, including America.* In God's divine strategy, a global conflict will mount alongside a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The worst days and the best days for planet earth are yet ahead of us.

## **VI. THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CAUSES OF NATIONAL CRISIS**

- A. The divine requirement in Joel's day is the response God still requires – a holy, praying Church. *If My people called by My name will humble themselves and pray... (2 Chron. 7:14)*
- Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting... rend your heart...return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful...and He relents from doing harm. (Joel 2:12-13)*
- B. When the Lord calls a national crisis “the day of the Lord,” He is identifying Himself as the primary orchestrator of it. In other words, the locust plague and the Babylonian invasion, was not Israel's greatest problem. It was not Satan nor the wicked Babylonians. ***It was God.*** Before all other secondary sources, including the sin of Nebuchadnezzar and his armies, ***the primary source of Israel's problem was God and His unrelenting zeal for them.***
- C. The primary solution is always for the Church to gather together to repent with fasting and prayer. **God's people, Israel, had become adversarial in their relationship to a righteous God;** they had resisted Him until God became their adversary. God would bring them back into a right relationship with Him through judgment. **The greatest “problem” of a sinful Church is God's zeal to have purity in its midst.**
- D. God's people have to first take up the issue with God. God can take care of Nebuchadnezzar and his evil empire, along with Satan and his rage. Problems are never solved by trying to deal with secondary causes if God is the primary cause of the national crisis. We often focus on the secondary issues instead of the primary one. However, the secondary causes are still real.
- E. There are natural, sinful and demonic secondary causes. To use modern day examples of legitimate secondary causes, we focus on the sin in Washington, or the oil in the Middle East, oil or finances in Europe, etc. Yet, the sin of world political leaders is not our ultimate problem.
- F. The problem is first the compromising prayerless church not responding to our primary source of trouble—God Himself. If we settle the issue with God, we can overcome the fallout of man's sin and Satan's rage. But, God is the first cause we must face.

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- G. When we focus on secondary causes, we come up with secondary solutions. We can march on Washington, picket, call senators, write appeal letters, etc. Sometimes these are truly important, as they sometimes make an impact in righteous decisions in a nation. Yes, our secular society must repent of various sins, but that is still a secondary solution.
- H. The primary solution is always for the Church to repent with fasting and prayer. The primary *solution* corresponds to the primary *source* of the problem. God is the cause of the problem, and thus, we need to wholeheartedly pursue Him as our solution.
1. If God is the primary source of the trouble, then our primary solution is *finding the favor* of the Man at the right hand of the Father. It is Jesus' zeal for love to abound in His people and to have His Gospel spread in power that has caused the disruption. He is moved by love as His own zeal compels Him. It is *His* favor that we need!
  2. The Church must know that the primary cause of some international crisis is God's zeal being stirred. Therefore, the primary solution will only be found in God taking action in favor of the saints (Dan. 7:22). The secondary solutions must never obscure the primary necessity of wholeheartedness. We come before God with fasting and prayer to seek God's favor. ***It is God's response to the crisis that will ultimately solve the crisis.***
- I. The primary solutions are the responsibility of the Body of Christ. The vacuum of prayer and fasting in the Western Church today is not a small problem. The houses of prayer in the earth are beginning to fill up, but are still in great need of passion and spiritual authority.
- J. Joel called Israel to wholeheartedness (Joel 1:15) ***before the military crisis in Joel 2:1-9 began.*** The call to prayer and fasting is God's primary prescription for the human heart to be protected from offense, anger and fear that arise in times of judgment. Whether the judgment is averted, minimized or still comes in full strength, we can encounter God's goodness by returning to Him. When we rend our hearts, we encounter the God who is gracious and merciful and great in kindness (Joel 2:13)

## **VII. THE REDEMPTIVE PURPOSE OF THE DAY OF THE LORD**

- A. Each "day of the Lord" in history is designed by God to prepare the human heart for the ultimate Day of eternal judgment at the end of the age. In an eternal sense, all of these natural days of the Lord, both the great and lesser ones, prepare us for the Great White Throne judgment when we no longer have opportunity to change.
1. Between now and eternity, we *can* change and God earnestly desires to bring us into that transformation by these heightened manifestations of His judgment and glory.

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2. The day of the Lord is God's mercy being given to bring dynamic change in geographic areas, and ultimately, the whole globe. It is a frightening and a glorious thing when God holds a nation accountable for His claims over it. It is God's mercy to visit with historic judgment before the great Day of eternity when the accountability is final.
  3. In other words, day-of-the-Lord judgments are an act of mercy. God did not just lose His temper. Rather, it is a redemptive tool to bring people out of sin before it's too late.
- B. He uses judgment activity as a cleansing agent to purify the spiritual atmosphere of specific geographic areas of the earth, clearing the way for a blessing that is to come later. Just as a forest fire is a natural cleansing process in nature, prohibiting future greater fires, God's judgments in history are acts of mercy where the Lord clears out obstacles to ultimately release more blessing and stop greater judgment in the future. Never does God release His judgments casually but always at the critical times in history knowing how they affect a future period of time. There is continuity in God's plan throughout the generations. On the last day, we will see how He worked with wisdom and consistency through all of the generations.

## **VIII. THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE: "LIKE KIND BUT LESSER DEGREE"**

- A. Joel described the day of the Lord blessings and judgments for Israel. Understanding this is relevant for us because of the principle which I call, "***Like kind, but, lesser degree.***" The glory and judgment that God releases to the nation of Israel, He will give in "***like kind but in lesser degree***" to the Church and the nations around the world. In other words, the same manifestations of glorious power specified for the Church in Israel will be seen in the Church world wide, yet in a lesser degree.
- B. It is the same principle with the judgments of God. The judgments on the nation of Israel will be seen in many nations, but in lesser degree. ***Israel will receive the most severe judgment and the greatest degree of blessing.*** Revelation 9:15 says that one-third of the earth's population will be killed. They will die unnatural deaths in the judgments of God. Yet in Zechariah 13:8, we find that two-thirds of Israel will die in God's judgments. Israel receives twice the portion of judgment—but also more blessing!
- C. Many countries throughout the world will endure military invasions and conflict at the hands of the Antichrist's worldwide evil empire yet not to the degree that Israel will. ***All nations will come against Israel*** (Zech. 12:3; 14:2). On the other side, the Church in Israel will have a spirit of glory resting upon it that will far surpass the rest of the Church in the earth. These born-again, lovesick worshipers of Jesus will be the recipients of a greater deposit of glory in Israel. ***Their judgment is more severe, but their glory is greater.***

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- D. We study the judgments that will touch the nation of Israel and the glory it will encounter because we know that both of them will have an application in the Gentile Church—***like kind but lesser degree***. For example, knowing that the Spirit will be poured out on Israel so that all prophecy, we can be sure that those same things will be happening in the Church around the world. Though the great and terrible Day described in Joel is directed at Israel, what will happen to Israel in that Day will happen to the entire Body of Christ worldwide—like kind but lesser degree. The Day of the Lord crisis and glory seen in Joel is centered on Israel, but we apply it knowing there is a parallel crisis coming to Gentile nations that involves military invasions and agricultural crisis (Rev. 6-18) and also to the international body of Christ that involves persecution unto martyrdom (Dan. 7:21-25).
- E. The point is that ***answers that God gives to Israel during its Day-of-the-Lord crisis are the same answers He gives to the Church globally***.
- F. Many theologians have what I call “***selective theology***” in relation to Israel. They apply the scriptural promises of blessing given to Israel to the modern Church yet leave the judgment prophecies to be fulfilled only in Israel. The truth is that the glory and the judgment spoken of by the Old Testament prophets are mostly talking specifically to the nation of Israel, yet the principle is that what God does in that nation, both good and bad, He will do in like kind but a lesser degree worldwide. We study Joel knowing that what will happen to Israel, good and bad, will happen in part to other nations as well.

## **IX. THE SECOND COMING: WINDS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER A GREAT HURRICANE**

- A. Daniel saw the activity of God shifting things in the nations as winds stirring on the sea. ***Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea." (Dan. 7:2-3)***
- B. Many events surrounding the Second Coming—before, during, and after—are involved in the Day of the Lord. Picture a great hurricane out at sea that is approaching the coastlands. Imagine that it has 200-mph winds around the center of the storm. The winds will increase and affect the coastland long before the fullness of the storm reaches land. This center of the storm called the great Day of the Lord is the Second Coming of Jesus. The winds of war and judgment will increase greatly before the all encompassing central event of Jesus’ return, as the center of the storm. Before He actually appears, the winds that precede Him are like the hurricane winds preceding the great center of the storm. In other words, the progressive intensity of events, both good and bad, disrupting whatever is in its path. As there are winds on all sides of the center of a storm as there will winds on both sides of the Lord’s coming. The winds of disruption will be seen a decade or two before He returns, as well as many winds blowing in the aftermath of His Second Coming. After His appearing, many things will be re-established as nations are judged and brought under the full government of God. There will be a unique intensity right after Christ’s return, setting things into God’s order.

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- C. The winds of change will progressively intensify as the coming of the Lord comes nearer and nearer. Hebrews 12 refers to these winds preceding the Lord's appearing as a "*great shaking*." There will be a great disruption in the nations just before and immediately after His appearing. Some nations will be altogether eliminated as Jesus, the King of kings, puts things in order. Many geographical changes will occur before and after He returns. All the events surrounding the Second Coming—before, during, and after—are involved in the Day of the Lord.
- D. The Lord's return is being preceded by many winds that are stirrings. He is setting everything in order, moving boundary lines of nations and bringing numerous changes in the atmosphere, weather patterns and agriculture. We are at the beginning of the beginning. We have time right now to seek God, to go deep in the messages He gave us through Joel and other scriptures, that we might have unshaken love and insight in the great and very terrible Day of the Lord.