

## THE END TIMES

### Joel's Day of the Lord

I attended another funeral the other day. This time of a young boy who for a period of time ran the halls of our church and attended our Sunday School classes. He was only twelve when he passed unexpectedly from this life into the next. Again, I was reminded of the brevity of this earthly existence. Every day death draws nearer.

The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. It hushes their fears and allows them to practice all unpleasant forms of iniquity while death draws every day nearer and the command to repent goes unheeded.

Those are the words of A.W. Tozer<sup>1</sup> – solemn, convicting, and so very truthful. And those words of A.W. Tozer summarize well the message of one of the earliest writing prophets in the Old Testament, the prophet Joel. There are differing opinions as to when he lived, but it was most likely that he lived during the reign of Joash, in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. His name means “Jehovah is God.”

The key theme of this little book of only three chapters is the “Day of the Lord.” It’s mentioned five times in this book: once in the first chapter, three times in chapter two, and once in chapter three.

Joel 1:15 Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.

Joel 2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand-

Joel 2:11 The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

Joel 2:31 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

Joel 3:14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

You get the impression that the Day of the Lord is not something you want to sign up for! No wonder another prophet, Amos, makes fun of those who say they are looking forward to the day of the Lord.

“If only the day of the LORD were here! For then the LORD would rescue us from all our enemies.” But you have no idea what you are wishing for. That day will not bring light and prosperity, but darkness and disaster. In that day you will be like a man who runs from a lion — only to meet a bear. After escaping the bear, he leans his hand against a wall in his house — and is bitten by a snake. Amos 5:18-19 NLT

What is the Day of the Lord? The expression comes from the idea in the Ancient Near East that a mighty military ruler could conquer a land and defeat his enemy in one single day. The term emphasizes might, judgment, and awesome destruction. The “day” however, is not a single 24 hour day, but a period of time. The “Day of the Lord” in the Bible is a period of time with several characteristics.

## A TIME OF JUDGMENT

As we’ve just seen, the day of the Lord is first of all a time of judgment.

“it will come like destruction”

“it is dreadful. Who can endure it?”

“the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood”

For Joel, this aspect of judgment is viewed from several angles. From the prophet’s perspective, it is both past, in the near future and in the distant future. Remember that last week we saw that the Old Testament prophets often saw and spoke of both the present and future as if they were looking at a range of mountain peaks. When you’re on top of a mountain and looking out over a range of mountains, you can often see the peaks of those mountains but not what lies in the valleys between. At times, the mountain peaks almost seem to merge together.

We see the same thing in the book of Joel. Joel first sees and describes a past day of the Lord in 1:1-20. Notice what he says in verse 4:

What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten.

These verses look at the day of the Lord in *retrospect*. Joel is looking back on a *past day* of the Lord — a literal, awful destruction of the land by locusts. One of the most feared plagues in the ancient world was a plague of locusts. They devastate everything. They can take a lush, fertile land and transform it into an arid wasteland in just hours. And they often come in swarms, as verse 4 describes. What one swarm of locusts doesn’t destroy, the next one will.

But then in chapters 2 and 3, the prophet looks to the future, giving us a description of the Day of the Lord in *prospect*. Joel speaks first of a *near future* day of the Lord in chapter 2. Here, the imagery seems to shift from swarms of locusts to mighty armies that invade the land. The shift in imagery is easy, because locusts look like tiny armored horses. In fact, the Italian word for locust means “little horse.”

But then, beginning in 2:28 and to the end of the book, Joel graphically describes a *far future* day of the Lord. Notice the futuristic language beginning in verse 28:

“And *afterward* I will pour out my Spirit...”

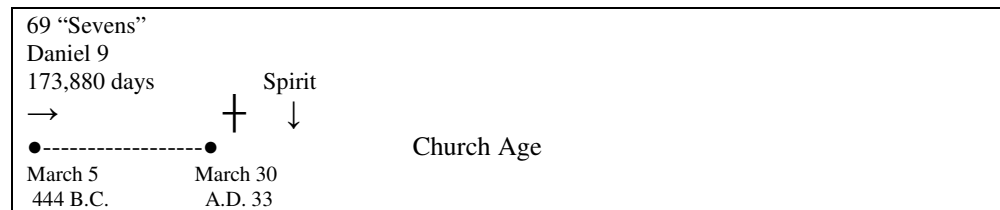
“I will pour out my Spirit *in those days*...”

“before the coming of the *great and dreadful day of the Lord*...”

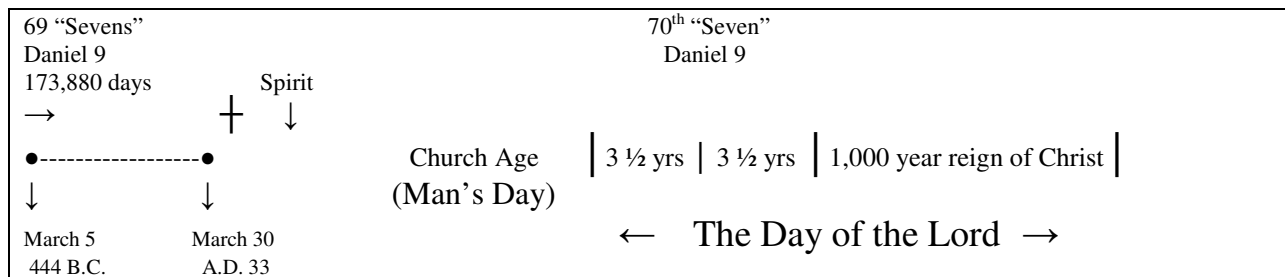
So just when will this “great and dreadful day of the Lord” come? Let me try to put this in the perspective of what we’ve already seen in Daniel and Ezekiel. Remember, Daniel received the revelation of “Seventy Sevens” decreed for his people, Israel. This amazing prophecy specified that, from the decree to rebuild the streets and wall of Jerusalem (which was given on March 5, 444 B.C.) until the coming of the Messiah, there would be exactly 69 sets of “sevens” (seven years each) or the equivalent of 483 “biblical” years which is exactly 173,880 days.

And that is precisely what took place. On March 30, A.D. 33, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and presented himself to Israel as their king (Luke 19). We know, of course, that he was rejected, hung on a cross, cut off, and as a result the offer of Christ’s kingdom to Israel as a nation was repealed (Romans 9-11).

An amazing thing happened however which you can read about in Romans 9-11. Israel’s rejection meant our acceptance. Following Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, God sent his Holy Spirit to live in *all* who believe in Jesus, irrespective of nationality. We who have his Spirit make up what the Bible calls the “church.”



But what ever happened to Daniel’s “seventieth seven” or last period of seven years? That brings us back to the topic of the *Day of the Lord* as described by Joel. The “great and dreadful day of the Lord” as Joel describes it is a future time of unimaginable judgment. It begins with the seventieth seven (the final period of seven years) described by Daniel. And it continues on through the one thousand year reign of Jesus Christ upon the earth. We live in the “Church Age” which could also be called “Man’s Day.” As we read last week from the article in the *Portland Tribune*, mankind *thinks* that he is his own god and that this life is all there is. But a time is coming when the Lord will reveal himself in judgment upon man’s arrogant pride.



Here’s how Joel describes this period of time:

I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. Joel 2:30-31

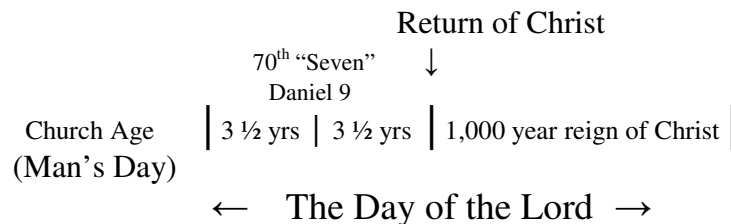
Sounds an awful lot like what John describes in the book of Revelation, speaking of God's judgments during the Tribulation:

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Revelation 6:12-14

Or listen to these words of Jesus who describes this period of time with the same graphic imagery:

“Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.  
Matthew 24:29-31

What coming is Jesus speaking of here? Notice that it is *after* the distress of those days. It is at the end of the seventieth “seven” spoken of by Daniel. At this time, Christ will return to earth, set his feet on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, and establish his reign of 1,000 years on this planet.



Here's how the prophet Zechariah describes this time:

A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.  
Zechariah 14:1-4

Where will you and I be at that time? Well, it all depends upon your relationship with Jesus Christ. If you reject him, as the Jewish nation has, you will experience his judgment. You see, the Day of the Lord could begin at any time.

70<sup>th</sup> “Seven”  
Daniel 9  
Man’s Day | 3 ½ yrs | 3 ½ yrs |

Unbelievers → Day of the Lord

The Apostle Paul has a lot to say about this in his letter to the Thessalonians.

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the *day of the Lord* will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

Some in the church were saying that the Day of the Lord had already come. There are also some like that today. There are those who claim that the awful judgments of the tribulation as described by the Old Testament prophets and by John in the book of Revelation have already taken place. But Paul says, “No, you’re in for a big surprise!” For the judgments of the Day of the Lord could begin at any time. And that’s why Paul says that we better be ready. For if the Day of the Lord began *today*, and you have not settled your relationship with Jesus Christ, *you will not escape!*

But what about those who are believers and make up the Church, the Body of Christ? What will happen to us if the Day of the Lord arrived today? Paul also says something about that in this same chapter. Notice verses 8-11:

For God did not *appoint us to suffer wrath* but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11

Those of us who are believers, we will *not* experience God’s judgment during this period called the “Day of the Lord.” Why not? Because we will have experienced what the Bible calls the “catching up” of believers. If you back up to chapter 4 of Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, you read these words, beginning in verse 15:

According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18



## A TIME OF REPENTANCE

How can we avoid the judgment of the Day of the Lord and experience instead the refreshment of the Day of the Lord? The answer is in repentance. This is Joel's constant plea to the people of his day. They were to blow the trumpet (2:1-2). This was the Jewish *shofar*, which was to be sounded from Zion, the Holy Mountain where the Temple stood. It was not a trumpet call to battle, but a trumpet call to repentance, both individually and nationally.

'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Joel 2:12-13

"*Repent*, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord," Peter says to the crowds in Acts 3 (Acts 3:19). What is true repentance?

Repentance involves first of all *contrition*. And contrition affects our *emotions*. Joel says, "Rend your *hearts*, and not your garments." David understood true contrition when he said: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:7). Contrition is more than mere remorse. When Judas betrayed Jesus he had *remorse*. He didn't really repent, but only sorrowed over his evil action (Matthew 27:3). On the other hand, Peter, after he had denied the Lord three times, went out and "wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75). Joel here says, "Rend your heart and not your garments." God doesn't want our remorse, but our repentance. And true repentance begins with contrition, a broken heart over our sin.

Secondly, repentance involves *confession*. Remember, David hid his sin of adultery for an entire year! And his lack of confession led to physical and psychological illness. He was depleted and depressed. It wasn't until he acknowledged his sin by verbal confession that he once again experienced the refreshment and joy of the Lord. True repentance always involves confession, both to God and to others when they have been wronged.

Finally, repentance involves a *change of life*. There is a "return to the Lord," as Joel puts it. Repentance means to turn from going in one direction and to begin to go in another direction. When there is contrition and there is confession, but there is no change of life, we have to evaluate the authenticity of our repentance. True repentance involves a change of life. You see, all we have looked at over these three Sundays – all of this fascinating truth concerning the return of the Lord and the precise, accurate fulfillment of prophecy – is not meant to satisfy our curiosity, but to lead us to *repentance*. It is revealed to us for the purpose of changing our lives.

The Father's love for you and me is so deep. All the while judging sin, he took upon himself the very judgment that sin deserves. As you and I look back at the cross and what he has done in sacrificially giving his life, and as we look forward to his return and the fulfillment of all that he has promised...how can we do other than deeply repent of anything and everything in our lives that is contrary to his will and character.

This is God's call to you today. As we take these elements – the bread and the juice – we're reminded of his great sacrifice. But I warn you, *do not* take these elements lightly. If you are hiding sin, if you are not contrite, willing to confess and experience a change of life ... then do not take these elements this morning until you are right with God. At each table, there is someone who is available to pray with you and for you. Take advantage of this opportunity. Don't let it pass by.

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<sup>1</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961), 95.