



COMING IN SECOND

He may not be the GOAT, but he should be in the conversation—in 1988, the first-ever 3-point contest for the NBA All-Star Weekend, Larry Bird walked into the locker room and asked the players sitting there, “*Who’s coming in second?*” These were NBA All-Stars! Not only did he win, he never took off his warm up jacket. Although Bird is famously the greatest trash-talker in NBA history, when it comes to calling shots, the Lord is untouchable.

Over the last two Weeks, Joel first described a literal locust invasion that devastated Judah. He then used that locust invasion to illustrate an actual human invasion by the Babylonian army. Due to their evil deeds, God promised to judge Babylon. Due to his covenant, God promised to restore the land of Judah.

This Week, Joel’s prophecy uses the events related to Babylon to illustrate what God will do with all nations in the final Day of the Lord. Joel 3 begins with God holding court for the nations and reading the charges before his verdict and sentencing. It continues with a cry for God to “*bring it*” against those deserving his wrath. With everything set against him, the Lord knows the nations are just playing for second. And, in the words of Ricky Bobby, “*If you’re not first, your last.*”

JOEL 3:9–16

⁹Proclaim this among the nations: Consecrate for war; stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near; let them come up. ¹⁰Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, “I am a warrior.”

¹¹Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O LORD. ¹²Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

¹³Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.

¹⁴Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. ¹⁵The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

¹⁶The 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.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

As we said in the Study Notes, the gospel offers a unique blend of justice and mercy unmatched in other religions. But what does that mean? Justice means a person gets exactly what they deserve. Mercy means *not* getting what you deserve. God is perfectly just. But, he is also perfectly merciful. How can he be both perfectly and completely? Scan the QR code for a great explanation of the gospel’s justice and mercy.



DISCUSSION

If you could pick any superpower, what would it be and why?

1. What did God tell Joel to do? (9a)

2. What specific instructions does God give to the nations? (9b-12a)

3. What is God’s response to the coming battle and what outcomes are stated? (12b-16)

4. What imagery do you see in this passage regarding the completeness of the Lord’s victory?

5. How does the Lord’s ultimate victory inspire hope regarding challenging circumstances in your own life?

Life can be tough. Thankfully, Christians have hope, meaning, and purpose. If you are struggling finding any of those things, talk to your coach.

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION



WEEK 6

AN
ATHLETE
STUDY

STUDY NOTES

STACKING THE DECK

One of the great themes of Scripture is that the Lord often stacks the deck against himself and then wins anyway. He famously selects the humblest and least impressive people to accomplish the greatest things. Abraham was just a guy until he said “yes,” to the Lord. Moses was a fugitive and a poor public speaker (despite his impressive Egyptian training). Gideon was found hiding, but God used him to strike fear in Israel’s enemies. God anointed young David as king, the last and least likely of Jesse’s sons. Over and over, God puts obstacles in his own way just to bust through them.

After warning Israel that Babylon is coming in divine judgment, God points to the ultimate deliverance only he can offer. God said through the prophet Joel, **“Proclaim this among the nations: Consecrate for war; stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near; let them come up.”** God is calling out the nations daring them. The word used for “Mighty Men,” in Hebrew might also translated as “Heroes.” These aren’t “weekend warriors,” these are battle-hardened military men. God is essentially saying, **“Bring it!”**

He went on, **“Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, ‘I am a warrior.’”** In other words, bring everyone you have. In fact, bring every weapon you can find. **BRING IT ALL!** The Lord wants nothing left in reserve, this war must be total and complete.

GOD BRINGS ULTIMATE JUSTICE IN HIS TIME

In this coming Day of the Lord, God wants no delay, **“Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there.”**

At this point in Joel’s prophecy, it seems like he breaks and shifts perspective. Instead of speaking to the Lord’s enemies, he stops and speaks to the Lord. Joel seems to interject his own cheer saying, **“Bring down your warriors, O LORD.”** Perhaps calling down angelic warriors to the battle.

Resuming the taunting, he says, **“Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.”** The “Valley of Jehoshaphat” may very well be the “Valley of Megiddo” referenced in Revelation 16:16 recorded many centuries later. It’s where the mountains of Megiddo are found. The Hebrew word for mountain is “har,” so “har Megiddo” (aka “Armageddon”) describes the location of the final apocalyptic battle.

The Lord makes clear, **“There I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.”** The battle is over before it begins. The Lord doesn’t even stand to claim victory—he stays seated and all the nations stand guilty.

Verses 13–16 should strike holy fear into the reader. This passage offers graphic visual imagery, not for the faint of heart. When judgment comes and the guilty face their sentencing, **the sickle** need not search, **for the harvest is ripe**. The blood of enemies will pour out like juice from a **winepress** and **the vats overflow**. Justice will be served, because **their evil is great**.

HOPE LIVES FOR SEEKERS OF JUSTICE

The gospel offers the unique blend of justice and mercy unmatched in other religions. Because of Christ, and rightly so, we talk about God’s mercy a great deal. However, for those who reject the gospel by never surrendering to Christ, they will not experience God’s mercy. They’ll experience his justice. Sin must be and will be dealt with. **The LORD... and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.**

As we wrap up Joel, we must look at this scene from another perspective. The Apostle John recorded Christ’s return in Revelation 19. As you read, ask yourself, “Whose team are you on?” and “Whose team do you want to be on?”

“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.”

As we wrap the book of Joel, we’re reminded of several truths. 1) God’s love leads him to warn us and desire our repentance. 2) God’s justice cannot overlook sin. He must judge it. 3) God will restore those who seek his grace and trust in him alone. Live these truths. Share these truths. **Multitudes** need it. **For the day of the LORD is near.**