

Joel 3 • Judgment at the End of the Age

Introduction

It is interesting that when the Prophet Daniel realized that when the seventy years of Israel's captivity were about to be concluded that God's response to Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9) was to reveal His plan for the whole world expressed in seventy weeks of years. Here at the outset of Israel's division which would ultimately lead to its experiencing "the day of the Lord" on a local level, God provides through the Prophet Joel that which will ultimately take place on the world stage in the course of the final fulfillment of "the day of the Lord". Jesus did the same thing with the Church by providing the Olivet Discourse to provide us with the bigger, overall picture of what to expect in the Last Days. God has repeatedly shown His people what will take place so that by faith they may endure and understand what the rest of the world will fail.

¹For behold, in those days and at that time,

When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,

²I will gather all the nations

And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.

Then I will enter into judgment with them there

On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel,

Whom they have scattered among the nations;

And they have divided up My land.

³They have also cast lots for My people, Traded a boy for a harlot

And sold a girl for wine that they may drink.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: How do we know that this is speaking of events which have never yet taken place?

A: Aside from the fact that none of the following has taken place historically, verse 1 specifies, "in those days and at that time" which is referring to the previous verses in Joel 2:30-32 speaking of "the day of the Lord".

Q: Why is it that only Judah and Jerusalem are specified in v.1, and there is no mention of "Israel"? Why do all the other tribes and cities appear to be omitted?

A: At this time the kingdom has been divided into the apostate Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which has Jerusalem as its capital. A migration has taken place wherein the faithful from all tribes have become residents of Judah. This is addressing the spiritual situation for those who have not forsaken their faith versus those who have. All the faithful from all the tribes are now in Judah.

Q: But then why is "Israel" mentioned in v.2?

A: This is not addressing the apostate northern kingdom of the time, but showing that the faithful are "My people and My inheritance, Israel", a reference not to respective governments or political structures, but to the faithful remnant.

Q: What is "the valley of Jehoshaphat"?

A: In 2 Chronicles 20 is recorded the invasion of Judah by Moab, Ammon and "some of the Meunites" (2 Chr. 20:1) during the reign of Jehoshaphat. This "great multitude" (2 Chr. 20:2) was supernaturally destroyed by God in a valley near Ziz "in front of the wilderness of Jeruel" (2 Chr. 20:16) which they would later name "the valley of Beracah". (2 Chr. 20:26) Judah was told by God through the prophet Jahaziel they would not have to fight that battle (2 Chr. 20:17). God supernaturally caused the enemy to turn on each other so that Judah took the spoil from among the corpses. (2 Chr. 20:24-25) God's judgment on these nations was not just for that particular invasion, but for their previous mistreatment of Israel. (2 Chr. 20:10)

Q: So what does this mean for the future event disclosed here?

A: The final battle parallels Scripture describing what will take place in the same character as that which occurred in Beracah, "the valley of Jehoshaphat". What took place with just a few nations serves as an example of what God will do to all the nations for their mistreatment of Israel. And, as in the first example, they will be disposed of supernaturally by God Himself. (Rev. 16:13-16)

Point: The judgment of a few **nations** in "the valley of Jehoshaphat" will ultimately be replayed for all **nations**.

⁴“Moreover, what are you to Me, O Tyre, Sidon and all the regions of Philistia? Are you rendering Me a recompense? But if you do recompense Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your recompense on your head. ⁵Since you have taken My silver and My gold, brought My precious treasures to your temples, ⁶and sold the sons of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their territory, ⁷behold, I am going to arouse them from the place where you have sold them, and return your recompense on your head. ⁸Also I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a distant nation,” for the LORD has spoken.

⁹Proclaim this among the nations:
Prepare a war; rouse the mighty men!
Let all the soldiers draw near, let them
come up!
¹⁰Beat your plowshares into swords
And your pruning hooks into spears;
Let the weak say, “I am a mighty man.”
¹¹Hasten and come, all you surrounding
nations,
And gather yourselves there.
Bring down, O LORD, Your mighty ones.
¹²Let the nations be aroused
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.
Come, tread, for the wine press is full;
The vats overflow, for their wickedness 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 moon grow dark
And the stars lose their brightness.

[Read v.4-8]

Q: How might this apply to our understanding of what took place in the valley of Jehoshaphat?

A: The intentions of the nations of Moab and Ammon involved in that conflict are replayed by those of Tyre, Sidon and Philistia.

Q: Is this speaking of a future, unfulfilled event?

A: This was fulfilled historically both in the time of Hezekiah and, according to extra-biblical history, during the campaign of Alexander the Great. Like that which took place in the valley of Beracah, this is an example on a smaller scale of what is to ultimately come.

Q: What is the meaning of “recompense”? What is this referring to?

A: “Recompense” means to pay something back in return. Because these nations believed that each nation is overseen by its respective god, their treatment of Israel for perceived actions against them is also intended as a response to not just against the people of Israel, but Israel’s God.

Q: What is ironic about this discussion on payback?

A: Their payback to Israel which took the form of not only taking Israel’s material wealth but selling them into slavery and sending them into captivity is itself going to be recompensed by God Himself on their behalf. God will return Israel from the very place into which these nations will in turn be sent.

Q: Who are the Sabeans? What does this mean?

A: These are the inhabitants of Sheba in eastern Arabian Peninsula. This is a dramatic juxtaposition to what has taken place. Whereas God’s people have been sold to maritime people’s in the far West, so these offenders would be sold to the traders of the far East.

Point: “For in the way you **judge**, you will be **judged**, and by your standard of **measure**, it will be **measured** to you.” (Mt. 7:2)

[Read v.9-15]

Q: How has the viewpoint changed again?

A: It has returned from addressing historical precursors on a smaller scale to speaking of the future, unfulfilled final fulfillment yet to come.

Q: What is significant about the call in v.10?

A: It is the exact opposite of the call through Isaiah and Micah when speaking about the Millennial Kingdom.

*And He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many peoples;*

And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

*Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they learn war. — Isaiah 2:4*

*And He will judge between many peoples
And render decisions for mighty, distant nations.*

**Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks;**

*Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they train for war. — Micah 4:3*

Q: What does the name “Jehoshaphat” mean?

A: “The Lord judges” or “Yahweh is Judge”. The name of the historical king and what took place in his lifetime historically parallels the greater fulfillment of God in the final judgment of all the nations.

Point: Whereas the final great white throne of judgment spoken of in Revelation 20:11 is every individual's final judgment, that which is being referred to here is a final judgment where the nations are concerned.

Q: Why might v.13 sound familiar?

¹⁷And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." ¹⁹So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. ²⁰And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles. — Revelation 14:17–20

Q: When this same harvest of judgment is presented in Revelation, what actually takes place immediately following?

A: It is at this point that the final series of the Bowl judgments of God's wrath are poured out on in concert with the final gathering of the nations against Him, which is being referred to here.

Q: What do we learn is the greater spiritual meaning of "the valley of Jehoshaphat"?

A: It is "the valley of decision".

Q: What is the dual irony of this designation?

A: On the one hand, those coming against God have made a choice, which is one meaning of "decision", but it is met by God's response or "verdict", an alternate definition of "decision". Their choice has led to his verdict.

Q: How do we know this is related to the fulfillment of what Scripture specifically identifies as "the day of the Lord"?

A: Because of the parallel events provided in verse 15 and the chapter's opening statement.

Point: The concluding events of the Last Days are the result of a personal **decision** which will be suffer the consequences of God's **decision**.

[Read v.16-17]

Q: How does this contrast with the popular notion of where God resides and works from?

A: Normally He is strictly perceived as working from heaven; this is speaking of literally ruling on earth from Jerusalem.

Q: Why is the city alternately referred to as "Zion"?

A: It reflects that time when the Messiah's occupation of the city as His throne coincides with making it holy. (v.17)

Q: But how are the things and institutions, such as Jerusalem and the nation, placed in the proper perspective?

A: "...the LORD is a refuge...and a stronghold" (v.16), not the institutions themselves. He is the source of its strength both physically and spiritually.

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¹⁶The LORD roars from Zion
And utters His voice from Jerusalem,
And the heavens and the earth tremble.
But the LORD is a refuge for His people
And a stronghold to the sons of Israel.
¹⁷Then you will know that I am the Lord
your God,
Dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain.
So Jerusalem will be holy,
And strangers will pass through it no
more.

Q: What is significant about the reference to the absence of strangers in v.17?

A: It is the biblical way of stating that the hallmark of a holy place is that it will not be trodden by the foot of any unbeliever. The Tabernacle and Temple when described as a “sanctuary” was forbidden to strangers—that is, unbelievers. At that time the whole of Jerusalem will be likewise treated as the Temple, but instead of just residing in the Holy of Holies, He is occupying the whole city.

Point: The **judgment** of the nations coincides with the **Judge** taking His place in “Zion, My holy mountain”.

³⁴“You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. ³⁵“Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. — Daniel 2:34–35

[Read v.18-21]

Q: How is this final section a concluding contrast to the beginning of the book of Joel?

A: Joel begins with a description of the devastation of the land by the consecutive swarms of locusts representing invading nations. Here we are presented not just with the Lord’s complete restoration of the land, but His blessings.

Q: What is the three-fold list of attributes supplied in v.18?

A: “Sweet wine”, “milk” and “water”—all liquids. Each represents not just the literal, but the spiritual nourishment of the land.

Q: How will this be extended to the whole world?

A: Israel is described as “a spring”, or in some translations, “a fountain”, which nourishes the rest.

Q: What is “the valley of Shittim”?

A: “Shittim” refers to a place where acacia trees grow, which grow in arid regions such as this one in an area situated between Ammon and Moab. This is something which is, again, both literal and spiritual.

And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. — Zechariah 14:8

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, — Revelation 22:1

Q: The “valley of Jehoshaphat” involved Ammon and Moab, verse 4 cited Tyre, Sidon and Philistia in relationship to it, and now concludes in verse 19 with a reference to Egypt and Edom. Why might this be significant?

A: It’s a list of Israel’s closest neighbors who have been the biggest problem for Israel not just politically and culturally, but especially spiritually.

Point: God will not just remedy Israel’s **earthly** problems for good, but the **spiritual** ones.

¹⁸And in that day
The mountains will drip with sweet wine,
And the hills will flow with milk,
And all the brooks of Judah will flow
with water;
And a spring will go out from the house
of the LORD
To water the valley of Shittim.
¹⁹Egypt will become a waste,
And Edom will become a desolate
wilderness,
Because of the violence done to the sons
of Judah,
In whose land they have shed innocent
blood.
²⁰But Judah will be inhabited forever
And Jerusalem for all generations.
²¹And I will avenge their blood which I
have not avenged,
For the LORD dwells in Zion.