

The Valley Of Decision

Joel 3

Well guys we are here, the last chapter in the book of Joel. I can't believe we have already finished another book of the Bible. However, I certainly can't wait to see what we find in the next book.

As we've gone through this short, prophetic book of the Old Testament, we've seen God's disciplinary judgement on his people in Judah in the form of a plague of locusts and an invading army. We've seen multiple calls to repentance, calls to mourning and grieving over sin and its consequences, calls to proper worship of God, and calls to trust in his blessed promises. We've seen God mercifully relenting of his punishment and promising to bless his people with an abundance, including the promise of his own Holy Spirit and salvation when they call on him. And today, we're going to see the promise-filled resolution to this story.

I need you to pay close attention to this because we may learn some things that we have never considered before. Let's dive right in

¹ "In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ² I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land. ³ They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine to drink.

Notice here that right off the bat it says, "In those days and at that time". What do you think that means? It means that this is something that will come to pass in the future. I'm going to tell you that this is talking about the last days.

Now I am going to blow your mind and tell you that I bet most of you have the wrong idea of the last days. We tend to think only in terms of the final years or months immediately before the return of Jesus in all His glory to earth, or the

rapture of the church. However, I am going to tell you that the last days began with the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven and the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost.

Oh, cmon' pastor how can you say that? Well let's think about it for a minute. Scripture tells us about signs that will happen and prophecies that will be fulfilled in the last days, right? We have been seeing those signs and prophecies fulfilled for decades. The last days is referring to an era not a short period of time. Since that time, the church has not been rushing towards a distant edge that represents the consummation of all things. Instead, on Pentecost the church came to the edge – and has run parallel to it ever since.

Then the scripture goes on to say, "*when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem*". In other words, "when I bring them back together". Now in a lesser and immediate sense this was fulfilled in the return from the Babylonian exile. In the greater and ultimate sense it will be fulfilled in the end-times regathering of Israel, to the point where an expectant Israel welcomes Jesus saying what it says in Matthew 23:39. ³⁹ *For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.* At that point salvation will come to Israel as a whole like it says in Romans 11:26-27. ²⁶ *and in this way^[a] all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.* ²⁷ *And this is^[b] my covenant with them when I take away their sins."*

Now to further emphasize what I am saying about the end times here look at verse 2. It says, *I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.* Joel describes here the final gathering of the nations in rebellion against God at the battle of Armageddon. Look at Revelation 16:12-16.

¹² *The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East.* ¹³ *Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet.* ¹⁴ *They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.*

¹⁵ *“Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.”* ¹⁶ *Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*

Why do I say that? There is no place in Israel known as the Valley of Jehoshaphat, but the name Jehoshaphat means, “The LORD Judges.” It describes God’s place of judgment. There is no such valley in all of Judea and therefore the name here has to be symbolic and signify God’s final judgement of all nations and all people.

Joel was written at a time when a terrible plague of locusts brought the judgment of God upon the people of God. At a time like that, it is easy to think “God, You are dealing harshly with us, but what about the ungodly nations? We may be bad, but they are worse. Don’t you care about them?” Just look at verses 2 and 3. God used Joel to assure His people that the **nations** will be dealt with.

The end of verse 2 says it all, *There I will put them on trial for what they did to my people.* God’s complaint against the nations is that they have mistreated His **people**. Primarily, this has in view the way the nations treat Israel, but also extends to how the nations treat the church. When God’s people are mistreated, God takes it personally and will avenge it.

Let’s look at what it says in Matthew 25:31-46.

³¹ *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ ³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’*

40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ 41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ 44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ 45 “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ 46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

The criteria is not faith in Jesus Christ but how the nations have treated the people of Israel and the church – the *brethren* of Jesus. Held on the earth after His return in glory, this judgment determines who is allowed to enter into the Millennial Earth, the 1000-year reign, and who goes straight to judgment.

Then it says in verse 3 that they cast lots. It is bad enough for man to regard any human life as cheap; it is worse to regard the people of God as cheap. God remembers and will repay. Are you with me so far? Well it gets worse for the nations that go against His people.

4 “Now what have you against me, Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done. 5 For you took my silver and my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples.^[c] 6 You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland. 7 “See, I am going to rouse them out of the places to which you sold them, and I will return on your own heads what you have done. 8 I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away.” The LORD has spoken.

Verse 4 starts off with God actually challenging the nations to come against Him or His people. He vows to return your retaliation upon your own head to those who come against Him or His people.

Judgment is about the only aspect of God’s plan of the ages that is plainly logical. The grace and mercy of God are not plainly logical. What have we done to earn it,

nothing? Salvation by grace through faith is not plainly logical. Why do we deserve it, we don't? The high standing and destiny of the believer in Jesus are not plainly logical. Judgment, however, is God simply giving those who reject Him what they deserve – it *is plainly logical*. It is as if God says to the wicked, "You rejected the mercy and grace of heaven, so I will give you the plain logic of earth: you will receive what you deserve before the holy court of My justice."

Verse 8 says, "*I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah*". The nations treated God's people with contempt and had no sense of their worth. Therefore, God will repay them with the contempt they put upon His people.

We see it throughout scripture what God has done to people that went against Him. We don't want to be one of those people. Let's move on.

⁹ Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. ¹⁰ Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, "I am strong!" ¹¹ Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there. Bring down your warriors, LORD! ¹² "Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. ¹³ Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!"

Prepare for war: Again, God challenged the nations to prepare for war against Him. This refers again to what we read in Revelation 16: earlier, but God will simply laugh at the puny and futile preparations by the nations. I would encourage you to read Psalm 2 later.

Beat your plowshares into swords: If you are going to go into battle against God, you should have every weapon available. You should also practice your best positive thinking: let the weak say, "I am strong." Nevertheless, the most positive attitude can't work when man sets himself against his Maker. There was a Broadway play titled "Your Arms Too Short to Box with God." This is what the nations don't know but will learn the hard way.

Verse 12 says, "*I will sit to judge all the nations on every side*". Though the nations will come against God and His Messiah with every weapon and the most positive frame of mind, it is all for nothing. They will be plucked like a ripe harvest and

crushed in judgment. Psalm 2 beautifully expresses this and again I encourage you to read it.

Verse 13 says, *“¹³ Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full”*. Revelation 14:17-20 also uses this image of the winepress of the wrath of God to describe Jesus’ judgment on the nations at Armageddon.

¹⁷ Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸ Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.” ¹⁹ The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. ²⁰ They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.^[a]

Isn’t this amazing? Just imagine how all of this must have felt to Joel. God using him to prophesy how He was going to deal with anyone who goes against Him or His people. Let’s read some more...

¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. ¹⁵ The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. ¹⁶ The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. ¹⁷ “Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her.

Joel looked out upon the Valley of Jehoshaphat at the battle of Armageddon, and saw multitudes facing their eternal fate – truly, it was a valley of decision, and those who fought against the LORD and His Messiah were in the wrong place in the valley of decision, ultimately fulfilled at the battle of Armageddon.

The idea of the “valley of decision” has been used countless times to show people that *they* stand in the valley of decision and must decide for or against Jesus. Which is true. However, Joel’s context is exactly the opposite. Man does indeed stand in the valley of decision, but it is God who does the deciding, not man. It is a

valley of judgment – and we should decide for Jesus right now so that we never stand in this valley of decision.

Verse 16 says, *“the earth and the heavens will tremble”*. Joel goes back to the descriptions of the cosmic cataclysm that were mentioned in Joel 2:30-31. In the midst of it all, the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel, and He will restore both His people and His city to glory.

¹⁸ “In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD’s house and will water the valley of acacias.^[d] ¹⁹ But Egypt will be desolate, Edom a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood. ²⁰ Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations. ²¹ Shall I leave their innocent blood unavenged? No, I will not.”

This starts off by saying that after God’s final victory that there will be lasting abundance for His people, and the days of famine and drought will be nothing more than a distant memory. Now it will be Egypt’s turn along with all the other enemies of God and His people to live in utter desolation and destruction.

A fountain will flow from the Lord’s house after His triumphant return. Zechariah 14:8 says, *⁸ On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter.”*

It mentions here the Valley of Acacias. This was a place associated with both failure and victory. It is located on the eastern side of the Jordan River, to the north of the Dead Sea. It was where the king of Moab sent his young women to the men of Israel to seduce them into idolatry and sexual immorality. But, it was also the launching place for the armies of Israel when they set out against Jericho and Canaan in the days of Joshua.

When water from the house of the LORD flows down to the Valley of Acacias, then God’s grace and provision cover the past – every sin, every victory is covered over by Him.

Verse 20 says, *Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations*. God will show mercy to His people and grant them forgiveness. This

prophecy of Joel, which began with the desperate plague of locusts, ends with a promise of restoration and redemption.

This is the last promise that God gave, but not the least of all His promises.

Guys, I don't presume to know your relationship with God. But let me say this, if there is any doubt in your mind that you will go to heaven then today, while you are in the valley of decision, is the day to make things right.

I can assure you that you don't want to be in the valley of decision on the day of judgement. I believe we are much closer to that day than we realize. We are living in a day when even people here in the U.S. are rising up against Israel and God's people. He is not going to put up with it for much longer. The signs are there.

If you have a grievance against someone, if you are gossiping about someone, whatever the case may be, make it right. Now you may think that there is no way that person is going to Heaven but who are we to decide who is and who isn't a child of God. Like it says here, He will repay you in kind for what you have done against His people.

Today is the day Make it right.