



Joel - Chapter Three

II Joel 2:18-3:21 - The Mercy of the Lord and Judgement against the Nations (continues/concludes)

II.b Joel 2:28-3:8 - God's Spirit Poured Out (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Three

The Lord provides reasons for judgement (vv.1-8), a description of judgement on the day of the Lord that will be their climax (vv.9-16), and the certainty of the Lord dwelling with his people (vv.17-21).

¹ For then, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ² I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgement with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations. They have divided my land, ³ and cast lots for my people, and traded boys for prostitutes, and sold girls for wine, and drunk it down.

Joel 3:1-3

For then, in those days and at that time. This generic reference recalls the events of Joel 2:28-32 and particularly the day of the Lord: refer also to Jeremiah 33:15, 50:4, and 5:20. Joel's prophecy still concerns the time period connected with it shall come to pass afterward mentioned in Joel 2:28. This is the broad period of the last days, initiated by the ascension of Jesus and the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost.

Many have the wrong idea of the last days, thinking only in terms of the final years or months immediately before the return of Jesus in glory to this earth, or the rapture of the church. Scripturally, the last days can be thought of as an

era, one that began with the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost. Since that time, the church has not been rushing towards a distant edge that represents the consummation of all things. Instead, at the Day of Pentecost the church came to the edge, and has run parallel to the brink for some 2,000 years so far.

When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem. In a lesser, immediate sense this was fulfilled in the return from the Babylonian exile and also with the establishment of a Jewish state in 1947. In the greater, ultimate sense it will be fulfilled in the end times regathering of Israel, to the point where an expectant Israel welcomes Jesus saying: <<***Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord***>> (Matthew 23:39b), and salvation comes to Israel as a whole: <<***And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, 'Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.' 'And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins'***>> (Romans 11:26-27).

All the nations refers to all the oppressors of God's people; refer to Psalm 110:6, Isaiah 66:18, Jeremiah 25:31, Ezekiel 39:21, Micah 4:11-12, and Zephaniah 3:8. Joel was written at a time when a terrible plague of locusts brought the judgement of God upon his people. 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. Do not you care about them?" God uses Joel Chapter 3 to assure Israel that the nations will be dealt with.

The valley of Jehoshaphat, meaning 'Yahweh has judged,' refers to a place of final judgement rather than a known geographical location.

They have scattered them among the nations refers to deportation associated with exile. The northern tribes were dispersed throughout the nations of the Assyrian empire and the people in Judah were mainly taken to Babylon, although some went to Egypt.

I will enter into judgement with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel. 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. In the judgement of the nations Jesus described, in Matthew 25:31-46, the criteria is not faith in Jesus Christ but how the nations have treated the people of Israel, the brethren of Jesus. Held on the earth after his return in glory, this judgement determines who is allowed to enter into the Millennial Earth, and who goes straight to judgement.

They have divided my land, and cast lots for my people. This was done in order to take them away as slaves: <<***On the day that you stood aside, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and***>>

cast lots for Jerusalem, you too were like one of them>> (Obadiah 11). 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: <<*Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'*>> (Romans 12:19).

⁴ What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads swiftly and speedily. ⁵ For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. ⁶ You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, removing them far from their own border. ⁷ But now I will rouse them to leave the places to which you have sold them, and I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads. ⁸ I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away; for the Lord has spoken.

Joel 3:4-8

As if in a courtroom, the Lord brings the questions, charges, and verdict directly to specific nations.

Tyre and Sidon were Phœnician cities along the Mediterranean coast. Relations between Israel and Phœnicia were occasionally good: <<*Now King Hiram of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father; for Hiram had always been a friend to David*>> (1 Kings 5:1), but sometimes Phœnicia was a polluting influence, especially in the case of the wicked Queen Jezebel: <<*And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him*>> (1 Kings 16:31). Philistia, on the other hand, was a long time enemy of Israel: <<*At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his stallions, at the clatter of his chariots, at the rumbling of their wheels, parents do not turn back for children, so feeble are their hands, 4 because of the day that is coming to destroy all the Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Sidon every helper that remains. For the Lord is destroying the Philistines, the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor*>> (Jeremiah 47:3-4).

Are you paying me back for something? God virtually challenges the nations to come against him or his people. He vows to return the deeds upon the heads of those who come against him or his people. Judgement is about the only aspect of God's plan of the ages that is plainly logical. The grace and mercy of God is not

plainly logical. Salvation by grace through faith is not plainly logical. The high standing and destiny of the believer in Jesus is not plainly logical. Judgement, God simply giving those who reject him what they deserve, is plainly logical. It is as if God says to the wicked, “You rejected the saving logic 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.”

I will return your deeds. Restoration for God’s people becomes God’s recompense against the nations. Restore in Joel 3:1, the same Hebrew verb as **return** here.

Sold to the Greeks. The Hebrew, *hayyewanim*; translated as Javan in Genesis 10:2, 1 Chronicles 1:7, and Isaiah 66:19, refers to Greek-speakers on both sides of the Aegean Sea. Both the Philistines and the Phœnicians are accused of selling slaves to the Edomites in Amos 1:6-9. Slave trade between Tyre and Javan is mentioned in Ezekiel 27:13.

I will rouse them to leave. The enslaved, i.e. **the people of Judah and Jerusalem**, will become the enslavers. Sidon was destroyed by Artaxerxes III in 343 BC, and resistant Tyre was defeated by Alexander the Great in 332 BC.

I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of 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, vowing to **turn your deeds back upon your own heads.**

Such action was seen by some to be the fate of ten Roman emperors who persecuted Christians:

- Nero lost 30,000 of his subjects by pestilence, had his armies utterly defeated in Britain, suffered a revolution in Armenia, and was so hated by the senators of Rome that they forced him to kill himself.
- Domitian was butchered by his own soldiers.
- Trajan died of a foul disease.
- Severus died miserably on a military campaign in Britain.
- Maximus Thrax was cut in pieces by soldiers of the II Parthica, together with his own son and his chief ministers.
- Trajan Decius died as an exile in Razgrad, Bulgaria.
- Valerian was whipped to death by the King of Persia who captured him.
- Aurelian was killed by his own soldiers.
- Dioclesian poisoned himself.
- Maximum hanged himself.

The Sabians. Most commentators identify this people as inhabitants of the land of Sheba or Saba located in **far away** southern Arabia, approximately modern Yemen. It was the Sabians who killed Job’s children (Job 1:13-19) and probably their

queen who travelled to visit King Solomon and was amazed at what she found (1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12).

II.c Joel 3:9-16 - Judgement in the Valley of Jehoshaphat

All the nations are called to come up against Judah for war. This foretells a great battle where the Lord will judge these nations, for it is he and not Judah that is their adversary.

⁹ Proclaim this among the nations:

Prepare war,

stir up the warriors.

Let all the soldiers draw near,

let them come up.

Joel 3:9

Prepare war is also translated as **consecrate war**. Warriors were to seek the will of their deity prior to military engagement, e.g. Judges 20:19-28. Some commentators view this as an ironic statement: the nations are told to consecrate themselves for war, unaware that the Lord of heaven and earth is their adversary: *<<Band together, you peoples, and be dismayed; listen, all you far countries; gird yourselves and be dismayed; gird yourselves and be dismayed! Take counsel together, but it shall be brought to naught; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us>>* (Isaiah 8:9-10), and: *<<Advance, O horses, and dash madly, O chariots! Let the warriors go forth: Ethiopia and Put who carry the shield, the Ludim, who draw the bow. That day is the day of the Lord God of hosts, a day of retribution, to gain vindication from his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated, and drink its fill of their blood. For the Lord God of hosts holds a sacrifice in the land of the north by the river Euphrates>>* (Jeremiah 46:9-10). This preparation for war is again seen in Revelation 16:12-16, but God will simply laugh at these puny and futile preparations by the nations, as David so eloquently writes in Psalm 2.

¹⁰ Beat your ploughshares into swords,
and your pruning-hooks into spears;
let the weakling say, 'I am a warrior.'

Joel 3:10

Beat your ploughshares into swords. This is the reverse of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3. The warfare preparation is so comprehensive that implements of agriculture must be transformed into weapons of warfare. This was something undertaken

across the whole of the UK when metal items such as fences and cooking pots were recycled and used to build ships, tanks and many other weapons.

Let the weakling say, 'I am a warrior.' The great need for soldiers means that even those unfit for battle must become warriors.

¹¹ Come quickly,
all you nations all around,
gather yourselves there.
Bring down your warriors, O Lord.

¹² Let the nations rouse themselves,
and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat;
for there I will sit to judge
all the neighbouring nations.

Joel 3:11-12

Come quickly, all you nations all around, gather yourselves there. All the opposing nations are commanded to come up against the people of God: <<*Therefore, mortal, prophesy, and say to Gog: Thus says the Lord God: On that day when my people Israel are living securely, you will rouse yourself and come from your place out of the remotest parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great horde, a mighty army; you will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the earth. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, so that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I display my holiness before their eyes*>> (Ezekiel 38:14-16).

I will sit to judge. The connection between the place (the valley of Jehoshaphat) and the action of the Lord (judgement) is made explicit. The irony of v.9 is apparent as there will be no battle, only the Lord's verdict upon all the neighbouring nations.

¹³ Put in the sickle,
for the harvest is ripe.
Go in, tread,
for the wine press is full.
The vats overflow,
for their wickedness is great.

Joel 3:13

Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Lack of harvest due to the locusts described in Joel 1:11 is now a full harvest of the gathered nations cut with a sickle like grain; refer to Isaiah 17:4-5, Jeremiah 9:22 and 51:33, and Micah 4:11-12. Although the nations 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 judgement: <<*Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand! Another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud, 'Use your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.'* So the one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped>> (Revelation 14:14-16).

David beautifully expresses the folly of the nations and the triumph of the Lord: <<*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."* He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill">> (Psalm 2:1-6 ESV).

The wine press is full, the vats overflow. The evil of the nations is so great that the vats of judgement are overflowing; refer to Isaiah 63:1-6 and Revelation 14:14-20. This is an ironic reversal of the promise of Joel 2:24 that the threshing floors and wine vats would be full! Revelation 14:14-20 also uses this image of the winepress of the wrath of God to describe Jesus' judgement on the nations at Armageddon.

¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes,
in the valley of decision!
For the day of the Lord is near
in the valley of decision.

Joel 3:14

Multitudes, multitudes is a picture of all the people of the world standing before the Lord for judgement.

The valley of decision. This is the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where the Lord will be the judge. Only the Lord makes decisions in this valley, and his decree is absolute. Joel looks out upon the Valley of Jehoshaphat at the Battle of Armageddon, and

sees multitudes facing their eternal fate; truly, it is a valley of decision, and those who fight against the Lord and his Messiah are 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 in countless evangelistic meetings to show people that they stand in the valley of decision, and must decide for or against Jesus. 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 judgement, and people should decide for Jesus right now so they never stand in this valley of decision.

For the day of the Lord is near. While the day was near for Israel (Joel 1:15 and 2:1), the Lord's covenant love and the people's repentance halted his judgement.

¹⁵ The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.

Joel 3:15

The sun and the moon are darkened. As commented on in Joel 2:10, the events in view cause miraculous cosmic disturbances: <<*Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return with the rain; on the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease working because they are few, and those who look through the windows see dimly*>> (Ecclesiastes 12:1-3).

¹⁶ The Lord roars from Zion,
and utters his voice from Jerusalem,
and the heavens and the earth shake.
But the Lord is a refuge for his people,
a stronghold for the people of Israel.

Joel 3:16

The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem. God thunders as he engages the battle: <<*You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them: The Lord will roar from on high, and from his holy habitation utter his voice; he will roar mightily against his fold, and shout, like those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. The clamour will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord has an indictment against the nations; he is entering into judgement with all flesh, and the guilty he will put to the sword, says the Lord*>> (Jeremiah 25:30-31), <<*And he*

said: The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds wither, and the top of Carmel dries up>> (Amos 1:2).

The heavens and the earth shake. Joel goes back to the descriptions of cosmic cataclysm that were mentioned in Joel 2:30-31.

But the Lord is a refuge for his people. Being close to the Lord provides a feeling of safety, no matter what life may bring: <<*But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, to tell of all your works*>> (Psalm 73:28).

A stronghold for the people of Israel. Amid the cosmic and military confusion, the people of God are held secure and spared destruction: <<*The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their refuge in the time of trouble*>> (Psalm 37:39), and: <<*For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat*>> (Isaiah 25:4).

II.d Joel 3:17-21 - The Glorious Future of Judah

God promises a time when he will dwell among his people in Zion, while those who have opposed his people will be crushed.

¹⁷ So you shall know that I, the Lord your God,
dwell in Zion, my holy mountain.
And Jerusalem shall be holy,
and strangers shall never again pass through it.

Joel 3:17

So you shall know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion. Judgement and salvation lead to knowledge of the covenant Lord, his presence, and the removal of the people's shame: <<*You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame*>> (Joel 2:27). Zion is the original stronghold; here it denotes the promise of God's intimate residence among his people: <<*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them*>> (Revelation 21:3).

Strangers are those who do not worship the Lord.

Jerusalem shall be holy. Where God is present, all is purified and even ordinary deeds become acts of holy worship. Nothing unacceptable is found in a place of such holiness: <<*A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way;*

the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray>> (Isaiah 35:8), <<Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more>> (Isaiah 52:1), <<Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfil your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off>> (Nahum 1:15), <<and every cooking-pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and use them to boil the flesh of the sacrifice. And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day>> (Zechariah 14:21).

¹⁸ On that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the stream beds of Judah
shall flow with water;
a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord
and water the Wadi Shittim.

Joel 3:18

On that day is a reference to the day of the Lord when all this shall come to pass.

Wine, milk, and water. This is similar to the words spoken through Amos: <<*The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when the one who ploughs shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it*>> (Amos 9:13). This and other descriptions of God's provision in Joel 2:19 and 2:22-26 recall the earlier scarcity described in Joel Chapter 1. After God's final victory, there is lasting abundance and the days of drought are just a distant memory. Instead, Egypt shall become desolate (v.19), along with the other enemies of the Lord and his people.

A fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord. This is similar to the prophecies given in Ezekiel 47:1-13, Zechariah 14:8, and Revelation 22:1-2. Abundant waters extend even to the arid-dwelling acacia trees found at Shittim. The location of this fountain may be Wadi en-Nar, extending from the Kidron Valley to the Dead Sea.

The Wadi Shittim 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 (Numbers 25:1-3). It was also the launching place for the armies of Israel when they set out against Jericho and Canaan in the days of Joshua (Joshua 2:1 and 3:1). When water **from the house of the Lord** flows down to the **Wadi Shittim** or the **valley of Acacias**, then God's grace and provision covers the past, every sin, every victory is covered over by him.

¹⁹ Egypt shall become a desolation
and Edom a desolate wilderness,
because of the violence done to the people of Judah,
in whose land they have shed innocent blood.

Joel 3:19

The restoration of God's people (v.18) is contrasted with the judgement upon the nations. **Egypt** and **Edom** were ancient adversaries representing all of those opposed to the people of God; refer to 1 Kings 14:25-26, 2 Kings 23:29-34, Isaiah 34:5-17, and Obadiah vv.1-21. **Desolation** was prophesied against **Egypt** in Ezekiel 29:10-12 and 32:15), and **Edom** in Ezekiel 35:3-15.

In whose land they have shed innocent blood. The nations shed or 'poured out' (Hebrew *shapak*) blood but the Lord will 'pour out', also Hebrew *shapak*, his Spirit (Joel 2:28-29).

²⁰ But Judah shall be inhabited for ever,
and Jerusalem to all generations.

Joel 3:20

But Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem to all generations. The Lord's residence in Zion in v.17 and v.21 coincides with that of his people living in unending security. The land had been promised to God's people and they would once again live there: <<***Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, so that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever***>> (Ezra 9:12), and: <<***I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God***>> (Amos 9:15).

²¹ I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty,
for the Lord dwells in Zion.

Joel 3:21

I will avenge their blood their blood is a comment on the innocent blood of the Judæans in v.19. The verse brings together the two primary themes of Joel: judgement on the day of the Lord, and the fact that the Lord dwells in Zion: <<*Remember your congregation, which you acquired long ago, which you redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage. Remember Mount Zion, where you came to dwell*>> (Psalm 74:2), and: <<*Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts shall be called the holy mountain*>> (Zechariah 8:3). 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.