

Joel

Chapter 3

The LORD Judges the Nations

“For behold, 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 judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, 3 and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it. 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 return your payment on your own head 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 in order to remove them far from their own border. 7 Behold, I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them, and I will return your payment on your own head. 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.” 9 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. 10 Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, “I am a warrior.” 11 Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O LORD. 12 Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. 13 Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great. 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 the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. 16 The 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.

3:1 *In those days.* At the time of Israel’s final redemption. (CSB)

Envisions not only the restoration of Joel’s generation after the locust plague but also the final deliverance of God’s people and the judgment of all nations on the Last Day (cf Mt 25:31–46). (TLSB)

restore the fortunes of. Or “bring back from captivity” (see vv. 6–7; see also Jer 29:14 and NIV text note). (CSB)

This refers not only to the things of value taken from Israel, but indeed the eternal destiny of those who trust in God for their salvation. (TLSB)

3:2 *Valley of Jehoshaphat.* See v. 12. Called the “valley of decision” in v. 14, it seems to be a symbolic name for a valley near Jerusalem that is here depicted as the place of God’s ultimate judgment on the nations gathered against Jerusalem. There King Jehoshaphat had witnessed one of the Lord’s historic victories over the nations (see 2Ch 20:1–30). (CSB)

This is a wordplay. Jehoshaphat means “the judgment of Yahweh.” Tradition was regarded this as the Kidron Valley. The site is best taken symbolically, signifying the place of the final judgment, since the Bible mentions this valley only here and in v. 12. Some of the aspects of Joel’s prophecy are similar to events of Jehoshaphat’s reign, recorded in 2 Chr 20, when the people of the Transjordan region rose up

against the king of Judah. Jehoshaphat called for a national fast and assembled the people at the temple, including the children. The enemy, described as a great horde, is defeated in the valley. However, the Transjordan nations would be easterners, not northerners as Joel describes (2:20). The prophet may have borrowed his imagery from the events during Jehoshaphat's reign, reminding the people of the blessings that come from calling on the Lord. This could also commend a ninth-century date for the prophecy. (TLSB)

my heritage. Eight times in four verses (vv. 2–5) God uses “my,” emphasizing his covenant relationship with Israel. (CSB)

God's chosen people (Ex 34:9; Dt 4:20; cf Ac 15:16; Eph 1:3-4). The privilege afforded by the election of God's people was the basis for special petitions (Dt 9:26, 29; Ps.28:9) and confidence (Ps 94:14; Mi 7:14, 18; cf Ps 37:18). (TLSB)

Israel. (Probably refers to all God's people, with no distinction between the northern and southern kingdoms, as also in 3:2, 16.) (CSB)

3:3 *cast lots for my people.* This happened to Judah at the time of the captivity (586 B.C.) and is mentioned in Ob 11. The Israelites were treated by their enemies as mere chattel, to be traded off for the pleasures of prostitution and wine. (CSB)

traded a boy for a prostitute. God's people were sometimes sold as slaves and traded for goods or services, as if they were not human but merely chattel. (TLSB)

3:4–8 A parenthetical interlude. In vv. 1–3, 9–11 God announces judgment against the nations hostile to Israel, but here he addresses the nations directly. (CSB)

3:4 *me.* The Lord. (CSB)

Tyre ... Sidon ... Philistia. Tyre had sold Israelites as slaves (see Am 1:9), and Philistia had often plundered Israel (see Jdg 13:1; 1Sa 5:1; 2Ch 21:16–17; Eze 25:15–17). God punished them by allowing Sidon to be enslaved by Antiochus III in 345 B.C. and by allowing Tyre to be besieged by the Babylonians in 586 and to be captured by the Greeks (under Alexander the Great) in 332. (CSB)

Twin cities of Phoenicia, known for their wealth and foreign trade. (TLSB)

Philistia? Longtime enemy of Israel; it dealt in the slave trade. (TLSB)

paying Me back. For some perceived injustice done to them by God's people. (TLSB)

3:5 The Philistines bedeviled God's people over and over (Jgs 10:7; 13:1; 1 Sm 31:1). Once, they managed to capture the ark of the covenant and set it in the temple of their god Dagon (1 Sm 5:1-2). (TLSB)

3:6 The Greeks were trading with the Phoenicians as early as 800 B.C. (CSB)

When sold into slavery by the Greeks, the people ended up very far from Judah. The exile described by Joel is fundamentally different from what occurred later under Assyria and Babylon. (TLSB)

3:7 No matter how far removed the exiled captives might be, the Lord promised to gather and return them to Israel. (TLSB)

3:8 *I will sell your sons* – Some of d’s people were taken captive by the Greeks (v. 6); the Lord would bring the same hardships on the coastal people that they had brought on the Judeans. (TLSB)

Sabeans. From Sheba, whose queen visited Solomon (see 1Ki 10:1–13). (CSB)

They controlled the Arabian trade routes south of Judah. (TLSB)

far away. It was located in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula (present-day Yemen). (CSB)

3:9–21 In vv. 9–11 Joel is the speaker; in vv. 12–13 God speaks; in vv. 14–16, Joel; and in vv. 17–21, God. When Joel speaks, he does so as the spokesman of the Lord, who has commissioned him to be his prophet. (CSB)

3:9–11 Joel commands that the nations be told to prepare for battle, for the Lord would come against them with his invincible heavenly army and bring them into judgment (cf. Eze 38–39; Rev 19). (CSB)

3:9 The Lord summons all the enemies of His people to prepare for battle. (TLSB)

Consecrate for war. During the conquest, cities of the Canaanites were devoted (consecrated) to destruction. (TLSB)

3:10 The first part of this verse is the reverse of Isa 2:4 and Mic 4:3, where the peaceful effect of God’s reign is portrayed. Here God’s enemies are summoned to their last great confrontation with him. (CSB)

God incites His peoples’ enemies to rise and arm themselves with whatever is available. Even the feeblest among God’s enemies are summoned to this battle. (TLSB)

3:11 *gather yourselves there*. In the Valley of Jehoshaphat for judgment (vv. 2, 12). (CSB)

ring down your warriors – Angelic hosts are coming to gihl for God’s people. The Bible contains other passages depicting God’s angels coming to render such aid (Dn 10:13, 20-21; 12:1; Rev 19:14). (TLSB)

3:12 *I will sit to judge* – When He judges, the Lord will separate the whole world into two groups, His people and His enemies (Mt 25:31-46). (TLSB)

3:13 As a result of the Lord’s great army that had marched against Judah (2:3–11), there had been no harvest (2:3). That harvest was to be restored (2:19, 22, 24, 26). In the final great day of the Lord, there will also be a harvest—the harvest of God’s judgment on the nations. Rev 14:14–20 draws heavily on this picture of judgment. (CSB)

Just as the wheat falls before the sickle and the ripe grapes are mashed in a winepress, so God’s enemies will be cut down and crushed on the Day of Judgment. Sickles could be finely crafted with bronze or crudely crafted with small, chisel-shaped pieces of flint in pottery or the lower jawbone of an ox or donkey. God’s enemies shall receive what their deeds have earned. (TLSB)

3:14 *valley of decision*. The Valley of Jehoshaphat (judgment) of vv. 2, 12. “Jehoshaphat” speaks of God’s role as Judge. Here “decision” (from a different Hebrew word) refers to the heavenly Judge’s decision or judicial decree. The valley is now viewed as the place where that decree will be executed. (CSB)

God renders His verdict on all peoples, pronouncing punishment for unbelievers and revealing the final deliverance of His people. (TLSB)

the day of the LORD is near. On a personal level, the day of the Lord is always near, since we do not know when we will die and be judged according to what we believed and practiced during our earthly days. (TLSB)

3:15 (Joel links God’s judgment through the locusts to the cosmic phenomena of the day of the Lord. (CSB)

3:16 *roar.* Like a lion, God will destroy the nations. The first two lines occur also in Am 1:2 (see Jer 25:30). (CSB)

utters his voice. As God at the head of his army had thundered against Jerusalem (2:11), so he will then thunder against Jerusalem’s enemies, and he will do so from his royal city, from which he rules his “inheritance” (see v. 17; Am 1:2). (CSB)

The day of the Lord will not harm His people in any way. Sheltered in the Lord and safe in Him, they will, on this day, be brought into the fullness of God’s glory. (TLSB)

3:1–16 Prophesying about Judgment Day, Joel announces that the Lord will punish His enemies, while vindicating and finally delivering His people. Though thoughts of judgment naturally produce dread in us, by faith we need not fear God’s verdict. After all, the Lord is coming to usher us into heaven, not to punish us. • Judge of all the earth, grant us full confidence for Judgment Day, for we believe that there is no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly. Amen. (TLSB)

The Glorious Future of Judah

17 “So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy and strangers shall never again pass through it. 18 “And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the valley of Shittim. 19 “Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the people of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. 20 But Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem to all generations. 21 I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty, for the LORD dwells in Zion.”

3:17–21 God blesses his people in a dual way: negatively, by destroying their enemies; and positively, by giving them good things. (CSB)

I ... dwells in Zion. The Lord himself will dwell with them (see v. 21). The same picture is found in 2:27; Ps 46:4 (cf. Rev 21:3). The final blessed state of the now unholy and vulnerable city will be God’s abiding presence in her. Then she will be holy and impregnable. (CSB)

Here the temple mountain of Jerusalem represents both the people of God (the spiritual Israel) and the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1-2). (TLSB)

never again pass through it – There shall be no unbelievers in God’s everlasting kingdom. There will be no enemies left to torment God’s people in paradise (Rev 21:4, 8). (TLSB)

3:18 *In that day.* The same as “In those days” of v. 1. The Edenic lushness pictured in this verse is in great contrast to the drought in 1:10 (see Am 9:13). (CSB)

A fountain shall come forth from the house of LORD. Flowing from God’s presence, streams of blessing will refresh his people and make their place endlessly fruitful (cf. Ps 36:8; 46:4; 87:7; Eze 47:1–12; Rev 22:1–2). (CSB)

In the NT, Jesus is the source of such “living water” (Jn 4:14). (TLSB)

Valley of Shittim. The overflow of life-giving water will be so great that even a desert area like this valley west of Jerusalem will abound. (TLSB)

3:19 *Egypt ... Edom.* As old enemies of Israel, they here represent all the nations hostile to God’s people. (CSB)

Traditional nemeses of Israel represent all those opposed to God and His people. (TLSB)

desolation ... desolate wilderness. Figures for the removal of all life-sustaining blessings, thus setting in sharp focus the contrasting destinies of God’s people and the enemies of God’s kingdom. This picture of desolation also recalls the earlier description of Judah’s condition (2:3). (CSB)

3:20 *will be inhabited forever.* When God’s judgment and redemption are consummated, his kingdom will endure and flourish eternally. (CSB)

The heavenly Jerusalem will be a place of undisturbed peace and eternal life for God’s people. (TLSB)

3:21 *avenge.* The Lord will not allow any evil committed against His people to go unpunished. Thus Satan and his cohorts will be cast into the lake of fire (Rv 20:7–10). (TLSB)

the LORD dwells in Zion. The ever-present Lord of Israel will accomplish all these glorious things. (TLSB)

This book of judgment ends on a promising and encouraging note: “The LORD dwells in Zion,” and therefore all is right with those who trust in God and live with him. (CSB)

3:17–21 Joel promises a final vindication and everlasting abundance for God’s people. Given the inevitability of judgment, dreadful punishments await those who reject God and His purposes. Repent daily and strive continually to enter by the narrow gate. Receive limitless grace from the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. Through Him, you shall indeed come home to the Father. • Lord Jesus Christ, when You return, You will judge the world in righteousness. Therefore, keep us in the one true faith and be our refuge and stronghold against all who hate us on account of You and Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)