

Joel

Chapter 3

The Nations Judged

'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 enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for 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 that they might drink. ⁴ 'Now what have you against me, O 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. 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. 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, O 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!' 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 sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for 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)

This was the Messianic period which had just been described according to its outstanding features, with the Day of Judgment very prominent in the description. (Kretzmann)

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 (see NIV text note). 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 inheritance. 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 Sam 31:1). Once, they managed to capture the ark of the covenant and set it in the temple of their god Dagan (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 *assemble there.* In the Valley of Jehoshaphat for judgment (vv. 2, 12). (CSB)

BRING DOWN YOUR WARRIORS – Angelic hosts are coming to gird 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 JUDGE ALL NATIONS – 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)

thunder. 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)

Blessings for God's People

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. **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. **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** Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon.' **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 ... dwell 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 (see v. 21 and **note**; Rev 21). 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...STRANGERS INVADE – 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 will flow out of the LORD's house. 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)

acacias. Since acacias flourish in dry soil, the picture is that of a well-watered desert. (CSB)

This was otherwise an arid desert. The description aptly shows the power of the Gospel-message going forth from the Church of Christ and bringing fertility even to the unfruitful places of the earth, to the hearts of unbelievers and godless people everywhere. (Kretzmann)

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)

desolate ... desert waste. 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)

The entire description clearly does not speak of a mere earthly, temporal glorification of Jerusalem and a corresponding desolation of Egypt and Edom, but the latter are types of the powers opposing the Church of God, and Jehovah is setting forth the blessings which the work of the Church is bringing to men, on the basis of the redemption brought

about by Jesus Christ. Cp. Rev. 22, 2. The Lord is dwelling in the midst of His Church and revealing Himself as the King of His people, partly by the destruction of His enemies, partly by the perfection of His kingdom in glory. (Kretzmann)

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)