

Joel 3:9-21

Review

Last time we looked at the restoration God will bring following the devastation foretold by Joel for the Day of the LORD. We saw that there are two possible ways to interpret this second phase of the Day of the LORD – either when God makes all things new at the end of all time, or intermediate past and future restorations of the Israelite people and the land of promise. Note that these two viewpoints are not mutually exclusive.

For example, when God says through Joel, “...*I will pour out my Spirit upon all people*,” He is not necessarily speaking of a future event in which all people will receive His Spirit, but rather promising that He will fill people with His Spirit throughout the future just as He has at various times throughout history until the culmination of His plan for mankind’s redemption in the coming Day of the LORD.

Nevertheless, part of God’s restoration foretold in Joel 3:1-2...

¹“For 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... Joel 3:1-2a (ESV)

...must certainly – in my (always) humble opinion – be at the final Day of the LORD foretold in Revelation 21-22.

By contrast, when God says, “*I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten...*” He can, has, and will restore those who have allowed sinful choices to destroy our lives in the very moment we repent and turn to the LORD for salvation.

CORRECTION – Last time I said that every mention of the Philistines in the Old Testament is as enemies of God’s people Israel. However, in preparing for our upcoming study of Genesis, I found that Abraham made a covenant at Beersheba with Abimelech the chief of the Philistines, and that he and his son Isaac dwelt for a time peacefully and prospered in the land of the Philistines (Genesis 21 & 26). Notice that the Philistines were already resident in Caanan well before Joshua and the Israelites returned to the Land after the wilderness wandering – in fact, even before the children of Israel (Jacob) became a people.

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The final portion of Joel is a poetic and largely symbolic summary of his prophecy. Much of the symbolism in this poetic conclusion is strikingly similar to other prophetic symbolism found in God’s Word.

Beginning in Joel 3:9 and going through verse 13, we find a series of imperative sentences. These commands were given to Joel by God. The commands in verses 9 through 13 are directed to “*the nations*.” These are they who will come against God’s people and land as foretold in Joel 1 – that great invading army that Joel likened to a swarm of locusts.

***⁹Proclaim this among the nations:
Consecrate [שָׁרָף qāḏaš] for war;
stir up the mighty men.
Let all the men of war draw near;
let them come up.***

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***10 Beat your plowshares into swords,
and your pruning hooks into spears;
let the weak say, “I am a warrior.” Joel 3:9-10 (ESV)***

The Hebrew word **קָדַשׁ** *qādaš* translated in the ESV as “consecrate” can also mean prepare or dedicate. In fact, most other English language translations render this word as “prepare” here in this verse. But that rendering doesn’t quite capture the sense of the word here. The Legacy Standard Bible renders the word “set yourselves apart for” and this idea comes a little closer to the mark. The preparation God calls for here involves not only acquisition of weapons, supplies, and equipment. It involves dedication of mind to the mission – in this case the mission of attacking God’s land and people. God is telling the nations here – bring it on; give it your best shot!

Joel’s reference to plowshares, swords, pruning hooks, and spears is the converse to Isaiah’s prophecy.

***2 It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be lifted up above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
3 and many peoples shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
4 He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore. Isaiah 2:2-4 (ESV)***

But before the LORD can establish this eternal peace, the great invasion Joel foretells must first take place.

NOTE – Micah 4:3 is an exact quote of Isaiah 1:4.

***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. Joel 3:11-12 (ESV)***

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Here Joel reiterates his prophecy of God's coming final judgment. Recall when we looked at Joel's first mention of the judgment at the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2) I remarked that this judgment doesn't fit very well with the Great White Throne judgment we read about in Revelation 20:11-15, because Joel 3:2 speaks of God's judgment for crimes against Israel specifically.

But if the judgment God calls the nations to in the Valley of Jehoshaphat here in Joel 3:11-12 is indeed that final Great White Throne judgment John wrote about in Revelation 20:11-15, then it meshes quite well with Isaiah's prophecy that we looked at above, because after that final judgment God will bring an end to war and all other manner of sin forever.

NOTE – Recall that the Valley of Jehoshaphat is mentioned only twice in God's Word – both times right here in Joel 3.

***¹³Put in the sickle,
for the harvest is ripe.
Go in, tread,
for the winepress is full.
The vats overflow,
for their evil is great.*** Joel 3:13 (ESV)

This command is not for the invading armies of the Day of the LORD, but rather from God the Father to God the Son and the angel who will defeat the invaders and carry out the final harvest of the earth.

¹⁴Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." ¹⁶So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

¹⁷Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." ¹⁹So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. ²⁰And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia. [about 184 miles] Revelation 14:14-20 (ESV)

***¹⁴Multitudes, multitudes,
in the valley of decision!
For the day of the LORD is near
in the valley of decision.
¹⁵The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.*** Joel 3:14-15 (ESV)

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The valley of decision Joel writes of here is the same as the Valley of Jehoshaphat we read about earlier in this chapter – the place where God will judge all the nations. This part of Joel’s prophecy is strikingly like Isaiah’s prophecy about the Day of the LORD.

***⁹Behold, the day of the LORD comes,
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
to make the land a desolation
and to destroy its sinners from it.
¹⁰For the stars of the heavens and their constellations
will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising,
and the moon will not shed its light.
¹¹I will punish the world for its evil,
and the wicked for their iniquity;
I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant,
and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.*** Isaiah 13:9-11 (ESV)

Furthermore, Jesus made a similar declaration regarding His promised return.

***²⁹“Immediately after the tribulation of those days [the great tribulation Jesus foretold
in Matthew 24:15-28] the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its
light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens
will be shaken. ³⁰Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man,
and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of
Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹And he
will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his
elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*** Matthew 24:29-31
(ESV)

Clearly then, this portion of Joel’s prophecy at least is yet to be fulfilled in the end times.

***¹⁶The 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.
¹⁷“So you shall know that I am the LORD your God,
who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain.
And Jerusalem shall be holy,
and strangers shall never again pass through it.*** Joel 3:16-17 (ESV)

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Jerusalem in the Time of Solomon

Jerusalem has been intimately connected with God and His chosen people since the time of Abraham. Upon returning from rescuing his nephew Lot who had been taken as a prisoner of war, Abraham encountered Melchizedek – the king of Salem (later Jerusalem) and priest of the God Most High and gave him a tithe (Genesis 14:17-20).

NOTE – The author of Hebrews makes clear that Melchizedek was and is the preincarnate Jesus (Hebrews 6:19-7:10).

The mountain of Moriah in Jerusalem is where God called Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. (Genesis 22:1-2).

The army of King David later conquered the city of the Jebusites (Jerusalem) by climbing up the water shaft and established his stronghold on Mt. Zion (2 Samuel 5:6-9). Afterward, God gave a promise to David through Nathan the prophet concerning the royal line of Judah and the temple David's son Solomon would build in Jerusalem.

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring [Solomon] after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever . 2 Samuel 7:12-13 (ESV)

Yet because Solomon fell into the sin of idolatry with the gods of his many wives and concubines, God punished him by taking most of his kingdom away. Yet God gave rule over the tribe of Judah to Solomon's son Rehoboam. Through the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite, God told Solomon's servant Jeroboam son of Nebat that He would make him ruler over the remaining 10 tribes.

36 Yet to his son [Rehoboam] I will give one tribe [Judah], that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. 1 Kings 11:36 (ESV)

Since ancient times continuing to the present day, Jerusalem has been a source of contention – particularly Mount Moriah where Solomon erected the temple of God, and where the third most holy site in Islam – the Al-Aqsa Mosque now stands.

Zechariah foretold that God would make Jerusalem a source of contention as it is today, but that God Himself will intervene just as Joel says here in Joel 3:16-17.

2 "Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples. The siege of Jerusalem will also be against Judah. 3 On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All

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who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it. ⁴On that day, declares the LORD, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But for the sake of the house of Judah I will keep my eyes open, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. ⁵Then the clans of Judah shall say to themselves, ‘The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the LORD of hosts, their God.’

⁶“On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves. And they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem.

⁷“And the LORD will give salvation to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not surpass that of Judah. ⁸On that day the LORD will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, going before them. ⁹And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

¹⁰“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. Zechariah 12:2-10 (ESV)

Thus, God will fulfill His promise to David to establish his throne forever through the line of Judah to Jesus – the Lion of Judah.

*⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)*

*¹⁸“And in that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the streambeds of Judah*

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*shall flow with water;
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD
and water the Valley of Shittim* [שִׁטָּיִם *šittāym* - acacias] • Joel 3:18 (ESV)

The Valley of Shittim is a fertile area a few miles to the northeast of the Jordan River inflow into the Dead Sea. The Israelites under Joshua camped in this area prior to crossing over the Jordan following the 40-year wilderness wandering after the exodus from Egypt. There is strong archaeological evidence that one of the ancient cities in this area was once subjected to a large conflagration with temperatures in excess of 1,000° F, thus it is a likely location for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Today the Valley of Shittim is a relatively fertile agricultural area amid a vast arid desert. This is because the area is irrigated with water from the Jordan River. But in the Day of the LORD, Joel proclaims that the entire region will be made fertile by water flowing “*from the house of the LORD.*” Joel’s prophecy here meshes with Zechariah’s description of the Day on which Jesus once again sets foot on the Mount of Olives.

⁴On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. ⁵And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

⁶On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. ⁷And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light.

⁸On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter.

⁹And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one. Zechariah 14:4-9 (ESV)

Ezekiel also refers to this flow of water coming from the temple which will restore the valley of the Dead Sea to life.

¹Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. ²Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.

³Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. ⁴Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. ⁵Again he measured a thousand, and it was

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a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. ⁶And he said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?”

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. ⁸And he said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah [עֲרָבָה ‘ārāḇâ – a currently arid plain along the western shore of the Dead Sea], and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. ⁹And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. ¹⁰Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. ¹¹But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. ¹²And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.” Ezekiel 47:1-12 (ESV)

NOTE – Obviously, for any of these prophecies about the water flowing from the temple to be fulfilled, there must be a temple from which the water can flow. Since there has never yet been such a flow of water coming from Jerusalem to make the Dead Sea valley fertile again, these prophecies remain to be fulfilled sometime in the future. Consequently, the temple in Jerusalem will also need to be rebuilt sometime in the future.

*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.
²⁰But Judah shall be inhabited forever,
and Jerusalem to all generations.
²¹I will avenge [נָקַם nāqâ] their blood,
blood I have not avenged,
for the LORD dwells in Zion.” Joel 3:19-21 (ESV)*

Throughout God’s Word, Egypt symbolizes worldliness and sin. Historically of course, Egypt held Israel captive for hundreds of years after initially welcoming Jacob and his clan as residents (Genesis 46-Exodus 12). But symbolically, Egypt represents the ravages that worldly sinfulness brings upon all mankind. Although the valley of the Nile in Egypt is fertile, the remainder of Egypt is a barren desert – including the wilderness of Sinai through which the Israelites passed after their exodus from Egypt and throughout their 40-year wilderness wandering. Perhaps God will one day render even the Nile valley desolate. More likely though, Joel speaks here of God’s bringing an end to the sin that Egypt represents.

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Edom (modern Jordan) is named for Jacob's brother Esau. It is the area where Esau's descendants went to dwell after the two brothers parted company when Jacob returned to Canaan from Padan Aram (Genesis 33). Later, when the Israelites asked for permission to pass through Edom's territory on their journey from the wilderness of Sinai to the Land of Promise, the Edomites refused (Numbers 20). Consequently, God spoke through Balaam (the reluctant prophet) that Edom would one day be dispossessed. Joel says here in Joel 3:19, that Edom will become a desolate wilderness. Having been there, I can attest that the lands of Edom, Seir, and Moab (modern day Jordan) are already a desolate wilderness, so God won't need to work too hard to fulfill this prophecy.

Finally, here in the ESV rendering of Joel 3:21 we read that God will avenge their (the people of Judah's) blood which He has never avenged before. The Hebrew word נָקָה *nāqâ* which the ESV renders as "avenge" can also mean to be clean, be free from guilt, be innocent. Thus, English translations are split roughly half and half on how they render this verse. The ESV seems to indicate that God will avenge the blood of the people of Judah upon Judah's neighbors (e.g. Egypt and Edom) who have shed Judah's innocent blood.

But some of the other English translations render the verse so that it would seem that God intends to forgive Judah of the blood of other innocent people which Judah has shed. For example,

***21I will pardon my people's crimes,
which I have not yet pardoned;
and I, the LORD, will make my home
in Jerusalem with my people."*** Joel 3:21 (NLT)

As with several unanswered questions that have arisen during our study of Joel, the solution to this conundrum is left as an exercise for the student.

Conclusion

Our study of Joel has confirmed the difficulty of interpreting this prophecy due to the lack of any geographical or historical context within the text of the prophecy itself. As with all Biblical prophecy, we have found that some aspects of the text must be taken literally while others are surely symbolic. Finally, while the overall theme of Joel is clearly God's final destruction of the current creation and His recreation of a new world free from the curse of sin which Joel calls "the Day of the LORD," we have seen that some of Joel's predictions may already have been fulfilled and others may foretell events that will take place sometime in the future but before the final Day of the LORD.