

Joel 2:25-3:8

Review

Last time we saw that the Day of the LORD which Joel foretells will begin with a horrendous onslaught against God's land and His people by an invading army in such great number that Joel likens them to a swarm of locusts. We saw that the devastation this horde leaves behind will be total – such as has never been seen before and never will be again. Yet this great catastrophe will be only the beginning of the Day of the LORD. Joel says that once God's people return to Him and repent even amid this great ruin, God Himself will come to their aid and restore the land to peace and prosperity.

Throughout our study of Joel, we have taken the approach that his prophecy is for the end times – the Day of the LORD in which He will make all things new. But Joel may also foretell some disaster that will come upon God's land and people followed by God's restoration that will take place sometime before the final Day of the LORD.

Joel 2:25-3:8

Recall that Joel likened the invading army that will come upon the land in the Day of the LORD to a swarm of locusts. Joel now writes of God's miraculous restoration of the land that was devastated by the locusts.

²⁵I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. Joel 2:25 (ESV)

Ordinarily it takes many years for the land to fully recover from a locust infestation. Yet God promises here in Joel 2:25 that He will miraculously restore the land and the people following the destruction by the great army He sent to bring His people to repentance and back into fellowship with Him.

Recall when we began our study of Joel, we spoke of the swarm of locusts in symbolic terms. Sometimes in our lives, we are beset by seemingly endless troubles that come upon us wave after wave just like a locust incursion. Sadly, we sometimes bring these countless troubles upon ourselves through our own poor decisions and habits – ignoring God, and shunning His aid and love. But just as He will restore His land and people following the devastation brought upon them by the great army He will send among them to draw them back to Him in repentance, so He will restore to us the healthy, prosperous, and productive lives we ourselves left by the way in our rebellion against God.

Praise God that it is never too late for us to return to fellowship with God and obedience to Him. Although we may have strayed away from Him for many years, He promises that He will restore to us the years that we have squandered. In fact God allows these troubles in our lives for the very purpose of bringing us to repentance and renewed seeking after Him.

¹⁶That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NLT)

Joel 2:25-3:8

Beware though! This isn't some pie in the sky prosperity Gospel about how God loves us all and has a wonderful plan to give us our best lives now. God's restoration of us here and now from the years we throw away in rebellion against Him is contingent upon our turning away from our rebellion and seeking after Him anew. God will not foist His blessings upon us. He will draw near to us in response to our drawing near to Him, and He will bring His promised blessings with Him.

***26 "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.
27 You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else.
And my people shall never again be put to shame. Joel 2:26-27 (ESV)***

The state of Israel today is a largely secular society despite the prominence of Orthodox Jews, Israeli Muslims, and Eastern Orthodox Christians. Most Israelis are fully immersed in modern, commercial pursuits paying little heed to God or the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Certainly, Israel has its dietary laws and strict **שַׁבָּת** *šabāt* rules and practices. For the most part Israeli Jews observe God's ordained yearly festivals, in the same sense that most Americans celebrate Christmas with little heed to the coming of Jesus – God the Son into the world. Israel today is much the way Isaiah described it in his own vision of a coming assault upon Jerusalem.

***13 And the Lord said:
"Because this people draw near with their mouth
and honor me with their lips,
while their hearts are far from me,
and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,
14 therefore, behold, I will again
do wonderful things with this people,
with wonder upon wonder;
and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,
and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden." Isaiah 29:13-14
(ESV)***

This is nothing new. Most Israelites have been in denial of God and rebellion against Him periodically since the time of their exodus from Egypt. But after God restores the land following the great invasion foretold in Joel 1, God's people Israel will once more be fully in touch with God who chose them out of the world thousands of years ago to be His own people. As Joel 2:27 says, the remnant of Israel ***shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else.*** Indeed, God will bring about the devastation foretold in Joel 1 for this very purpose – that afterward He will show them His power and His love by restoring not only the land, but their own hearts toward Him. The same is true of us when God restores our fortunes after a season of devastation or tragedy. Although we may wander far from Him or even deny Him altogether, by His miraculous restoration we become attuned to His presence and His work in our lives and to His infinite care for us.

Joel 2:25-3:8

Notice that Joel emphasizes twice – in Joel 2:26 and again in Joel 2:27 – that following this miraculous restoration, Israel will never again return to sinful denial and rebellion. Unfortunately, I can't yet say the same for myself, and if we are honest neither can any Christ follower. Although we are truly born-again of God's Spirit, we continue to rebel against Him. But on the Day of the LORD, that will no longer be true. When God fully restores us to Himself on that day, the reign of our sin over creation will be broken forever, and thereby God will make all things new.

***28“And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.***

***29Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.*** Joel 2:28-29 (ESV)

A great deal has been written and said over the years about these two verses. I certainly can't add much of any worth to what so many erudite Bible scholars have already said on the subject.

The first thing to note here is that this pouring out of God's Spirit shall happen (or has already) “**afterward.**” Of course, this immediately raises the question – After **what?** While looking into this passage, it seemed to me that the NLT provides a better perspective that nevertheless substantially agrees with the other English translations I was able to access.

***28“Then, after doing all those things,
I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.
Your old men will dream dreams,
and your young men will see visions.***

***29In those days I will pour out my Spirit
even on servants—men and women alike.*** Joel 2:28-29 (NLT)

It seems apparent that the outpouring of God's Spirit upon all people which Joel foretells will happen **after** the catastrophic destruction and God's subsequent restoration of the land in the future Day of the LORD – possibly at the end of all time. Some have proposed that this passage foretells the outpouring of God's Spirit on the first Pentecost after Jesus ascended to His Father that we read about in Acts 2. But it seems that this interpretation doesn't consider the full context of Joel's prophecy – which I believe clearly pertains to the end of days.

Furthermore, Joel makes clear that this outpouring of God's Spirit will be on **all** people. This has never yet happened throughout history even on that first Pentecost. Joel's declaration about this outpouring of God's Spirit meshes well with his statement in Joel 2:26 & 27 that God's people will nevermore be put to shame, with Paul's writing in Romans 11:26 that “**...all Israel will be saved,**” and Joel's saying in Joel 2:32 which we shall look at later that “**everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved.**”

In fact, God has been pouring out His Spirit upon particular people for His own specific purposes throughout time. In Genesis 41:38, Pharaoh remarked that the Spirit of God was in Joseph. Later, God told Moses that He had filled a craftsman named Bezalel with His Spirit to enable him to help

Joel 2:25-3:8

build the tabernacle. We read in Numbers 11 that Moses himself was filled with God's Spirit and God then used Moses to pass that Spirit on to the seventy elders whom Moses appointed. In Judges we read that God's Spirit clothed Gideon (Judges 6), was upon Jephthah (Judges 11), and rushed upon Samson (Judges 14 & 15). When Samuel anointed the future King David at his father Jesse's house, we read that God's Spirit rushed upon David from that day forward (1 Samuel 16:13). Jesus confirmed this in Matthew 22:43. Of course, we know that Mary conceived Jesus by God's Spirit.

There are many other instances throughout God's Word that confirm God's outpouring of His Spirit throughout history. I won't belabor the point any further, except to say that the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost was not mankind's first encounter with Him. On some occasions God's Spirit comes upon people for God's own good purposes. At other times, God's Spirit indwells someone continually – as with King David and of course every born-again believer since the first day of Pentecost when the Church was born.

But this outpouring that Joel speaks of here will not be just for specific people but for **all** people. Thus, it seems that the fulfillment of this outpouring will be in a later time – perhaps the end of all time, since in our current world most people apparently have not received God's Spirit poured out upon them.

Before we move on, we need to put to rest the idea the God indwells animals, plants, and other aspects of His creation with His Spirit or will do so when this prophecy of Joel is fulfilled. The idea that the Spirit of God resides within all elements of creation is called Animism. It is an aspect of many ancient religious traditions and has seen a resurgence in modern culture since the latter half of the 20th century. Genesis 1:2 tells us that the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. We also read in Numbers 22 that God caused Balaam's donkey to speak. But there is nowhere in God's Word that speaks of His Spirit indwelling any other non-human creature. Indeed, the only spirits we find indwelling animals in God's Word are the spirits of demons who are somehow able to possess other creatures by the power of satan. The Hebrew word translated as "flesh" by the ESV in Joel 2:28 is **בָּשָׂר** **bāśār**. It can indeed refer to the flesh of any living thing, but here in Joel it clearly means only people as reflected in the NLT's and others' translation of the verse.

30“And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. 31The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. Joel

2:30-31 (ESV)

Here in this passage, we find affirmation that the Day of the Lord prophesied by Joel is clearly an event that remains to be fulfilled sometime in the future. Certainly, never in human memory has the sun been turned to darkness and the moon to blood. Some have claimed that this prophecy refers to total eclipses of the sun in the past or in the future. In my (always) humble opinion, I don't think God would call Joel to prophesy about ordinary eclipses as ***“the great and awesome day of the LORD.”*** It seems to me that explaining it away as an eclipse (either past or future) belittles the fearsomeness and awesomeness of the Day whenever it finally comes. In fact, I see it as a form of denial as a psychological defense against the daunting prospect of the coming Day.

Joel 2:25-3:8

32And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls. Joel 2: 32 (ESV)

Joel 2:32 is one of those well-known Bible verses frequently taken out of its rightful context by those wishing to make a point about salvation (eisegesis). Yes. Without doubt we must call upon the Name of the LORD to be saved. But not everyone who calls upon the Name of the LORD actual commits to following Jesus as the LORD of their lives, and that makes all the difference. Jesus Himself taught this.

21“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV)

Joel is speaking here of a specific group of people – those who escape the devastation of the great and terrible Day of the LORD. Among these survivors will be those whom the LORD called who will then call upon His Name for salvation. Similarly, when Paul writes in Romans 11:26 that “***all Israel will be saved***,” he does not imply that every Hebrew will be saved simply as a matter of birthright. It is hard to imagine that our righteous and just God will grant idolatrous and wicked Jews like Ahab and Jezebel entry into His Kingdom just because they were born of His chosen people. That would be like spitting in the faces of the faithful Hebrews who suffered under their cruel reign. The full context of Romans 11 makes it crystal clear that Paul was referring to a remnant of Israel who truly repent of their sins and call upon the Name of the LORD for salvation. Remember though that the exact manner by which God will redeem those faithful Jews who lived and died before Jesus was born remains a mystery.

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. 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, 3and 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. Joel 3:1-3 (ESV)

Here we find yet another element of Joel’s prophecy that makes it difficult to interpret. If we assume that Joel’s prophecy is (at least mostly) for the end of days, then this judgment Joel speaks of in Joel 3:1-3 doesn’t seem to mesh very well with the Great White Throne judgment detailed in Revelation 20 by which ***all*** mankind who have ever lived and ever will live will be judged – not specifically for their crimes against God’s people Israel, but for everything we have done that has been recorded by God in His books.

CAVEAT – Remember that God will pronounce His judgment from the Great White Throne, based solely upon whether we have our names inscribed in His Book of Life – not by what we have done. Remember that Isaiah proclaimed, “***We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our***

Joel 2:25-3:8

righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isaiah 64:6) by comparison to God’s perfect righteousness. Our own thoughts, words, and deeds will be to no avail, regardless of how righteous we may think we are. Only the righteousness of Jesus imputed to us through faith in His Gospel can rescue us out of God’s perfectly righteous judgment.

But Joel’s prophecy here doesn’t seem to be speaking of that ultimate judgment at God’s Great White Throne because even the very earth and sky will not be able to abide in His presence at that judgment.

11Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

Revelation 20:11 (ESV)

By contrast, Joel 3:2 speaks about a specific place – the Valley of Jehoshaphat – where this judgment will take place. The only two mentions of this place in God’s Word are found right here in Joel 3 – here in verse 2 and again in verse 12. Some have proposed that this valley may be the valley of the Kidron brook between the old city of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives through which Jesus and His disciples walked on the night He was betrayed. Others have proposed that this valley is where Jehoshaphat son of Asa king of Judah defeated an alliance of Amon, Moab, and Edom somewhere in the lower Jordan valley around En Gedi (2 Chronicles 20). The Biblical bases of these two speculations regarding the location of the Valley of Jehoshaphat are meager at best.

Furthermore, the judgment Joel foretells here in Joel 3 will be for specific crimes of the nations against Israel – particularly specific heinous crimes against boys and girls – not the general sins of mankind as in the Great White Throne judgment. Thus, seemingly the judgment Joel foretells here will be an interim judgment against all the nations following the great invasion foretold in Joel 1. If that is the case, then the invasion of the army of “locusts” might also be an interim event (perhaps also foretold in Ezekiel 38-39) – not the battle at Armageddon, the return of Jesus riding a white horse, or the final defeat of Satan we read about in Revelation 16 & 19-20.

Nevertheless, the judgment we read about here in Joel 3 could also be symbolic of the judgment we read of in Revelation 20.

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. 5For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. Joel 3:4-5 (ESV)

Here again, not having a historical or geographic context for Joel’s life and prophecy makes it hard to understand why Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia are singled out for God’s judgment here in Joel 3. The region of Sidon is mentioned in God’s Word as far back as the time of Moses (Genesis 10). Sidon was the son of Canaan and great-grandson of Noah. By the time the Israelites returned from bondage in Egypt around the 13th century BC, a ***fortified city***” of the Phoenicians existed at Tyre (Joshua 19:29). The Philistines who occupied the seacoast of Canaan came from the line of Casluhim, son of Egypt and great-grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:14). They were already resident in the land when Joshua and the Israelites arrived from Egypt. The Philistines were originally a seafaring people like the Phoenicians, and may have first arrived in Canaan from the island of Crete.

Joel 2:25-3:8

The Philistines are mentioned over 250 times in the Old Testament – always as enemies of Israel from the time of Joshua onward. Indeed, the descendants of the Philistines continue to dwell along the seacoast of Gaza as the enemies of God’s people Israel. So, the struggle between the Philistines and the Israelites over the land of Canaan continues to this day. Of course, the Philistines were and are idolaters. In ancient times they worshipped Dagon, Ashteroth, Beelzebub, and later Baal. In modern times, they worship the modern idol – Allah!

Joel speaks here of the Philistines having carried off God’s treasures and placing them in their own temples. Of course, the most famous example of this is when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant at Ebenezer, carried it to their city of Ashdod, and set it up in the temple of their god Dagon.

¹When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ²Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. ³And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. ⁵This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. 1 Samuel 5:1-5 (ESV)

Of course, the ancient treasures of God’s temple in Israel have long since been taken away and disbursed throughout the world – not just in Philistia. Joel speaks here of God’s repayment for these thefts – specifically His repayment of the Philistines.

⁶You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border. Joel 3:6 (ESV)

Interestingly, this verse in Joel is the only mention of the Greeks in the entire Old Testament! Some have taken this reference to the Greeks as a “handle” to date the prophecy of Joel subsequent to the conquest of the Levant by Alexander the Great in 333 BC. However, the Greeks were a widely traveled seafaring people throughout the Mediterranean and Black seas a thousand years or more prior to Alexander.

Furthermore, the “**You**” at the beginning of Joel 3:6 must be considered in the context of the previous two verses. Of course, it refers to the Philistines who had been in conflict with the Israelites since the time of Joshua. Some of the Israelite prisoners taken by the Philistines in battle were likely sold as slaves to the peoples of the Mediterranean basin – including the Greeks. Thus, Joel’s reference to the Greeks is of no help in dating his prophecy.

⁷Behold, I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them, and I will return your payment on your own head. ⁸I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell

Joel 2:25-3:8

them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away, for the LORD has spoken.” Joel

3:7-8 (ESV)

Since the division of the kingdom after Solomon’s death, the people of Israel have been dispersed out of Canaan throughout the world. Even before that, as we have seen Israelite prisoners of war had been sold into slavery around the Mediterranean, the Middle East. Of course, the majority of the people spent hundreds of years in Egypt – first as immigrants and later as captives prior to their (partial) conquest of Canaan under Joshua when they first came into conflict with the Philistines.

We find the word “your” repeatedly here in Joel 3:7-8. It probably continues to refer to the Philistines as in the previous few verses, but it could also refer to all the nations God will gather at the Valley of Jehoshaphat for judgment (Joel 3:2). Nevertheless, Joel’s point is clear. God will allow the returned captives of Israel to mete out His judgment upon those who sold them into slavery.

Absent any historical context for Joel’s prophecy, it is difficult to determine a meaning for this declaration. Perhaps, this recompense for those who sold Israel into slavery has already been fulfilled sometime in the past. Perhaps it remains for the future. Perhaps this talk of repayment for past wrongs done to Israel is symbolic. Once again, I’m afraid the answer to this question must be “left as an exercise for the student.”

Before we move on, let’s take a brief look at Joel’s intriguing reference to the Sabeans. These were ancient people who live in the southern Arabian Peninsula – modern day Yemen. They were descended from Noah’s great-great-grandson Sheba (Genesis 10:7). The Sabeans are mentioned three times in the Old Testament with the first mention in Job 1. This is particularly interesting since Job is thought by many to be one of the oldest books in the Bible – possibly pre-dating even the five books of Moses. The “*queen of the Sheba*” who visited Solomon (1 Kings 10) was possibly a Sabean, although this “*queen of the south*” as Jesus called her (Matthew 12:42 & Luke 11:31) may also have come to Solomon from the Horn of Africa – modern Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti.

Why does Joel mention the Sabeans? Very likely, some of the Israelite prisoners sold into slavery by the Philistines in Joel’s time were sold to the Sabeans. Thus, Joel proclaims that part of God’s returning of payment on the heads of the Philistines will be allowing Israel to sell Philistine captives as slave to the very people to whom the Philistines had sold Israelites. Of course, this assumes that Joel prophesied sometime prior to the division of the kingdom, and that this partial fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy has already been literally fulfilled sometime in the past while the Sabeans themselves flourished.

Looking Ahead

God willing, next time we will finish up our study of Joel. The latter half of Joel 3 is a poetic summary of the prophecy in symbolic language. Much of the imagery in this poem has parallels elsewhere in God’s Word which we will examine.