

JOEL

CHAPTER THREE

1. When will the events foretold occur?

The phrase, “in *those* days and at *that* time” (Joel 3:1) refers to the end of chapter two which looked to “afterward” (Joel 2:28-32) and which Peter said was starting on Pentecost after Jesus’ ascension (Acts 2:16-21). This is not to say everything which follows would happen on the Day of Pentecost, but that day began the era when the following events would occur. Thus, the New Covenant would be in effect whenever these events unfold.

2. Who are the “captives” God intended to “bring back?”

“When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem” (Joel 3:1) is prophesied in the same vein as “I will bring back the captives of My people Israel” (Amos 9:14). The context of this passage is: “‘On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,’ says Jehovah who does this thing” (Amos 9:11-12). These verses are quoted by James (Acts 15:16-17) and applied to the church receiving Gentiles. Thus, the captives are not literally Jews, but spiritually so, “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16; 3:7-9, 29; Romans 9:6-8; Philippians 3:3). Captivity refers to the sin holding souls in bondage and from which Jesus sets free (Luke 4:16-21; John 8:32).

3. Where would Jehovah “gather all nations?”

“I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat” (Joel 3:2). The fourth king of Judah was named Jehoshaphat (1st Kings 22:41-50), but neither

Scripture, nor history, nor geography offers any record of a place, much less a valley, called by his name. *“Jehoshaphat”* means *“Jehovah judges,”* so the reference is to wherever God would enter into judgment against nations. Because this place is set in contrast to *“Jerusalem”* (Joel 3:1), which God would avenge, and because Jerusalem is higher in elevation than anywhere else in sight, always referred to as *“up”* from elsewhere (Acts 21:15), it stands to reason that the judgment place would be, comparatively, a *“Valley.”* Therefore, the *“Valley of Jehoshaphat”* is not a physical place at all, but a spiritual location, as heaven and hell, immaterial but very real.

4. What would He do with *“all nations”* at Jehoshaphat?

“I will enter into judgment with them there” (Joel 3:2). Jesus, too, foretold His judgment on all nations: *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats”* (Matthew 25:31-32). Jesus’ judgment will happen *“in the last day”* (John 12:48), so that is what this chapter is about.

5. What are the charges levelled against the nations?

“On account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land. They have cast lots for My people, have given a boy as payment for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink” (Joel 3:2-3).

- 1) They had scattered His people among the nations. This refers to the Jewish diaspora (Esther 3:8) following the overthrow of Israel by Assyria and of Judah by Babylon (Jeremiah 50:17). This was not just the captivity in the lands of the nations who had conquered them, but the scattering beyond.

2) They had divided up His land. Again, this refers to the overthrow of Israel and Judah (Amos 7:17; Lamentations 5:2).

3) They had cast lots for His people (Obadiah 11; Nahum 3:10): Paying for prostitutes with a boy slave and paying for wine with a girl slave. They were engaged in human trafficking, but were not even fetching the standard price of a servant, thirty pieces of silver (Exodus 21:32), thus cheapening human value.

6. What was God's first question to Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia?

"Indeed, what have you to do with Me, o Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia?" (Joel 3:4). This was a common form of repudiation in the ancient world (2nd Samuel 16:10; 1st Kings 17:18; 2nd Kings 9:18-19; John 2:4). It was a way of saying these peoples ought not to have interfered with God's people.

7. What was His second question to them?

"Will you retaliate against Me? But if you retaliate against Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your retaliation upon your own head" (Joel 3:4). He challenged them to contemplate whether their actions against Him, Jehovah, by way of what they had done to the Israelites were legitimate. He warned them that they were the ones deserving of recompense and they were going to receive it.

8. What had the Tyrians, Sidonians, and Philistines done to merit retaliation from God?

“Because you have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried into your temples My prized possessions. Also the people of Judah and the people of Jerusalem you have sold to the Greeks, that you may remove them far from their borders” (Joel 3:5-6).

The temple had been despoiled no less than seven previous times: by the Egyptians (2nd Chronicles 12:9), by the Syrians twice (2nd Chronicles 16:1-2; 2nd Kings 12:17-18), by the northern kingdom of Israel (2nd Chronicles 25:23-24), by the Assyrians twice (2nd Kings 16:7-8; 18:13-16), and by the Babylonians (2nd Chronicles 36:9-10). Evidently, further looting had taken place by Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia. While the Jews were in Babylonian exile, the Ark of the Covenant disappeared, never to be seen again (Jeremiah 3:16).

They also sold the Jews into slavery to the Greeks, far away from their homeland and this is what bothers the Lord most.

9. How would God “return” their “retaliation” upon their “own head?”

“Behold, I will raise them out of the place to which you have sold them, and will return your retaliation upon your own head. 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 people far off; for Jehovah has spoken” (Joel 3:7-8).

God has been explicitly clear throughout the ages in teaching consequences for sin (Psalm 7:14-16; Proverbs 26:27; Galatians 6:7-8). Accordingly, the people who had sold Jews into Greek slavery would experience their offspring being sold into slavery into a distant land of the opposite direction.

The Sabeans, the people of Sheba, were known traveling merchants (Job 6:19; Ezekiel 27:33), so the Jews would not need to be an ocean-going people like Tyre, Sidon, or Philistia because the Sabeans would come to them to buy slaves.

10. What are the nations summoned to?

“Proclaim this among the nations: ‘Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, “I am strong.”’ Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O Jehovah” (Joel 3:9-11).

God says, “Fight me!” He says, “Bring it!” In so many ways, He lets them know that, because these nations had fought His people, He would fight them back! They can amass all their armies, mobilize their special forces, conscript farmers, and even stir up the courage of their weaklings; they can throw everything they have at Him because He is ready to throw down!

11. What were the nations to do with their plowshares and pruning hooks?

*“Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears” (Joel 3:10), which is the exact opposite of what Isaiah and Micah foretold: “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass **in the latter days** that the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and **all nations** shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word Jehovah from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; **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 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3). Isaiah and Micah also prophesied concerning the latter days, meaning the New Testament era and they also prophesied of all nations. Their prophecies focused on turning weapons into implements of peace because the nations desired to be taught by God, whereas Joel's prophecy focused on the opposite – turning implements of peace into weapons of war because the nations who had resisted Him would be punished.

12. Did God literally mean for armed conflict or some other adversarial situation?

"Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations" (Joel 3:12). The summons to war is to impress upon the nations His fierce opposition to them. They are to present themselves to Jehovah in the place where Jehovah judges for Jehovah to judge them! Combat was merely an illustrious metaphor concerning judgment.

13. How else does God illustrate His impending judgment?

Next, He turns to agricultural metaphors. *"Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great"* (Joel 3:13). Harvests and sickles and winepresses are common figures for judgment (Mark 4:26-29; Revelation 14:14-20; 19:15). The farmer and the vintner must wait for harvest and for fruit to ripen and God does wait for enemy peoples to complete their iniquity (Genesis 15:16; 1st Thessalonians 2:16).

14. After the analogy, what are the multitudes again warned about directly?

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of Jehovah is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14). God spoke of judgment somewhat plainly (Joel 3:2),

compared His judgment to warfare (9), again spoke of judgment plainly (12), compared His judgment to harvest (13), and again spoke of judgment plainly (14).

15. Explain the sun, moon, and stars going dark.

“The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness” (Joel 3:15). Scripture often described exalted world leaders as celestial luminaries in just the same way cinematic headliners are called “stars” now.

Notice parallels when God has warned of judgment against others. He was addressing Babylon (Isaiah 13:1) when He said, *“Behold, the day of Jehovah comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine”* (9-10). He was addressing Egypt (Ezekiel 32:2) when He said, *“When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, and bring darkness upon your land”* (7-8).

God told the prophet Isaiah to *“take up this proverb against the king of Babylon”* (Isaiah 14:4): *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit”* (12-15). Popular misconceptions notwithstanding, *“Lucifer”* is not a name for Satan, but means *“Day Star,”* and specifically refers to Nebuchadnezzar in this instance. He was figuratively identified as a celestial body that went dark.

Remember Joseph's dream of the heavenly bodies bowing down to him (Genesis 37:9).

In the New Testament, we are told who our warfare is against. *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"* (Ephesians 6:12). Because we are in combat against certain spiritual armies in celestial realms, it should come as no surprise that these lofted opponents go dark when God brings His judgment.

16. Where would God's voice be heard coming from?

*"Jehovah also will roar **from Zion**, and utter His voice **from Jerusalem**"* (Joel 3:16). Whereas it was Jerusalem sounding the alarm previously because the Jews were the subject of God's anger (2:1), now that they have repented, God directs His wrath outward, from Jerusalem/Zion, toward *"all nations"* (3:1, 9, 12).

17. What effect does His voice have upon *"the heavens and earth?"*

"The heavens and earth will shake" (Joel 3:16). Whereas the prior mention of the earth quaking (2:10) was, quite plausibly, literal in its reference to the locust infestation, a literal application does not seem likely here. Rather, this seems to fit the theme of judgment prophecies (Psalms 18:7; 114:4; Isaiah 2:19; 5:25; 24:19-20; Jeremiah 4:24; Ezekiel 38:18-20; Nahum 1:5; Habakkuk 3:6; Haggai 2:6; Zechariah 14:4), such as Isaiah against Babylon (Isaiah 13:1): *"Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger"* (13).

Even the uninspired used similar wording to cast aspersions on those who preached Christ. A mob in Thessalonica said, *“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too”* (Acts 17:6). Words can shake up the earth, so God’s judgment can do likewise.

18. While heaven and earth were shaking, what would become of Israel?

“Jehovah will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel” (Joel 3:16). While the nations are upended in judgment, God’s people, figuratively Israel, are stable and secure. *“The solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’”* (2nd Timothy 2:19).

19. What would they come to know?

“So you shall know that I am Jehovah your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain” (Joel 3:17). They needed reminder that no other god than Jehovah is real and He is the God whose people is Israel. Knowing God is a major theme of Scripture, especially in the New Testament: *“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him”* (1st John 2:3-5).

20. What would become of “Jerusalem?”

“Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again” (Joel 3:17). Writing at a time when the Jews had known a conquered Jerusalem, Joel was reassuring the people of God that there would be a time when the holy city is impregnable.

Daniel had prophesied, *“In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever”* (Daniel 2:44). The Hebrew writer confirmed, *“we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken”* (Hebrews 12:28). And Jesus said *“the gates of Hades shall not prevail against”* His church and kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19).

Joel refers to *“the Jerusalem above”* (Galatians 4:26), not the city on earth.

21. What is the significance of the wine, milk, and water all dripping, flowing, and flooding?

“And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of Jehovah and water the Valley of Acacias” (Joel 3:18).

Whereas the wine had previously been cut off in God’s wrath (Joel 1:5, 9, 10), and the cattle suffered (Joel 1:18), and the brooks dried up (Joel 1:20), there would be a reversal (Joel 2:21-27). However, what mattered was not the physical, but the spiritual. God was pouring out His Spirit (Joel 2:29) and this is here portrayed in allegory.

22. Why would Egypt and Edom be desolated?

“Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of violence against the people of Judah, for they have shed innocent blood in their land” (Joel 3:19). Violence was the core reason God destroyed the earth in Noah’s day (Genesis 6:11-13), and immediately after the flood, He set forth a new law imposing a penalty on violence (Genesis 9:6). The shedding of *“innocent blood”* is of particular concern to

Him (Proverbs 6:16-17). In particular, the victims of the violence were God's protected people.

23. In what sense would Judah and Jerusalem always abide?

"But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation" (Joel 3:20). It is not the physical lineage of Israel God was so jealous of (Romans 11:11-32); rather, His *"holy nation"* and *"special people"* now are those who have received mercy in Christ (1st Peter 2:4-10).

24. What would God who dwells in Zion do about blood?

"For I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had not acquitted; for Jehovah dwells in Zion" (Joel 3:21) is probably not the most accurate rendering of the verse. More preferable is: *"I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged, for Jehovah dwells in Zion"* (ESV). Jesus promised to avenge the blood of all martyrs in the generation during which He had dwelt on earth (Matthew 23:34-36).