

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes: Book of Joel

5/31/17

Chapter 3

The Nations Judged - Verses 1-16

"In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ²I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land. ³They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine to drink. ⁴"Now what have you against me, 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. ⁵For you took my silver and my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples.^[c] ⁶You 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. ⁸I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabians, a nation far away." The LORD has spoken. ⁹Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. ¹⁰Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, "I am strong!" ¹¹Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there. Bring down your warriors, 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. ¹³Swing 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!" ¹⁴Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. ¹⁵The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. ¹⁶The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

3:1-2 The phrase "at that time" refers to the time when those who call on the Lord will be saved (2:32). God will not only bless believers with everything they need; he will also bless them by destroying all evil and ending the pain and suffering on earth. This prophecy had three fulfillments: immediate, ongoing, and final. Its immediate

interpretation could apply to King Jehoshaphat's recent battle against several enemy nations, including Moab and Ammon (2 Chronicles 20). Its ongoing fulfillment could be the partial restoration of the people to their land after the exile to Babylon. The final fulfillment will come in the great battle that precedes the Messiah's reign over the earth (Revelation 20:7-9).

3:2 The geographic location of the Valley of Jehoshaphat is not known, and some suggest it is being used as a symbol for the place where the Lord is to judge. Some think it may be a future valley created by the splitting of the Mount of Olives when the Messiah returns (Zechariah 14:4). The most important fact for us is that the name means "the LORD judges."

3:4 Tyre and Sidon were major cities in Phoenicia to the northwest of Israel. Philistia was the nation southwest of Judah. Phoenicia and Philistia were small countries that rejoiced at the fall of Judah and Israel because they would benefit from the increased trade. God would judge them for their wrong attitude.

3:6 Jews were sold to Greeks, a pagan and unclean people. Some think this verse and 3:1 indicate that Joel lived after the captivity in Babylon (586 B.C.), when the Greek culture began to flourish. But archaeological studies have shown that the Greeks were trading with Phoenicia as early as 800 B.C. Also 3:4 mentions Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia. These places were contemporary with Judah long before their captivity.

3:8 The Sabeans came from Sheba, a nation in southwestern Arabia. One of Sheba's queens had visited Solomon over a century earlier (1 Kings 10:1-13). The Sabeans controlled the eastern trade routes.

3:14 Joel described multitudes waiting in the "valley of decision" (the Valley of Jehoshaphat of verses 2 and 12). Billions of people have lived on earth, and every one of them—dead, living, and yet to be born—will face judgment. Look around you. See your friends, those with whom you work and live. Have they received God's forgiveness? Have they been warned about sin's consequences? If we understand the severity of God's final judgment, we will want to take God's offer of hope to those we know.

Blessings for God's People - Verses 17-21

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 Shall I leave their innocent blood unavenged? No, I will not.”
The LORD dwells in Zion!

3:17 The last word will be God's; his ultimate sovereignty will be revealed in the end. We cannot predict when that end will come, but we can have confidence in his control over the world's events. The world's history, as well as our own pilgrimage, is in God's hands. We can be secure in his love and trust him to guide our decisions.

3:18 The picture of this restored land is one of perfect beauty, similar to the Garden of Eden. The life-giving fountain flowing from the Lord's house illustrates the blessings that come from God. Those who continue to trust in him will be forever fruitful. (See also Ezekiel 47:1-12; Revelation 22:1-2.)

3:19 Egypt and Edom were two of Israel's most persistent enemies. They represent all the nations hostile to God's people. God's promise that they would be destroyed is also a promise that all evil in the world will one day be destroyed.

3:20-21 The word Judah is used here to refer to all God's people—anyone who has called on the name of the Lord. There is full assurance of victory and peace for those who trust in God (2:32).

3:21 Joel began with a prophecy about the destruction of the land and ended with a prophecy about its restoration. He began by stressing the need for repentance and ended with the promise of forgiveness that repentance brings. Joel was trying to convince the people to wake up (1:5), get rid of their complacency, and realize the danger of living apart from God. His message to us is that there is still time; anyone who calls on God's name can be saved (2:12-14, 32). Those who turn to God will enjoy the blessings mentioned in Joel's prophecy; those who refuse will face destruction.