

Text: Joel 3:1-21

Title: Judgment of the Nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat

Truth: God will judge Gentile nations for their wicked treatment of Israel.

Date/Location: Sunday August 30 and Wednesday September 2, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

This passage is mainly about God’s judgment on the Gentile nations.

I. Time, Subjects, and Location of the Judgment, 3:1-2a

A. Almost in passing Joel records God saying “in those days...when I bring back the captives of Judah...” This is in a far-future context—we know this because the judgment against the nations mentioned next has not yet occurred. Even though some Jews have returned to their land over the centuries, and many are there today, there has not been the universal return that is mentioned here. There comes a time when God will gather all Israel (Ezekiel 34:11-14).

It seems far-fetched to the secular mind or even to the Christian who has been trained in amillennial or postmillennial theology. However, it will occur. God has not cast off Israel permanently. For the present, He certainly has focused His attention on the salvation of Gentiles, but He will turn once again to Israel. He will gather them.

The time of the judgment is at the end of the Tribulation, just before the start of the millennial kingdom (Revelation 19-20). It is around this time that the Messiah comes, rescues Israel, gathers them from the worldwide diaspora, and then judges the nations of the world in order to put them into their proper place in His kingdom.

B. The subjects of the judgment are “all nations” as specified in verse 2. We know that these nations are Gentiles because their opposite—Israel—is mentioned in 3:1 (the “captives of Judah and Jerusalem”). Just prior to this judgment, these particular nations will come up against Jerusalem to destroy her, but God will deliver the nation with a great victory (Zech. 9:14-16, 12:2-9). After God

defeats their armies, the surviving people of the nations will be gathered for judgment.

The nation of Israel is evaluated at a different event, described in Ezekiel 20:33-38.

C. As soon as you start reading this judgment passage, it could bring to mind parallel passages that have to do with the judgment of the nations. Some of these passages are historical judgments like those listed in Isaiah chapters 13–23, Jeremiah 46–51, or Amos 1:1–2:3.

Others deal with the judgment of the end times, just before the kingdom of Christ begins. The most well-known among these passages is Matthew 25:31-46.

D. The location of the judgment is the “Valley of Jehoshaphat” mentioned in 3:2 and 3:12. It is also called the Valley of Decision in 3:14. The exact location is uncertain, though it seems to be somewhere near Jerusalem. That makes sense as it is the capital city and will be the place of the royal residence. See Ezekiel 38:21-23 and chapter 39. The judgment seems to come in two parts: the military destruction of the armies, and then the court-scene with the surviving of the nations. See also Daniel 11:45.

The association with King Jehoshaphat does not clarify the identification of this place. Perhaps it is best to take it not as the king’s name, but as the meaning derived from the roots of the word: Jeho from Yhwh or “The LORD” and Shapat which is the verb “to judge.” So this place is the “Valley of the Lord’s Judgment.” This makes the best sense of the phrase. It is where God will enter into judgment with them.

II. Reason for the Judgment, 3:2b-3

A. The reason is given at the end of verse 2: “On account of my people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations.” God calls Israel “My” people and “My” heritage. Judgment of the nations will be based on their treatment of the Jews. Their treatment will without fail indicate their spiritual condition—saved or unsaved. Notice that this agrees exactly with what is said in Matthew 25:31-46. “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren (Israelites), you did it to Me.”

B. Instead of helping the Jews, the nations of the world have all too often turned against them and scattered them over the face of the globe.

It is remarkable that the United Nations, for example, has such a transparent hatred for Israel. For what logical reason? There is none, except that Israel is the ethnic focal point of the work of God and Satan hates God and all that are associated with God in some way. The church is not an ethnic body, but it arises out of a Jewish covenant root. That root represents God to the world. The sinner has an innate (natural) rebellion against God. Therefore, although he might not understand why he hates Israel, he does so because he hates God. The battle is not merely against flesh and blood, but against powers of evil in high places. They influence the affairs of the world.

C. The history of the nations of the world includes that they cast lots for the Jewish people, engaged in human trafficking, and participated in prostitution. The buying and selling of souls in slavery is just one terrible example of the ways in which the world has done wrong to the Jewish nation.

III. Judgment against Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia, 3:4-8

A. The question of verse 4 indicates that the named countries had a mindset of vengeance. In their prior evil actions against Israel they were—in effect—attacking God. God asks if he had done something against them for which they were retaliating. It's like God is saying, "Are you mistreating My people because *I* have done something wrong against you? Are you getting back at me through them?" In what way, precisely, would they say that God has wronged them?

B. God promises that if they go that route, they will be repaid for their repayment. It will be swift and (though unstated here) devastating.

C. These nearby nations had been involved in the activities mentioned in verse 3. We don't know exactly when these events took place (or if it is a reference to what *will* take place in the future). They:

1. Stole gold and silver from God, probably from the Jewish government and temple.

2. Stole objects and put them in their own pagan temples.
 3. Sold residents of Jerusalem and Judah to the Greeks as slaves. The Greeks were international traders; it seems that they did not keep all the slaves for themselves. This kind of crime was punishable by death in God's law (Exodus 21:16, Deut. 24:7, 1 Timothy 1:10). Remember very keenly that
 4. Desired to remove the people from their land. This served their greedy purpose of enlarging their own borders and territory.
- D. God will return to them tooth for tooth, stripe for stripe, eye for eye. See Exodus 21:22-25. This may not make us feel nice inside when we think about it, but the language of force and retribution is sometimes all that the sinner can understand, and the only way they can be made to stop their evil behavior. This is because they set their hearts to do evil and will not rest until they do it, or are forced to stop.
1. First, God will bring back the people of Israel (3:7; see 3:1).
 2. Then He will do to the nearby nations as they thought to do to Israel (Deut. 19:18-20). For instance, He will sell their children as slaves through the Israelites to others.
 3. The nature and timing of these events is somewhat difficult. It does not seem like Israel would hold slaves during the millennial kingdom. I am going to leave this as an open issue for now.
 4. It is interesting that Mark 7:24-37 mentions Tyre and Sidon and the Lord's ministry there. God did not abandon those places as if they were relegated to permanent pariah status. Interestingly, they are mentioned more times together in the New Testament than in the Old Testament!

IV. Battle and destruction of the armies of the nations, 3:9-17

- A. Call to war. Instead of a gospel proclamation, God here instructs the prophet to proclaim war. The men of war are called (3:9). The implements of war are to be created (10). This is the exact opposite of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3. He calls the weak to strengthen themselves for what they will face. The nations are to assemble before God (11-12).

- B. The nations are called to face God in the Valley of Decision. The sentence has already been stated above. Now, the sentence will be carried out. The sickle, harvest, and winepress language is loaded with the idea of judgment. See Mark 4:29, Revelation 14:14-20 and 19:15. The wickedness of the nations is great. Who among God's people would even think to deny that?
- C. The vast number of people present is expressed as a repeated "multitudes" in the valley of decision.
- D. The heavenly bodies will be disturbed. This ties in these events with the end of the Tribulation around the time of Christ's return (Matthew 24:29; see also Revelation 6:12, 8:12).
- E. One beneficial outcome of judgment is this: God will show Himself to be the strong shelter for his people and the one Who protects His holy dwelling place in Jerusalem. He promises that no evil people will treat her that way again.

V. Restoration of Judah, 3:18-21 (Like 2:18-32)

- A. There will be idyllic conditions in terms of agriculture and water supply. The house of the Lord will provide a fountain to water the area north of the Dead Sea.
- B. Some of the national areas will be desolate as a reminder of their past transgressions against Judah (shedding innocent blood). This is a reminder of Isaiah 66:24, and a hard reminder of the fact that sin has long-lasting consequences.
- C. But Judah will abide permanently. They will be forgiven their guilt. There is only one way that it can happen, and that is through the blood of Christ. Although not stated explicitly here, it must be the case that God has in mind forgiveness through Christ. The people will respond in faith toward their Messiah. This will "free" God to live among them, for He cannot dwell in the midst of a wicked people. He left Israel (in Ezekiel) for their idolatry and other sins.

Conclusion

The prophets: repent, judgment is coming, then restoration. Joel too!

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