

VI. Joel in Biblical Perspective
A Minor Prophet with a Major Message
“In the Valley of Decision”
Joel 3
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Jo-el means Jehovah is God. We are going to look at this last chapter in this study, Joel 3. Before we get to this last chapter of Joel I just want to make sure we're all on the same page with what we have learned thus far. This is our 6th and last study of Joel so I don't want to do an extensive review but I want to make sure certain thoughts are in your mind as we read and walk our way through Joel 3. The context of Joel is the fact that Israel, the covenant people of God, had been visited with either a singular rather devastating plague of locusts in their life which would not be unusual in that place and that's why there are nine words in the Hebrew language that talk about locusts. There seems to be some indication that perhaps it wasn't just one though but it may have been a wave of two or three or maybe even more years that it had come. It had become from a singular plague of locusts into a four-fold plague that is recorded for us in Joel 1 which included locusts, fire, drought and famine. The most devastating thing of all, besides the fact that their land gave forth no harvest nor their vines gave forth no fruit and the economic ruin would have been significant, was now they had nothing to bring to worship God. They had no grain to bring for the offering, no drink offering to pour upon the altar of the Lord, and many of us might think the most devastating thing would have been losing money.

God says the most devastating thing is that now you have nothing to come and worship Me and the reason you don't have anything is the consequence of this plague. The reason this plague has come is because I have visited you with blessing upon blessing but you had decided not to worship Me when you had the resources I had given to you. You had decided that many more other things were much more important so no longer was the Giver praised but His gifts were idolized. So now He brings this judgment to bear.

Now we're reminded that these instruments of creation that are under the hand of a sovereign God – the fire, drought, storm, whirlwind, waves, flood and locusts – are not spawns of nature that have accidentally come together that God now has to respond to and we have to respond to. No, there is not one single atom, one single inch, one single moment that is out from under the sovereign hand of our God. These are instruments of God that are used to declare and warn of a judgment to come to those outside of Him and at the same time a refining blessing in the lives of His people as He is working in their lives in their walk with the Lord.

Here was a people who had known the blessings of God but they had forgotten Him and now the Lord was bringing them back to Him. They begin to repent but their initial repentance in Joel 2 tells us that their repentance was not a repentance of the heart. It was a repentance that was of form and ritual so the Lord says to them ‘don't come to Me simply rending your garments but come to Me with your hearts rended.’ These days from the Lord of discipline were there to warn them of the day of the Lord but what begins to unfold in Joel and is seen even clearer as we move to the New Testament, is the day of the Lord and judgment has two installments. One is in the advent of Christ as He goes to the cross where the day of the Lord at the cross is our Lord bearing our judgment. Then there is another day coming when the Lord will come bringing judgment.

Joel is pointing to that and that's why later the very text found in Joel 2:28 is that which Peter quotes when Christ has ascended and the Spirit of God has been poured out upon them, male and female, young and old, as they are speaking forth the Word of God and the prayer of Moses has now been answered – O Lord, I would that all of Your people have the Holy Spirit. Now they have the Holy Spirit and this is why Peter says in that day “This is what was spoken of by the prophet Joel that in the latter days I will pour out My Spirit upon My people. The Gospel will go to all the nations just as every tongue was being spoken and the Gospel was coming to people in their own language.

The people in the days of Joel, when they hear Joel saying ‘repentance by the voice of the Lord is not acceptable for it is only worldly sorrow over the consequences of sin, not a Godly sorrow over the sinfulness of sin, the ownership of sin and confession of sin’ then they repented. Then the Lord said “I will restore the days that the locusts have eaten in your life.” Now he moves to the third and final chapter. Joel 2 has pointed out the day of the Lord that is coming in salvation and Joel 3 is focused upon that second installment of the day of the Lord when He brings condemnation and judgment. So let's look at Joel 3.

As we look at Joel 3 I want to mention something that I'd like for you to keep in your mind. That's this; God's work of grace to restore, reconcile and redeem His people is an anticipation of a yet more terrible yet glorious day of the Lord when He shall come again and bring judgment and the enemies that He defeated in the first day of the Lord. When He came the first time He defeated His enemies – sin, death, hell, the grave, Satan and his works – but He has not destroyed what He has defeated. He will destroy it when He comes again on that terrible yet glorious day when He brings everything to consummation. When that day comes what will occur? Let's now go to the next step.

The day of the Lord that is yet to come, in light of the day of the Lord that has already come when He came and bore our judgment bringing salvation, reveals four things that are unfolded in Joel 3. We are going to look at the day of the Lord and what the valley of decision will reveal. Here is the valley of decision.

Joel 3:1-15 says [1] *“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, [2] I 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, [3] and 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.*

[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. [5] For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. [6] You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border. [7] Behold, I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them, and I will return your payment on your own head. [8] 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 nation far away, for the LORD has spoken.”*

[9] *Proclaim this among the nations: Consecrate for war; stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near; let them come up. [10] Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, “I am a warrior.” [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. [13] Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great. [14] Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. [15] The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

We will finish out the chapter in just a moment but in that text there are four things that will be revealed in the valley of decision. It is also called as you see in the text the valley of Jehoshaphat. The valley of Jehoshaphat that is going to hold all the nations, in that day, is not the same valley that is over there this day. That's just the symbol of it, the name of it. It is the upper end of the valley of the Kidron Brook that leads down to the valley of the Kings. In Jerusalem there are three valleys that run through it. There is the valley of Hinnom, the Tyropoeon valley and the valley of Jehoshaphat which ends up as the valley of the Kings on the upper end which is very likely the place where Abraham had met Mechizedek after his victories. Jehoshaphat means Jehovah in judgment.

As commentators have noted this is a passage that has been preached by many, many evangelists and when they preach this text and get to the valley of Jehoshaphat, the valley of decision, they tell people at the end of the service, 'now is the time for your decision for you're in the valley of decision.' While this valley of decision will reveal a number of things about your decision, this valley of decision is not your valley of decision. This is the valley of Jehovah. This is not your decision but the revelation of His decision will be in that day – those who are His and those who are not. It is in that day the declaration of God's judgment will be made and it is His decisions that are being revealed. When that day comes and it will come just as surely as the day came when He came to bear our judgment for salvation, according to this text it will reveal four things.

The first thing it will reveal about those of whom the judgment of God falls in that day, is that they have been a people who oppose that which the Lord is jealous for. I have made the point as Joel and Nahum does that the Lord is a jealous God. The Lord is jealous for four things – His Word, His glory, His name and His people. That whom you love you are jealous for. Doesn't the Bible condemn jealousy? The Bible condemns the jealousy OF things but not the appropriate jealous FOR something. I found out that one day that my wife loved me and is jealous for me.

I made the point that the incarnation is the only time that something became less after adding to it that Jesus has subtraction by addition. He adds humanity to Himself and therefore He is humbled. So it is subtraction by addition. A dear friend of mine came up to me after I had said that and said "Harry that is not the only case of subtraction by addition, for when Cindy married you that was subtraction by addition." I think he's on to something that perhaps I'll agree with that.

One time while my wife and I were living in Miami we had taken our children out to a fair. There in the providence of God I ended up in my first Miami gang fight walking with my children right into the middle of it. One gang had about eight people and the other had about 80. It was definitely outnumbered. As we were walking through and got to the car it was about that time that one young man was being severely manhandled so I told my wife to get in the car with the children, lock the doors and stay right there. Then I went over to try and help. I got into the middle of it and at that moment I wondered what was going to happen in my life because in the next few moments it was starting to flash before me. I could just see the newspaper headlines read 'Presbyterian preacher loses life in gang fight at the Orange Bowl Fair.' Then I looked up and saw my wife coming down the hill from the car. She had in her hand a palm frond waving it

for she was going to attack the ten people that were around me yelling “Get away from him, get away from him!” When I saw her with that palm frond I have to confess I didn’t feel a great amount of comfort but I knew one thing, she was jealous for me. There was no thought about what she was going to do.

It is that jealousy for His people that put Jesus on that cross and made Him stay there. He was going to save His people. He is jealous for His name, His glory, His Word and His people. In the Day of Judgment the first thing that will be revealed are those who are not His people and it will be revealed that they opposed and persecuted His people. Some of it would have been soft persecution, some of it would have been verbal, some economic, some mocking and some of what we’re seeing right now as never before. I have given you illustrations out of the Reformation of the martyrdom of believer after believer and the multiple martyrdoms that took place in the first 200 years after Christ’s ascension during the spread of the Gospel but there has never been a time where more believers were losing their life for Christ than right now. Jesus told us it would be that way as the end was approaching, as the day of the Lord was coming.

Joel 3:1-3 says [1] *“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, [2] I 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, [3] and 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.*

Here is the fact that it is revealed and not only would that be done initially with the Old Covenant people but that new Israel in Christ, those circumcised in their heart, will also be scattered, persecuted and be under the attack as the day of the Lord’s judgment approaches. In that day He will reveal what they did against His people. What is done against the Lord’s people, the Lord takes personally. That’s why He says in Matthew 25:33-46, [33] *And he will place the sheep (righteous) on his right, but the goats (the wicked) on the left. [34] Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ [40] And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’*

[41] *“Then he will say to those on his left (the wicked), ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. [42] For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, [43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ [44] Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ [45] Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ [46] And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

Notice the text says something. It is the expectation that God’s people in a Genesis 3, broken world, will be hungry. There will be times they will be naked. There will be times in this broken world that they are feeling the effects of it. The Lord will minister to them and He’ll

minister to them through His people. When His people do that which they are called to do for His people then He says you've done it until Me. When those who are not His people are those who are putting them into prison, attempting to starve them and withholding from them then He says you're doing that to Me.

That's why He says to Saul on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Saul was taking people under the sentence of death as a persecutor of the church. As the Lord brought him to conversion He reminded him that his sins were against Him. Saul's sins against His people were against Him. The Day of Judgment from the Lord will reveal not only the sins of those who have rejected Him but the specificity of what they have done against His people. They will sell them into slavery. They will cast lots for them. They will put them into what we call today 'sex trafficking.' They will be glad to sell someone's life just for a bottle of wine and a drink of wine. In that day it will be revealed that life has become very cheap. Anyone's life is now available for our self-absorbed purposes if we are outside of Christ.

Notice something else that is also built into that text. There is not only sexual immorality and sexual aberration of those who oppose His people but there is also the hardening of consciousness's in those days. There is the callous conscious – not only what can be done against people but also against children. It's amazing but I'm grateful for this movement that is highlighting sexual trafficking for it has become epidemic but stop and think. Why would the culture not do that when we are approving taking their lives at their most innocent time – the womb? Children seem to exist nothing more than for our convenience. If we want them we will keep them but if we don't we'll kill them even in what ought to be the safest place existing – the womb of a mother. We can do what we want is what they say.

Clearly Joel is telling you the depth of depravity, not only the opposition and persecution against His people, but built into that description is abject immorality and ungodliness that is almost beyond description. We sit here comfortably thinking that is another world but that is this world, this country – 75 million children killed a year. We wonder why our children who survived our holocaust against them in the womb then manifest our disregard for life by stepping in the school rooms to take lives. They have learned the culture of death from us and they only take it to another level. They have learned our culture of death in our legislation of the most abject immorality declaring it permissible to remove life. They have learned it, seen it and even created video games to train them. Then they take it into our culture. Oh that the salt and light of God's people would again be salty and the light shine clearly so that which is sin becomes unthinkable for you live in a culture that is bent and now what used to take 30 or 40 years only takes 20 or 30 months to make the unthinkable thinkable by making it acceptable. Then when you make it acceptable and thinkable, the unthinkable becomes doable. It's embraced in our cultures not far outside of our doors. Everywhere is housing the evil that will be exposed in the Day of Judgment. The Lord will not be mocked. He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.

The second thing revealed in that day in the text is those who assault the glory of God, God will assault for His glory using their own sins. It says in the text that they who scatter will now be scattered. They who sell into slavery will be sold into slavery. The principle here is revealing to us that what God does that will be brought paramount in the day of the judgment is that God gave them over to their sins. So we, who philosophically and legally approve the assault upon the sanctity of life, as we're getting older in life, now have a culture that is rapidly approving codification of the assault upon our life which is called active euthanasia. So our assault upon the unwanted unborn is now coming to the assault upon the unwanted older. They

are no longer convenient or productive and they are in the way. We as a culture are being given over. We who have allowed the killing of children now see children killing children. We who have embraced sexual immorality now see sexual perversion and the unthinkable is not thinkable and acceptable and doable.

It is what God describes in Joel 2 and with even further clarity in Romans 1. Perhaps other than the words 'depart from Me' the most frightening words in the Bible are 'God gave them over to the desires of their heart.' What did Jesus teach us in the Lord's Prayer? Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy Kingdom come... We who say 'not Thy will but my will be done' now get the consequences of our will when we raise it up over God's will. We and any who say to God 'We don't want You, Your name, Your glory, Your Word, Your people and we do not want Your presence' in the valley of decision will be the ultimate assault of God for His glory upon those who have assaulted Him. You don't want My presence? Then here depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness into the isolation of eternal judgment in a place called hell where His felt presence cannot be experienced at all. No one ever will experience that until hell no matter how far away you are from the Lord in this world. You have some way tasted the presence and kindness of God's common grace. The rain is falling on the just and the unjust but in that day those who would say 'no' to His presence will be consigned into the eternity of the torment of His judgment in isolation from His presence and every presence available, not even human relationships.

Here is the third one. He then says 'Gather up the assault upon the people, gather the nations.' Notice the reversal. Instead of the promise of the new heavens and the fulfillment of the Kingdom, He just turns it around. Joel 3:9-13 says [9] *Proclaim this among the nations: Consecrate for war; stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near; let them come up. [10] Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, "I am a warrior."* [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. [13] Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.*

He says in that day when the nations come together in the assault upon God all they have done is gathered themselves for God's judgmental assault in righteousness upon them. The valley now holds those who are coming under His judgment. As they rise up to mock God, to bring the assault against God, His glory, His Word and His people all they have done is gathered themselves for the final judgment of God upon them, in the valley of Jehoshaphat, the valley of God's decision as He delivers the decrees of judgment.

Fourthly, that day will reveal something else. Joel 3:16-21 says [16] *The 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. [18] "And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim. [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. [20] But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations. [21] I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged, for the LORD dwells in Zion."*

Here He gives the picture of the consummation where all of this heavens and earth are rolled up under the judgment of God and the fire of His judgment falls and the desolation comes and rolled out by the hand of God is a new heavens and a new earth, a New Jerusalem that is forever. He will be with His people. It will drip with sweetness. It will flow with milk. It shall be full to overflowing with the blessing of God for sin, hell, death and the grave are not as defeated as in the day of Calvary for now they have been destroyed in the day of the valley of decision. Now a new heavens and a new earth is there. His people will be with Him in the stronghold of the Lord and He will deliver them in that day.

Here are three takeaways to conclude this section and our study of Joel. The first takeaway is the day of the Lord in the valley of decision will reveal the decisions that we are making in these days. The Lord's decision in that day will reveal the decisions that men and women are making in this day. Lord, we love You, Your name, Your people and Your Word and we call upon You. In that day you will enter into a new heavens and a new earth. I am well aware that the decision of that day is in the hands of a sovereign God who has sovereignly given me and you the ability to decide on Him in this day but the evidence of God's saving, electing grace in our life in this day, our decision will be Jesus Christ. In the day of God's decision it will be revealed those who have called upon the name of the Lord, those who have not assaulted His people but have loved Him, those who have not decried His glory but have embraced it, those who have not dismissed His Word but have hungered for it, those who have not set aside His name but have exalted His name forever. The day of the valley of decision will reveal the decisions that men and women are making in these days.

The second takeaway, the day of the Lord in the valley of judgment will reveal those who trusted the Lord in the day of the Lord on the mount of salvation. The first day of the Lord is when the Lord comes to bear our judgment and He does so on Mount Calvary. The next day of the Lord is His second coming and that's when He'll bring judgment in the valley of Jehoshaphat. The judgment in the valley of Jehoshaphat will reveal those who have trusted in the Lord and the day of the Lord at Mount Calvary when the day of salvation became ours. Those, in the Day of Judgment, in the valley of decision, will be revealed who have trusted in Christ who in the day of the Lord 2100 years ago went to Mount Calvary and there took our judgment so that in that day His judgment does not fall upon us, but we are brought into His presence for all eternity.

The third takeaway is the day of the Lord's judgment gathers all the nations but until that day we go to all the nations proclaiming the day of the Lord's salvation. So we have a two-fold message. The two-fold message is the day of the Lord is coming in which He will bring an inflexible judgment and the unendurable, outpouring of His wrath which will have to be endured for all eternity, but we have Good News to the nations for before you're gathered in that Day of the coming of the Lord, in the valley of decision, there was the day of the Lord when He went to Mount Calvary and we who know He will gather the nations in that Day, in this day we've been sent to the nations to tell them that they must flee the wrath to come but there is a Savior who has come and bore the wrath of God for you. He freely gives the gift to you of salvation and that's our great privilege. That's why we have a national mission's conference coming. That's why we have a world mission's conference coming and that's why you this day leave this place and this week give to people the glorious Good News that the Savior who has come will deliver you from the wrath to come, not only deliver from it, but will deliver you to Himself in a new heavens and a new earth. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the blessing of Your Word. Thank You for the great significant opportunity we have to walk through the Scriptures. I want to take a moment to thank You for this summer season where we have been able to look at the books of Joel and Nahum – where one is warning nations and what God does with nations He has blessed who then oppose Him and one warning us and what God does with His people whom He has blessed and they forget Him. Father, I thank You that You do not forget us, even with the refining judgments of discipline You bring us back to Yourself to give us both a heart and the means to worship You and then renew our commitment to go to the nations of this world and warn them that it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God and it is appointed unto men once to die and then the judgment. There is glorious Good News for the Savior of sinners has come, this Lord of judgment has come particularly and specifically in grace and out of love to bear our judgment. So Father, we give You praise for Your Son, our Redeemer, who went to the mountain for our wrath that we will simply walk through the shadow of that valley into Your presence for all eternity in a glorious new heavens and new earth, a Jerusalem for all the generations that has come down from heaven. We praise You in Jesus' Name, Amen.