

“All the Prophets Testify”: Joel 3:1-12

Midweek Bible Study – 2025 October 15

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<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions

Outline (*TLSB* p.1448):

- I. Catastrophes Current and Coming (1:2-2:17)
 - A. The Current Catastrophe: The Locust Plague (1:2-20)
 - B. The Coming Catastrophe: The Day of the Lord (2:1-17)
- II. The Lord’s Response (2:18-3:21)
 - A. To the Locust Plague: Healing and Restoration (2:18-27)
 - B. To the Coming Day of the Lord (2:28-3:21)
 - 1. Salvation for the survivors who escape (2:28-32 [heading?])
 - 2. Judgment of the Nations (3:1-21)
 - a. Summons and accusations (3:1-12)**
 - b. The nations are sentenced, while Judah is blessed (3:13-21)

The Lord’s Response to the Coming Day of the Lord (2:28-3:21) continues with the Judgment of the Nations (3:1-21), the first part of which (3:1-12) can be seen as “Summons and accusations (*TLSB*) or “Charges and Summonses to Judgment (Allen [compare Roehrs-Franzmann as noted last time and note subjective prose/verse formatting; *CSSB* considers 3:4-8 a “parenthetical interlude” where God addresses the nations directly in the middle of 3:1-3 and 9-11, where He announces their judgment, presumably speaking to others; Allen at least sees those groupings as three stanzas]):

3:1 *For behold*: Signifies that something important follows; Keil-Delitzsch says something “new and important”. “Behold” is used again in 3:7, though perhaps with somewhat less significance than the compound in this verse.

in those days and at that time: if formatted as verse, the two phrases would be poetically parallel (for example, Allen). In view presumably is the Day of the Lord understood as the Last Day (confer Kretzmann), arguably introduced at 2:30, if not before (Keil-Delitzsch goes back to 2:28’s “in those days”; confer Allen), though Laetsch takes the expressions more broadly as referring to the time of the Messiah, the New Testament era.

when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem: still a temporal indicator and not yet a main clause. Not referring to the healing and restoration after the locust plague but the greater victory of the Last Day. With reference to 3:6-7, and a more-literal translation, *CSSB* notes the possibility, “bring back from captivity”, and Keil-Delitzsch says “turn the captivity”, but notes a “more comprehensive sense”, as in the ESV’s translation. *TLSB* comments, “Refers not only to the things of value taken from Israel (cf vv 3, 5,-6), but indeed the eternal destiny of those who trust in God for their salvation.” Laetsch refers to the turning of the people of Israel into the world-wide Church. Kretzmann refers to the return of Judah from exile as a type of the spiritual Israel’s deliverance through Christ.

3:2 *I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat*: the Lord arguably gathers the nations by summoning them in 3:9-12 (though, admittedly, there “for war”). The nations are *all* of those other than His faithful people, although only Tyre and Sidon and all the regions of Philistia are mentioned in 3:4 (Egypt is mentioned in 3:19). Laetsch sees other nations to the east included in the name of the Valley. The Valley of Jehoshaphat, mentioned only in this verse and in 3:12 (forming an inclusio for the section), means “the judgment of Yahweh” and has been taken literally as a reference to the Kidron Valley or figuratively as the place of final judgment. The Divinely-inspired Joel may be drawing on events of Jehoshaphat’s reign, which can help date the book (as we noted on p.2). Keil-Delitzsch notes that the valley related to Jehoshaphat was called the “Valley of Blessing” and was not the Kidron Valley. For his part, Luther also rejects the idea of the nations of the world’s literally being gathered at the valley between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, and Luther connects the judgment that happens when the Holy Spirit, mentioned in 2:28-29, preaches repentance.

And I will enter into judgment with them there: Allen translates “put them on trial there” (confer Kretzmann). We perhaps usually think of the Lord’s judging all people, but “judging” can have different senses, and, at least in this case, the Lord’s verdict against the nations is that they are guilty of the accusations He goes on to describe. Allen refers to “adverse sense of punishment” and, citing the author France, connects the imagery to Matthew 25:31-46, where the Lord also identifies with the least of His brothers.

on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel: we might think of God’s people as the victim in a criminal trial or plaintiff in a civil trial (confer Allen; God arguably is both the prosecuting attorney and judge). *TLSB* notes, “The privilege afforded by the election of God’s people was the basis for special petitions and confidence”. *CSSB* notes that God uses “My” eight times in four verses, emphasizing His covenant relationship with Israel (Allen draws a parallel between God as aggrieved in the previous section and here). Luther paraphrases, “I will find them out all right, much as I may now close My eyes to their great cruelty with which they rage violently against my people.”

because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land: both God’s people and land, closely tied together from His earliest promises, have been negatively affected. Keil-Delitzsch comments, “The words presuppose as facts that have already occurred, both the dispersion of the whole nation of Israel in exile among the heathen, and the conquest and capture of the whole land by heathen nations, and that in the extent to which they took place under the Chaldeans and Romans alone” (which Keil-Delitzsch later goes on to say “continues to this day”, which day is unclear in the volume consulted). *TLSB* notes, “God’s people were taken captive and exiled at various points in their history and so ended up dispersed throughout the world. For them, this promise of returning to their land was obviously precious.” However, we should not see any connection between such prophecy of a restoration and modern events, whether in 1948, today, or some future “millennium”.

3:3 *and have cast lots for my people*: at God's direction, the people of Israel initially used "lots", prayerfully cast and understood as expressing His will, in order to assign portions of the land to their various tribes, but this is something different. Presumably later, Obadiah 11 mentions the enemies casting lots for Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian exile. Keil-Delitzsch says, "The prisoners of war are distributed by lot among the conquerors, and disposed of by them to slave-dealers at most ridiculous prices." Keil-Delitzsch also expands the understanding both of God's people to the whole true Church and of His enemies to "carnally-minded Jews, Mohammedans, and nominal Christians, who are heathens in heart."

and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it: Allen translates, "selling boys" and "bartering girls". *TLSB* explains, "God's people were sometimes sold as slaves and traded for goods or services, as if they were not human merely chattel" (confer *CSSB*). Allen turns a nice phrase with "The hope of Judah's destiny was degraded into currency for debauchery and drunkenness" and points out that the drinking of the wine "is the final bitter touch".

3:4 *What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia?*: God rhetorically asks perhaps why He ("Me") should not condemn the nations (Keil-Delitzsch suggests, "What would ye with me?" and says the question is unfinished because of its emotional character). Tyre and Sidon, *TLSB* notes, were "Twin cities of Phoenicia, known for their wealth and foreign trade", and we see them come up in the New Testament in reference to their not repenting in the Old Testament (for example, Matthew 11:21-22). Philistia, *TLSB* describes as a "Longtime enemy of Israel; it dealt in the slave trade." As I noted in my May, 4, 2024, newspaper column, "Despite possible continuity in name [between Philistines and Palestinians], the makeup of the people so-named has changed over the centuries". Keil-Delitzsch essentially notes a distinction between all the hostile nations of the world and the immediately-surrounding nations addressed in 3:4-8.

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: Keil-Delitzsch paraphrases, "Ye have neither cause to avenge yourselves upon me, *i.e.* upon my people Israel, nor any occasion to do it harm. But if repayment is the thing in hand, I will, and that very speedily, bring back your doing upon your own head." *TLSB* refers to "some perceived injustice done to them by God's people", which perception clearly God rejects and which "payback" God will "return" to them (confer 3:7). *CSSB* refers to the named nations' later enslavement, besiegement, and capture, but if the passage is speaking of the Last Day, then those "fulfillments" arguably are not in view.

3:5 *For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples*: *TLSB* comments, "Philistines bedeviled God's people over and over (Jgs 10:7; 13:1; 1Sm 31:1). Once they managed to capture the ark of the covenant and set it in the temple of their god Dagon (1Sm 5:1-2)." Keil-Delitzsch comments, "These words are not to be restricted to the plundering of the temple and its treasury, but embrace the plundering of palaces and of the houses of the rich, which always followed the conquest of towns", and Keil-Delitzsch notes that the word translated "temples" can be palaces, as well (confer Laetsch and Kretzmann; Allen recognizes the possibility but thinks the pointed translation fits the tone of the context).

3:6 *You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border.:* More literally, the Hebrew might be translated “sons of Judah” and “sons of Iona”, which perhaps brings out the contrast better (whether “sons” or “children” be limited to “young people” or not). The Hebrew Old Testament uses the adjective behind the ESV’s “Greeks” only in this verse; it can be “Grecian” or “Ionian” and looks more like a transliteration of the latter, and we apparently should think not of Macedonia or modern-day Greece from where Alexander the Great later came but the western-edge of modern-day Turkey where the Ionian League later formed (to some extent confer Laetsch). *TLSB* comments, “When sold into slavery by the Greeks, the people ended up very far from Judah. The exile described by Joel is fundamentally different from what occurred later under Assyria and Babylon” (presumably in the distance that the people were taken?). *CSSB* notes that “The Greeks were trading with the Phoenicians as early as 800 B.C.” Keil-Delitzsch notes that the distance from the border removes the possibility of return and brings out the magnitude of the crime (confer Allen).

3:7 *Behold, I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them:* “Behold” as in 3:1. “Stir up” as in 3:9 and 3:12. Allen translates, “I am soon going to enable them to leave”. *TLSB* comments, “No matter how far removed the exiled captives might be, the Lord promises together and return them to Israel.” We might think of the resurrection of the dead and life together with the Lord in glorified bodies under a new sky on a new earth.

and I will return your payment on your own head: Confer 3:4. The form of the repayment seems to be described in what follows in 3:8.

3:8 *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:* with reference to 3:6, *TLSB* suggests “the Lord would bring the same hardship on the coastal people that they had brought on Judeans (3:3), though, to the extent that the prophecy is of the Last Day, the prophecy/fulfillment is in some sense figurative. The Sabeans, *TLSB* explains, “Controlled the Arabian trade routes south of Judah”. We might think of Joseph, sold to a caravan of Ishmaelites going from Gilead to Egypt (Genesis 37:25). *CSSB* refers to Sheba, whose queen visited Solomon, and says Sheba was located in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula, present-day Yemen (Laetsch suggests as far away to the southeast as the Ionians were to the northwest; confer Allen). Keil-Delitzsch sees the prophecy as fulfilled partly in historical events, but again we consider that the prophecy is of the Last Day and fulfilled then, even if figuratively (Laetsch says “either physically or spiritually”). Well Kretzmann says that the imagery “is based, at least in part, upon happenings of those days; but the application includes far more than this, for the Lord makes those incidents typical of the punishments which He intended for all His enemies.”

for the Lord has spoken: could indicate a break of some sort in the section (note the ESV's switch from prose to verse; *CSSB* had only 3:4-9 in prose; Allen has the preceding and following in verse). *CSSB* suggests that in 3:9-11 Joel is speaking, in 3:12-13 God is speaking, in 3:14-16 Joel is speaking, and in 3:17-21 God is speaking, though *CSSB* notes that "When Joel speaks, he does so as the spokesman of the Lord, who has commissioned him to be his prophet." Luther paraphrases, "All these things will not fail because it has not been a man who has predicted such things. Rather, the Lord has spoken, and He cannot lie."

3:9 *Proclaim this among the nations:* to some extent the preceding was spoken to the nations, and, even with what follows, we might wonder to what extent the nations heard any of it. Of course, proclaiming judgment on the nations is to proclaim deliverance for God's people, as is explicitly evident in 3:16-21. Keil-Delitzsch refers to the summons's being addressed to the heralds who are to convey it to the heathen nations, and Allen surmises that the heralds are angels.

Consecrate for war; stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near; let them come up.: Though arguably gathering the nations for judgment (3:2 and 12), the Lord, as *TLSB* puts it, "summons all the enemies of His people", I would say as if, "to prepare for battle." *TLSB* further refers apparently to the original conquest of the land, when cities of the Canaanites were devoted/consecrated to destruction. Keil-Delitzsch refers to the enemies' sacrifices and religious rites of consecration, but Allen thinks the expression is used ironically of the enemies. Regardless, no description of battle seems to follow (perhaps recalling our observations from our study of Revelation). The same Hebrew verb translated "stir up" is used in 3:7 and 3:12, though perhaps in this verse the intended sense is more "wake up". Also confer "come up" in 3:12. Connecting battle and judgment, *CSSB* says, "Joel commands that the nations be told to prepare for battle, for the Lord would come against them with his invincible heavenly army and bring them into judgment", and *CSSB* confers Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 19. Keil-Delitzsch refers to marching to war "but in reality to be judged". Allen comments, "Battle and trial are one. In OT thinking the two ideas are closely connected, war being regarded as a medium of divine justice, the execution of God's sentence."

3:10 *Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears:* Allen translates "hoes", but "beat your hoes" may be problematic in our time. *TLSB* comments, "God incites His people's enemies to rise and arm themselves with whatever is available." We may be more-familiar with the implements for war's becoming implements of agriculture/peace (Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, presumably later; confer and compare *CSSB*). In this case, Laetsch says, "the implements of peaceful and useful occupation are to be used for their destructive purpose".

let the weak say, "I am a warrior.": *TLSB* explains, "Even the feeblest among God's enemies are summoned to this battle." Perhaps, "Let the weak say, I am strong" as in *Lutheran Service Book* 806 (though neither the pew edition nor *Lutheran Service Builder* lists the Joel verse). "Warriors" apparently are mentioned again in 3:11.

3:11 *Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there.*: the lines arguably add the ideas of hurrying (Keil-Delitzsch quotes Hitzig's referring to "warlike enthusiasm" [confer Kretzmann]), explicitly refer to nations "surrounding" (confer 3:12), and a name specific location, repeated from 3:2/named in 3:12 (confer or compare the "near" and "up" of 3:9).

Bring down your warriors, O Lord.: As the ESV renders it, the line is an "interjection" of a sort, calling for the Lord to bring down some of the heavenly host (the same word for "warrior" was used in 3:10). *TLSB* comments, "Angelic hosts coming to fight for God's people. The Bible contains other passages depicting God's angels coming to render such aid", which is true enough. However, in this verse, where a prayer and appeal for opposing forces seem somewhat out of place, Allen follows an alternate reading and translates, "Let the timid man become a hero", which seems to echo the last line of 3:10, and also avoid issues related to an abrupt change in first-person speakers.

3:12 *Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat*: The same Hebrew verb translated "stir up" is used in 3:7 and 3:9, though here in a reflexive "conjugation". Confer "come up" in 3:9 and the Valley of Jehoshaphat in 3:2, the latter of which use again in this verse forms an inclusio for the section.

for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations: the Lord described entering into judgment in 3:2, and the idea of the "surrounding" nations was introduced into the passage in 3:11. The judgment is essentially described in what follows. Several commentators make reference to all the nations of the world's first hearing the Gospel before the Last Day, and we do well to remember that, since even the time of Christ, His return has been considered imminent and not in need of our doing something such as spreading the Gospel as a requirement before He would be able to return (not that we should not try to spread the Gospel nevertheless).

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:1-16 says, "Though thoughts of judgment naturally produce dread in us, by faith we need not fear God's verdict. After all, the Lord is coming to usher us into heaven, not punish us."

Next time, October 22, Joel 3:13-21.

Closing Prayer & Benediction