

The Future Judgment of the Nations

Joel 3:1-11

Joel 3:1-11 - *"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, ² I will also gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations;*

They have also divided up My land. ³ 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.

⁴ "Indeed, what have you to do with Me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia?

Will you retaliate against Me? But if you retaliate against Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your retaliation upon your own head; because you have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried into your temples My prized possessions.

⁶ 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.

⁷ "Behold, I will raise them out of the place to which you have sold them, and will return your retaliation upon 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 people far off;

For the LORD has spoken." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; Let the

weak say, 'I am strong.'" ¹¹ Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around.

Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD."

Background Notes

The theme of Joel's prophecy is "The Day of the Lord." There is an historical aspect to the Day of the Lord in Joel's prophecy: prophetic events that have already been fulfilled in history. However, most of Joel's predictions about the Day of the Lord have not yet been fulfilled - but they will be fulfilled in the future. In Joel 3 we will continue to look on to the eschatological, or future, "Day of the Lord."

There will be a judgment of nations (v1-8), and a war among the nations (v9-11). Both the war among the nations in verses 9-11 and the judgment of the nations in verses 1-8 will result in blessing and deliverance for the nation of Israel. Let's look at the description of this war and the judgment of the nations in a little more detail.

Doctrinal Points

1. At the time of the end, the nations will be gathered together for war.

Did you do a double take when you read verse 10? *“Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; Let the weak say, ‘I am strong.’”*

Wait a minute! I thought the Bible said *“beat your swords into plowshares and your spears into pruning hooks?”* Yes, the Bible does say that! Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 say, *“Beat your swords into plowshares and your spears into pruning hooks.”* Is this a contradiction in the Bible? No! It's simply descriptions of *two different phases* of the Day of the Lord. The future Day of the Lord includes both the Tribulation period (that follows the Rapture of the Church), and the coming millennial kingdom of Christ (that follows the Tribulation). Isaiah and Micah both looked ahead to the millennial kingdom and the wonderful 1000-year reign of Jesus Christ on this earth, but Joel was concentrating on the Tribulation portion of the Day of the Lord. At that time, the nations will be gathered together for war, and they will *“beat their plowshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears.”*

What is this war of the tribulation in verses 9-11, and how does it tie in with the “army of the north in Joel 2:20? Well, I'll tell you for sure when we get to Heaven! It's hard to be dogmatic on some of the details and the exact timing of events in the Tribulation. My own position is that the war in Joel 3:9-11 is the same war that's known in the book of Revelation as the “Battle of Armageddon.” Revelation 16:16, *“And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”* Armageddon, or *Har Megiddo* (Hill of Megiddo), is in northern Israel, overlooking the plain of Jezreel. The nations will gather there for *“the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14).*

Why have the nations gathered for war in Israel? The reason is that they are against Israel. Zechariah 14:2 says, *“For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem.”* Notice that it is **God** who gathers the nations - but God will intervene and deliver Israel! Zechariah 12:9 says, *“It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy the nations that come against Jerusalem.”* Joel 3:11 reveals that God will use His mighty angelic hosts to deliver Israel in that future day.

How does this tie in with the northern army of Joel 2:20? My own position is that the king of the north (Daniel 11) and his northern army will invade Israel near the end of the Tribulation period. That invasion will occur before the “Battle of Armageddon,” that I believe will occur at the very end of the Tribulation period. Daniel 11:44 says that news from the east and the north will trouble the king of the north, and he will *“go out with great fury and destroy and annihilate many.”* I believe the news that troubles the king of the north is the gathering of all the nations, including the kings of the east (Revelation 16), and the gathering of all the nations at Megiddo, in the plain of Jezreel. All this will culminate with the Battle of Armageddon and the judgment of the nations.

The invasion and judgment of “Gog, the Prince of Rosh” (Ezekiel 38-39), is all part of the same end-time scenario, but my own position is that this judgment will occur a little later than the Battle of Armageddon. It will be like a second wave of invasion from the north.

When we get to Heaven, we’ll see how it all fits together! In any case, at the time of the end, the nations will be gathered together for war.

2. At the time of the end, the nations will be gathered together for judgment.

Verses 1-2: *“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land.”*

And verse 12: *“Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.”*

As we see in verse 12, the war of verses 9-11 will lead to the “judgment of the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat” that is described in verses 1-8. Where is the Valley of Jehoshaphat? We don’t know for sure. Some commentators have suggested it may be the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem, but I tend to favor the view that may be a new valley that is formed to the east of Jerusalem when the Lord returns.

Zechariah 14:3-4: *“Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley.”* My guess is that this newly formed valley is the future Valley of Jehoshaphat, where the Lord will judge the nations.

Some Christians try to take all these prophetic scriptures and spiritualize them away to the Church, but you will notice that such an attempt is extremely difficult! ***These prophecies are not about the Church. They are to be taken literally!*** It will all happen, exactly as God, through His prophets, has declared.

Notice that the nations will be judged because of the way they treated the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. Verses 2-3: *“I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land.”*

Some of what this verse describes has already taken place in history. Throughout history, nations have reaped what they have sown in reference to their treatment of the Jewish people. But at the future judgment of the nations at the Valley of Jehoshaphat, all anti-Semitism and sins against God's chosen people will be judged. All the transgressions against God's people will "come out in the wash."

In His Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25, our Lord spoke of this coming judgment of the nations, and this judgment has become known as the "judgment of the sheep and the goats." Matthew 25:31-33: *"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. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left."*

Reading on in Matthew 25, we learn that this judgment of individuals in the nations will be based on their treatment of Jewish believers, especially during the Tribulation period. So the judgment of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 is the same judgment of the nations that is described in Joel 3. At the time of the end, the nations will be gathered together for judgment.

Practical Application

Remember, you will get a free trip to the Holy Land!

Whenever I lead a Holy Land tour, some folks tell me that they would love to go but they can't afford it. Couldn't they somehow get a free trip? I always tell them I'd love to take them for nothing, but *I* can't afford it!

However, remember - you *will* get a free trip to the Holy Land. Verse 11: *"Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O Lord."*

Who are the "mighty ones" mentioned here by Joel? Certainly they will include the holy angels, who will fight for the Lord. But believers may very well be included as well! Although we won't be coming to fight, we will come with the Lord when He sets up His kingdom and reigns here on this earth. Zechariah 14:5 says, *"Thus the Lord My God will come, and all the saints with You."*

When our Lord returns, believers will be with Him. So if you're a believer, you *will* get a free trip to the Holy Land!