

Joel 3:4-21 – Joy or Judgment?

The people of Judah had suffered because of their sin. God called them to mourn, to repent and to call out to him at the Temple. There is salvation for everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh. God promised that there would be a time when he would pour out his Spirit on all people; male and female, young and old, rich and poor. There would be restoration for God's people but judgment for those who rebel against God.

Read Joel 3:4-8.

Verse 4 continued the judgment of the nations started in 3:2. Which specific nations were mentioned in verse 4? What offenses had these nations committed? The mention of Greeks does not necessarily help nail down the date of Joel. While the Greeks were on the rise in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, there is evidence of Greeks trading with Palestine by the 7th century B. C. This is noted in Raymond Bryan Dillard's commentary on Joel. (3:4-6)

What punishment was God going to bring on the nations mentioned in verse 4? How was this punishment appropriate for the offenses they had committed? Most translations have "Sabeans" in verse 8. A few translations have "men of Sheba". Both are associated with southern Arabia. Some associate Sheba with Ethiopia. Dr. Douglas Stuart believes, based on the Septuagint, that the translation should be "sell them into captivity". (3:4, 7-8)

Read Joel 3:9-16.

In verses 9-12, what was God's proclamation to the nations? The first two lines of verse 10 may sound familiar but it is the reverse of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3.

Where did God want the nations to come? What did God say he would do there? The name "Jehoshaphat" means "Yahweh is judge" or "Yahweh has judged". (3:12)

What is described in verses 13-15? Verse 14 again used the phrase "day of Yahweh". Do you think that this is "a" day of judgment or "THE" day of judgment?

What happens to the nations who do evil? What happens to God's people? (3:16)

Read Joel 3:17-21.

How would God's people know that Yahweh was their God? Yahweh was said to dwell in Zion, his holy mountain, where the temple was. (3:17)

What did God say would be true of Jerusalem? Has this prophecy been fulfilled as of today? If not, when will it be fulfilled? For verses 17-18, see Revelation 21-22. (3:17)

How is this time of blessing for God's elect described in verse 18? Most English translations have "Valley of Shittim". NIV has "valley of acacias". The Valley of Shittim is northeast of the Dead Sea, in the Plains of Moab. This doesn't really fit the context of water flowing from the temple. The Kidron Valley still has some acacia trees according to Dr Dillard. (3:18)

What two nations were called out in verse 19? What would become of them? What were their offenses? Egypt's adversarial relationship with Israel went back to Israel's slavery in Egypt. Edom was also an adversary of Israel. Esau was Isaac's son and thus a physical descendant of Abraham. Yet Edom, descendants of Esau, were considered enemies of God. See Obadiah 10. (3:19)

In verse 20, what did God say would be true of Judah and Jerusalem? Has this prophecy been fulfilled as of today? If not, when will it be fulfilled? (3:20)

Verse 21 may look and sound very different based on what translation you use. It either has the idea that God will punish evil doers who have shed others blood. Or it has the idea that God will forgive his people's shedding of blood in their fight against evildoers. What is the significance of the closing phrase of the book of Joel? (3:21)

What have you learned from the book of Joel?