

Joel Lesson 32

Joel 3:2-3, Continued

Joel 3:2-3 – 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, 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.

When we ended last week we were looking at the question of what and where is the Valley of Jehoshaphat mentioned in verse 2, and we had looked at two of three options for the location of that valley. (Those three options were shown on the Handout for last week's lesson.)

The first option was the **Valley of Beracah** where God had given King Jehoshaphat a great victory over his enemies without the King or his people having to lift even a finger.

The second option was the **Valley of Jezreel**, which is the most famous battlefield on earth and which we saw is associated with a judgment of the nations in Revelation 16.

Option 3: The Valley of Jehoshaphat is the Kidron Valley

The Kidron Valley is located east of Jerusalem, in between the city and the Mount of Olives.

Throughout history, this third option has been the most popular option of these three. It is so popular, in fact, that many older maps label the Kidron Valley as the Valley of Jehoshaphat. You can see three examples of that at the bottom of the Handout for Lesson 31 from last week.

And why has this option always been so popular? Again, it is not because of King Jehoshaphat, but rather because of the meaning of his name (“God has judged”) and the association of the Kidron Valley with the judgment of God.

How was Kidron associated with judgment? When we look at the Kidron Valley in the Old Testament what we often find is that it was the location where the people disposed of their idols.

1 Kings 15:13 – He also removed Maacah his mother from being queen mother because she had made an abominable image for Asherah. And Asa cut down her image and burned it **at the brook Kidron.**

2 Kings 23:6 – And he [King Josiah] brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to **the brook Kidron,** and burned it at **the brook Kidron** and beat

it to dust and cast the dust of it upon the graves of the common people.

2 Chronicles 29:16 – The priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse it, and they brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it and carried it out **to the brook Kidron**.

2 Chronicles 30:14 – They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw into **the brook Kidron**.

So what then can we say? I think what we can say is that Kidron was a dumping ground for anything that was opposed to God!

But I think we can say much more than that. I think we can say that the Kidron Valley is not just associated with judgment – it is also associated with the Judge!

When Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem in Matthew 21, he came from the Mount of Olives, which means that he crossed the Kidron Valley and entered the eastern side of the city. Later, after the Last Supper, Jesus again crossed the Kidron Valley to reach the Garden of Gethsemane in John 18.

And from what direction did the glory of God return to the temple in Ezekiel 43? From the east, meaning

that God's glory passed over the Kidron Valley before entering through the eastern gate.

Ezekiel 43:2 – And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming **from the east**. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory.

This possible link between Ezekiel and Joel is interesting. Why? Because it is not the only possible link between those two prophets that we will see. In fact, we saw an earlier link when we looked at the promise of God pouring out his Spirit in Joel 2. We find that same promise in Ezekiel 39 (as shown on the *right* side of the Handout for Lesson 32).

And I think we will see other links when we look at the specific judgments in Joel 3 (as shown on the *left* side of the Handout for Lesson 32). In fact, the more I study these connections, the more I am inclined to think that the book of Joel may have been given by God as a preview of the book of Ezekiel. And, if so, that would go very far toward settling the question of when Joel was written. But let's leave that discussion for later.

Our question now is which is it? Which option for the Valley of Jehoshaphat is the correct option?

As before, I don't think we can rule any of them out entirely. In fact, it may be that none of them is correct, either because another valley was meant or, more likely, because no literal valley was meant. It is possible that this Valley of Jehoshaphat just means a Valley of Judgment, just as later in this same chapter we will see a Valley of Decision.

But, if I had to choose, I would go with Option 1, which is the least popular of those three options. (Option 3 is a close second due to its possible link with Ezekiel, but, at least for now, I still favor the first option.)

And why do I favor the least popular option? Because the Valley of Beracah is the only valley that is actually associated with King Jehoshaphat, and because it is a valley where God defeated the great enemies of his people. And remember how God described it.

2 Chronicles 20:15 – And he said, “Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, ‘Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, **for the battle is not yours but God’s.**’

I love that! **“The battle is not yours but God’s!”**
When I see that verse and when I read Joel 3, I

have a hard time picking any valley other than the Valley of Beracah!

And even more so when we look at the beautiful prayer of King Jehoshaphat that preceded the great victory given to him by God.

2 Chronicles 20:12 – O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

But, whichever valley we choose, and whether we choose a literal valley or a figurative valley, the first thing that happens in verse 2 is that God gathers all the nations and brings them down to this valley.

What happens next?

“And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel.”

What happens next is **judgment**. And why is God gathering and judging the nations? Verse 2 tells us. God says that he is doing that “on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel.” God is judging these nations because of what they had done to God’s people and God’s heritage.

And **when** does God do this? When does God gather these nations for judgment?

I think we have already answered that question. I think the time frame of Joel 3:1 is also the time frame of Joel 3:2. And, if so, then God gathered these earthly kingdoms for judgment on the day that he established his eternal kingdom in Acts 2. We earlier looked at a lot of evidence for that view.

Do we have any more evidence for that view now that we have read verse 2? I think we do. Compare Joel 3:2 with this verse from Zephaniah 3.

Zephaniah 3:8 – “Therefore wait for me,” declares the LORD, “for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. **For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.**

Doesn't that sound familiar? And when did that happen? Keep reading in Zephaniah 3.

Zephaniah 3:9 – **For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord.**

Doesn't that sound like the church? Doesn't that sound like Joel 2:32? “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

I think Daniel 2, Joel 3, and Zephaniah 3 are all describing the same thing – God’s judgment of the kingdoms of this world on the day that he established the eternal kingdom of Christ. On that day, all of the nations of this world were weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Now, this part of verse 2 creates a bit of a problem for those commentaries that have seen nothing but locusts so far in the book of Joel.

Are we still looking at locusts? Is God gathering insects here so that he can judge them? I am not aware of any commentary willing to go quite that far.

But, if not, then how do they explain this sudden jump from locusts in Joel 1 and Joel 2 (as they view Joel 2) to nations in Joel 3? Are these **nations** really being judged because of what the **locusts** did to Judah? Were these nations responsible for the locusts?

The answer, and I might suggest the *only* answer that makes any sense, is that Joel 2 is *not* just about an army of locusts. Instead, Joel 2 is about what Joel 2:2 said it was about – an army of **people**.

Joel 1 tells us about an army of locusts that had already come, and then Joel 2 tells us about an army of people that was coming and that was near.

And, yes, in some ways that army of people was a bit like that earlier army of locusts – but there were also some important differences between the two. And now, in Joel 3, God judges that nation from Joel 2 along with all the other nations of this world that set themselves against God and against the people of God.

In short, Joel makes perfect sense when we recognize that Joel 2 is **not** about locusts, but Joel makes little sense when locusts are all we can see in this wonderful book.

But what specifically had these nations done? Verses 2 and 3 tell us.

“Because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, 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.”

We still have not yet decided on the date of this book. When was Joel written? We have been considering three options: the early view, the pre-exile view, and the post-exile view. And, although we haven't picked a winner yet, the pre-exile view is pretty far ahead based on the evidence we have seen so far.

This evidence in Joel 3:2 is one reason we haven't reached a decision yet. This verse is important

evidence for us to consider. In fact, some commentaries tell us that this verse is the most important evidence when it comes to dating Joel.

Is it? I'm not so sure. Why not? Because this description is not about a single nation. Verse 2 is about "nations" (plural) and about what "they" (plural) have done. So it does not make sense to me to read these descriptions and ask whether they are describing Assyria or Babylon or some other nation. They are not describing any single nations, but instead they are describing multiple nations.

But we can certainly ask whether any specific nations are included in this description. For example, is Assyria included? The first thing mentioned here is scattering, and Assyria was the great scatterer of Israel.

2 Kings 17:6 – In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

But Assyria was not the only scatterer. In fact, Assyria was itself later scattered by another nation, Babylon.

Nahum 2:1 – The **scatterer** has come up against you. Man the ramparts; watch the

road; dress for battle; collect all your strength.

What about dividing up the land? The picture here is of some group of people taking the land and then dividing it up among themselves as spoils of war. And, of course, that happened very often in the history of Israel. In fact, all we need to do is look at the shrinking map of the twelve tribes to see how their land was taken and divided up throughout their history.

And not only did these nations divide up the **land**, but they also divided up the **people** among themselves. They cast lots for God's people, they traded a boy for a prostitute, and they sold a girl for wine, which they then drank.

The picture here is one of nations who care nothing for the people of God beyond what they can get when they conquer them or sell them. They scatter them, they take their land, and they sell their children.

And did those nations value those children? They did not. They sold them for just enough money to spend on a night with a prostitute or on a little wine to drink.

"They cast lots for God's people." That sentence really speaks volumes, and especially to those of us today who have the New Testament.

John 19:23-24 – When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, **but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.**” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They **divided** my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the soldiers did these things.

Casting lots and dividing up – we see both of those things here in Joel 3:2-3. It is certainly not explicit, but there may be an implied prophecy here about Jesus.

As the world here placed no value of the children of God’s people, this evil world would later likewise place no value on God’s only begotten Son, but would instead crucify him and cast lots for his clothing.

1 Corinthians 2:8 – None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The sad truth is that this world has never placed any value on the people of God or on the things of God. We see that here, and we see that later when the world rejected, refused, and crucified God’s greatest gift of all – his only Son.

Joel 3:4

Joel 3:4 – “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.

Some commentaries tell us that this verse must be something that someone other than Joel added later to this book.

And why do they say that? They say that because they think it would have been odd for Joel to move from a discussion of the judgment of the nations at the end of the world to a discussion of what they call “some relatively minor incidents of ethnic crimes against Israel.” And so they conclude that verse 4 could not have been in the original version of Joel.

Well, that’s one way of proceeding. But what about this way instead? What if, when the Bible doesn’t agree with some theory we have about it, we change our theory instead of changing the Bible? Doesn’t that sound like a better approach than crossing through verse 4 because it doesn’t fit with our pet theory about verses 2–3?

Liberal scholars are lacking in many areas, but one area in which they have no lack at all is the

exalted view that they have of their own opinions about the Bible! They place their theories about the text above the text itself, as evidenced by their willingness to quickly discard any text that disagrees with their theories.

So, rather than toss verse 4 because it doesn't look like the end of the world, I propose that we instead decide (or rather, continue in our decision) that verses 2-3 are not talking about the end of the world at all. Verses 2-3 are instead, I think, talking about the judgment of the nations that occurred in Acts 2 and that was also prophesied in Daniel 2, in Daniel 7, in Psalm 2, in Zephaniah 3, and in Zechariah 12.

And, if that is correct, then verse 4 is just doing what we also saw in verses 2 and 3 – verse 4 is giving us more reasons why those nations are being judged. The only difference is that verse 4 names names! “What are you to me, O **Tyre** and **Sidon**, and all the regions of **Philistia**?”

Tyre and Sidon were **Phoenician** cities, and so in verse 4 we see two ancient kingdoms – the Philistines and the Phoenicians.

And perhaps the first thing we should notice here is that Joel is being unusually specific.

There are 16 proper names in the book of Joel. If we exclude Joel, his father, Judah, Jerusalem, Israel, Eden, two valleys, and Zion, that leaves seven proper names: Edom, Egypt, Greeks, Philistia, Sabeans, Sidon, and Tyre.

And what can we say about those seven proper names? They are all in chapter three. Chapter two by contrast described a human army without ever naming it, but now in Chapter three we see all sorts of names. Why?

We looked earlier at why the book of Joel might have been intentionally vague when it came to the identification of the army in Joel 2, but why don't we see that same vagueness here?

I think the most likely answer is something else that we talked about earlier – **poetry**. A common feature of Hebrew poetry is a movement from general to specific. Here the text moves from “all nations” in verse 2 to Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia in verse 4. It is a literary technique that makes the broader message more concrete through specific examples.

And I think we see even more poetry in verses 2 and 3 with its repetitive and parallel structure: they have **scattered**, they have **divided**, they have **cast**, they have **traded**, they have **sold**, and they have **drunk**.

We looked at the poetry in Joel earlier. Why do I mention it again now? Well, look at your Bibles. If you are using the ESV, for example, you will notice that these verses are not typeset the same way as most of the other verses in Joel. These verses are typeset as prose rather than poetry. Why? Good question! I think we are clearly still seeing Hebrew poetry here.

But let's get back to the Phoenicians and the Philistines, which were both coastal neighbors of Israel.

The Philistines, of course, were Israel's long-standing enemies. Just how longstanding you ask? Well, there is a word that we hear a lot today in the news that came from the word *Philistia*. And what is that word? **Palestine**. So, yes, this conflict is most certainly longstanding! In fact, Ezekiel 25:15 describes it as a "never-ending enmity."

The Philistines' proximity to Israel made them especially dangerous. The Philistine city of Ekron was only 22 miles west of Jerusalem with no natural boundaries between them. From the period of the judges until the rise of Assyria, the land between Philistia and Jerusalem experienced regular warfare, but the Philistines were defeated by the Assyrians around 712 BC.

The Phoenicians were similar to the Philistines in one way – they were both coastal neighbors of Israel. But they were different in another way – the Phoenicians, unlike the Philistines, sometimes enjoyed friendly relations with Israel. David and Solomon were trading partners with Hiram, the king of Tyre. And King Ahab of Israel married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon.

The Phoenicians cities of Tyre and Sidon were located about 35 and 60 miles north of Mount Carmel as shown on the Handout for Lesson 32. They had accumulated great wealth through trade and commerce.

Zechariah 9:3 – Tyre has built herself a rampart and heaped up silver like dust, and fine gold like the mud of the streets.

But, past friendly relations or not, Tyre and Sidon are both listed among the great enemies of God's people. Judges 3:1-3 tells us that the Sidonians were among those nations that God left in the land to test Israel. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel devote entire chapters to condemning Tyre (Isaiah 23 and Ezekiel 26-27).

And who was behind Tyre? Who occasionally used Tyre with temptations of friendship and great riches but at other times used Tyre as an openly hostile enemy or as a source of false gods and false worship?

Who was pulling Tyre's strings? I think the Bible answers that question indirectly.

Let me describe someone, and you tell me who I am describing:

- He was full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
- He was in Eden, the garden of God.
- He was an anointed guardian cherub.
- He was on the holy mountain of God.
- He was blameless until unrighteousness was found in him.
- God cast him as a profane thing from the mountain of God.
- His heart was proud because of his beauty.
- God cast him to the ground.

Who does that sound like? To me, it sounds like Satan. He was in the garden; he was filled with pride; unrighteousness was found in him; and God cast him down.

But each of those descriptions comes from the same chapter, and each of those descriptions is about someone other than Satan – that chapter is Ezekiel

28, and that person other than Satan is the king of Tyre.

Why is such language used to describe the king of a city? I think, and this just my opinion, much of the language in Ezekiel 28 about the king of Tyre is describing the one who was pulling that king's strings from behind the scenes – Satan. I think Ezekiel sometimes looks past the king of Tyre to describe the real source of the trouble.

And, if that is correct, then I think it really drives home just how terrible Tyre was as an enemy of God's people. Yes, the Philistines were bad – but they were easy to figure out. There was nothing subtle about a Philistine, either then or now.

But not so with Tyre and Sidon. They were sometimes openly hostile, but sometimes not. Instead, what they did was dangle great riches and false gods in front of God's people. And, yes, we sometimes hear people called Philistines today – but I think the people today that we really need to guard against are those who could be called people of Tyre and people of Sidon. Their enmity against God's people was most often subtle, and I think Satan is also very subtle. I think Satan also prefers to attack us from the side rather than with a frontal assault.

Now, with that background, let's look at what God says to them:

What are you to me...? 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.

"What are you to me?" That is not something we ever want to hear from God! It would be like hearing Jesus say, "I never knew you!," as he says in Matthew 7:23. I think both statements are describing the same sad situation: these people are not God's people.

And, as evidence of that, we are told that these people are trying to pay God back for something. They are seeking vengeance against God! They are trying to get even with God!

And how is that working out? Not well. God says that he is going to return their payment back on their own head swiftly and speedily! And that, I think we will all agree, is yet another example of something we never want to hear from God!

What had these nations done to God's people? And what had God done to these nations that caused them to seek revenge? And how did God pay them back swiftly and speedily?

I think these questions are answered in part by something that Philistia, Tyre, and Sidon all had

in common – they were not good neighbors! Instead, I think they all liked to gloat and rejoice anytime something bad happened to Israel. We know that was true of Tyre and Sidon after Jerusalem was attacked by the Babylonians.

Ezekiel 26:2-3 – Son of man, because Tyre said concerning Jerusalem, ‘**Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken; it has swung open to me. I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste,**’ therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves.

And, of course, when Tyre and Sidon gloated over Israel’s misfortunes, they were also gloating over what they thought was a failure by God to protect his people. I think that is why God characterizes their taunts as he does here – “What are you to me? Are you paying me back for something?” In short, why are you bringing me into this – and are you really sure that you want to bring me into this? Be careful what you ask for!

And perhaps we should add here that this attitude of Tyre and Sidon hasn’t gone anywhere! We hear it all the time even today.

“Did you see all of those people praying to God before the storm hit? They lost their houses just like those who didn’t pray. Doesn’t that prove that God doesn’t

care about them? And what about those people praying for their sick relative to recover and then watching as that person dies? Doesn't that prove that God doesn't care about them? Doesn't that prove that God does not hear them?"

That is nothing more and nothing less than what Tyre and Sidon said to the Jews when they suffered misfortune. That is what Satan said to Eve in the Garden. And I suspect that is what Tyre and Sidon said when the locusts of Joel 1 showed up and what they said when the great army of Joel 2 showed up.

And God's response – both then and now? "What are you to me? Are you paying me back for something?" Are you really sure you want to know the difference between being a child of mine versus being a child of Satan? Because you will find that out one of these days, and you won't like the answer!

I think that attitude is one reason why we are seeing Israel's neighbors in this verse. I think that attitude is one reason why God tells them what he does in this verse. But that is not the only reason. We will find some other reasons in verses 5 and 6.

I think another thing we can say about verse 4 is that an attack against God's people is an attack against God. That was certainly true about Saul's attacks against the church as shown by Jesus's

question in Acts 9:4 – “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting **me**?”

So that is why we see Philistia, Tyre, and Sidon – but what about who we don’t see? Where is Assyria on this list? Where is Babylon? Why start off with Tyre and Sidon when we have Assyria and Babylon? After all, as Jeremiah 50:17 tells us, Assyria had devoured God’s people, and Babylon had gnawed their bones.

Some see this failure to mention Assyria or Babylon as evidence of either a very early or a very late date for the book of Joel. Either Joel was written before Assyria and Babylon were world powers or after Assyria and Babylon were no longer world powers.

But I think that view is wrong. Why? Because of what we find when we look at another Old Testament book – the book of Ezekiel.

We know that Ezekiel was written after the Babylonian exile. In fact, Ezekiel received his vision and wrote his book while the prophet was in Babylon.

Joel has three chapters, but Ezekiel has 48 chapters. And in how many verses does Ezekiel mention Assyria? In only 8 verses. So the fact that Joel does not mention Assyria does not mean that

Joel was written very early or very late. Ezekiel likewise had very little to say about Assyria.

And, as for Babylon, Ezekiel does mention it quite a bit more than Assyria – but not always in condemnation of Babylon.

Ezekiel 29:19 – Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: **Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon;** and he shall carry off its wealth and despoil it and plunder it; and it shall be the wages for his army.

Ezekiel 30:24 – **And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put my sword in his hand,** but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he will groan before him like a man mortally wounded.

If we are looking for the nations condemned by Ezekiel, then here is what we will find:

- **Tyre** is condemned in Ezekiel 26:1 through Ezekiel 28:19, which is almost three chapters of Ezekiel.
- **Sidon** is condemned in Ezekiel 28:20–24.
- **Philistia** is condemned in Ezekiel 25:15–17.
- **Egypt** is condemned in Ezekiel 29–32, which is four chapters.
- **Edom** is condemned in Ezekiel 25:12–14.

And what can we say about those five nations and cities? We find those same five nations and cities right here in Joel 3.

And, again, we know when Ezekiel was written. Ezekiel was written just after the Babylonian exile. And what that means is that, far from providing evidence of the early view or the late post-exile view, I think Joel 3 (when viewed in light of Ezekiel) may provide the best evidence we have for the pre-exile view.

And perhaps the time has finally arrived for us to make a decision on that issue. And here is my decision – I think Joel was written just before the Babylonian exile. I favor the pre-exile view.

That horse has been leading the race for quite a while, but now I am ready to declare a winner! And yes, that is just my opinion, of course, but I have also given you the evidence for my opinion.

I think Joel was written not long **before** the exile, and I think Joel provides a preview of what Ezekiel would later write not long **after** the exile.

Both Joel and Ezekiel have a great deal to say about Christ and about the kingdom of Christ. Ezekiel 40–43, for example, contains a detailed architectural blueprint describing a huge temple where God would abide forever. And when we study those chapters, we

quickly see that Ezekiel is describing the church – the same church that was established in Acts 2 when Peter quoted Joel 2.

And so why don't we see Assyria mentioned in Joel? Likely because Assyria was past history and because Assyria had been much more of a problem for Israel in the north than for Judah in the south.

And why don't we see Babylon mentioned by name in Joel? Likely because Babylon was still in their future and could have been averted entirely if the people had repented, and also because (as Ezekiel 30:25 tells us) God was using Babylon as his tool and for his purposes at this time.

And perhaps we can also say that the Philistines and the Phoenicians were mentioned, not because they were great powers, but because they were **not** great powers. Perhaps the message here is that no nation would escape this judgment. God would not just gather and judge Assyria and Babylon, but God would gather and judge **all** nations (which, in fact, is precisely what Joel 3:2 says: "I will gather **all** the nations").

If the Philistines or the Phoenicians thought they could hide in a corner while God punished Assyria and Babylon, they were badly mistaken. Not only could they not hide – but God was planning to start the judgment with them!