

Joel 3:12-13

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The LORD commanded the nations to enter the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where He would judge them for their wickedness.

In the previous section, the prophet Joel called the nations to battle and urged the Suzerain God to bring down His warriors to fight against the nations (vv. 9-11). In this section, the LORD responded by repeating Joel's invitation to battle and said that He will be ready to meet the Gentile nations. He began by saying, *Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat.*

The verb translated as *be aroused* means to be set in motion or to be stirred up (v. 9). Once *the nations are aroused*, they will then advance for the attack, which will take place in *the valley of Jehoshaphat*. The *valley* called *Jehoshaphat* is difficult to identify because the site is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Nevertheless, it can be understood in terms of its meaning, "Yahweh will judge." It thus serves as a wordplay to describe what will take place there. Accordingly, it likely refers to one of the valleys surrounding Jerusalem, where the LORD *will sit to judge the surrounding nations*. Yahweh functions as the sentencing judge. He will render judgment to the nations that attacked Jerusalem and Judah (Joel 3:1-3).

The LORD then used the imagery of abundance to portray the great wickedness of the surrounding nations. He said, *Put in the sickle*. The *sickle* is a sharp tool used for cutting grain (Jeremiah 50:16). Here, however, it is used in a figurative sense. The LORD commanded His warriors to *put in the sickle* and gave the reason: *for the harvest is ripe*. Jesus also used this imagery when explaining to His disciples the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:36-43). In His explanation, angels come to earth and harvest the wicked and throw them into the fires of judgement.

The *harvest* is the process of cutting down or trampling the crop. In our context, it is used in connection with the term *sickle* to represent God's wrath and fulfilled judgment (Revelation 14:14-19). The LORD compared the nations to a *ripe harvest* and commanded His warriors to cut them down like grains. The ripe grain represents the right time for the LORD to judge the nations.

In a similar vein, the LORD asked His warriors to *come and tread for the wine press is full*. The verb to *tread* means to trample. It refers to the method by which grapes are repeatedly piled in the vats (press) to release their juices and begin fermentation. The term *winepress* can also be translated as "vats." It refers to a large container that holds liquids. It is often made of wood and tied with a lower container by a pipe. So, once the grapes were mashed in the larger container, the juice ran into the smaller one. The *winepress* is used symbolically for the calamity that the LORD will inflict on the Gentile nations.

In our passage, the image of harvesting and treading grapes is used for the destruction of the Gentile nations. God made it clear when He added, *The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great*. Enough is enough. The word for *wickedness* [“Rab” in Hebrew] can denote great in extent or quantity. Here, it seems to refer to quantity, as indicated by the verb *overflow*. The Gentile nations had committed too many wicked deeds in the sight of the LORD. Now it is time for God to judge them for *their wickedness*. This time of judgment likely refers to the end-time battle of Armageddon, as described in the book of Revelation (Revelation 16:16).

Biblical Text

¹² **Let the nations be aroused
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.
Come, tread, for the wine press is full;
The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.**