

Joel 3:14-17

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The day of the LORD will be a time of judgment for the Gentile nations, but a time of deliverance for the sons of Israel. In consequence of this deliverance, the sons of Israel will acknowledge Yahweh as their Suzerain God.

This section begins with Joel's voice and ends with God's voice. It follows God's speech in which He commanded the nations to assemble in the valley of Jehoshaphat to receive their verdict (vv. 12-13). Joel now returns to give a brief description of the battle. According to the prophet, a cosmic disturbance will accompany the battle. The sun and the moon will be darkened. But the covenant people of God need not to fear because the LORD is their refuge and stronghold. The LORD then closed this section by reassuring His people of His presence and protection.

Joel began his speech with a loud and prolonged cry: *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision*. The Hebrew term translated as *multitudes* is "hāmônîm." It carries the idea of tumults in confusion. It suggests a confused noise of a great crowd (Isa. 17:12). The repetition of the term increases its intensity. As such, it describes the largest possible crowd *in the valley of decision*, where the LORD will execute judgment on the nations (v. 12).

The reason for Joel's intensive cry is because *the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision*. The phrase *day of the LORD* refers to any time of God's judgement. The Babylonian exile of Judah in 586 BC prophesied as the first of four locus invasions pictured by Joel was called a *day of the Lord*. This *day of the Lord* likely refers to the time when the LORD will openly intervene in human affairs and culminate an end to this age. During that time, God will judge all the nations who have rebelled against Him. God's judgment will fall on the Gentile nations because they have refused to recognize who He is. God will bring all things into their proper order and avenge all wickedness committed throughout history (Isaiah 2:12; Obadiah 15).

Here Joel says God will gather the *multitudes* into the *valley of decision*. In verses 2 and 12 it is said *God will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat* (Joel 3:2;12). It seems these are two descriptions for the same place. *Jehoshaphat* means "God will judge" indicating that this valley is where God's great judgment in the day of the Lord will take place. The *decision* being referred to likely is God's *decision* in His judgement against the nations. There is no known valley that was or is referred to as either *Jehoshaphat* or *decision*. Tradition says it is one of the valleys near Jerusalem. This is probable since it seems that at the last battle of this age, nations will gather on the plains of Megiddo, also called Armageddon, (Revelation 16:16) and march on Jerusalem, where they will be "outside the city" (Revelation 14:20). At that place "outside the city" in the valley called *Jehoshaphat* and *decision* there will be a great slaughter. There will be blood running so deep that it will come up to the bridle of a horse (Revelation 14:20). The word translated *decision* can also be translated "trench" which could refer to the place where blood will run deeply.

In those days, God's judgment will cause a cosmic disturbance. *The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness.* Joel repeated this verse almost verbatim from the same statement in 2:10. This likely indicates the same event is in view. The darkening of these luminaries is linked to the day of God's judgment on the Gentile nations. Revelation predicts a number of cosmic disturbances connected with the period of great tribulation. So also does Jesus, in Matthew 24:

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.”
(Matthew 24:29-30).

The first part of Jesus' statement appears to be a quote of Joel 2:10, repeated here in 3:10. They all appear to point to the same basic culmination of the age, when God brings all injustice to account.

Joel continued to say, *The Lord roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem.* The verb *to roar* means to utter a deep and prolonged cry. It is normally used of a lion that lies in wait for its prey (Amos 1:2; 3:4; Judg. 14:5). However, the verb is used here to describe the LORD's majestic power as well as His anger against the nations who have persecuted His people. The place called *Zion* is a mountain located on the eastern side of *Jerusalem*, the capital city of Judah. In this verse, *Zion and Jerusalem* are used synonymously to explain the location where Joel heard God's voice. This seems to connect well with the idea of the valley of decision being near Jerusalem.

As a result of *the LORD roaring from Zion and Jerusalem, the heavens and the earth tremble.* Nothing and nobody can resist God. Whenever He speaks, His voice is felt in the universe. As the psalmist declares, “The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders. The LORD is over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful. The voice of the LORD is majestic” (Psalm 29:3-4). In our passage, when the LORD utters His voice, *the heavens and the earth* will shake, causing panic among the nations. But the cosmic disturbance will not represent any threats to God's chosen people because *the LORD is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel.*

The noun translated as *refuge* comes from a verb that means “to take shelter.” The verb root basically means “to hide oneself.” It denotes the confident seeking of security, rather than “a flight of desperation.” The overall idea is that God's people can depend on Him. He is a place of safety and protection for them. He will protect His people from any threats associated with His day of judgment on the Gentile nations.

Joel emphasized the idea of *refuge* by stating that *the LORD is a stronghold to the sons of Israel.* The term *stronghold* refers to any inaccessible place of refuge such as a walled fortification. A *stronghold* was often built on high mountains and was meant to be impenetrable. It thus provides safety for people against their adversaries. Joel reminded the Israelites that the LORD will

protect and preserve them when He judges His enemies^{3/4}the Gentile nations. Therefore, *the sons of Israel* have no reason to panic.

The LORD now spoke to reassure His covenant people of His presence and protection. In consequence of this deliverance, the LORD stated, *You will know that I am the LORD your God*. The verb *know* means to perceive. In this context, it means to recognize or understand something. The pronoun *I* is emphatic in the Hebrew text, suggesting that it is the LORD (not any so-called god) who protects His people and provides for all their needs.

The statement *I am the LORD your God* would remind the people of Judah of their covenant relationship with the LORD. This covenant relationship is based on God's gracious love and not Judah's merit. God remains true to His nature. His deeds will cause His covenant people to recognize Him as their Suzerain God (Ruler), the one *dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain*.

Mount *Zion* is in the southeastern part of the city of Jerusalem, which is in the southern kingdom of Judah. It was the high hill on which King David built a citadel. For this reason, the Bible often calls it "the city of David" (2 Samuel 5:7). It thus symbolized the place of authority in Israel. The ultimate authority in Israel is clearly God, and Jesus the son of David, the heir of all things. It was to Jesus that God granted all authority in heaven as well as upon the earth (Matthew 28:18). *Zion* is referred to as God's *holy mountain* (Isaiah 52:1).

Because of the LORD's presence on Mount *Zion*, *Jerusalem will be holy, and strangers will pass through it no more*. God will assume the authority in *Jerusalem*, and rule over His people. The result will be that righteousness will reign. This could well be a prediction of Jesus restoring the kingdom to Israel, and assuming the throne of David (2 Samuel 7:13), as predicted by the prophets. This is so clearly taught in the scriptures that the Jews of Jesus' day stumbled at any other option for Jesus' advent. After Jesus rose from the grave, just prior to his ascension the disciples asked "Is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:7). Jesus' answer presumes that the kingdom will be restored, but states that it is not for the disciples to know when.

In Isaiah, Jerusalem it is called "the holy city" (Isaiah 52:1). It was destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonians, the first invasion of locusts. It was also destroyed in AD 70 by the Roman army, the last species of locusts. But one day, *Jerusalem will be holy*. The LORD will set *Jerusalem* apart and make it His special dwelling place. And *strangers will pass through it no more*. Those foreigners who have no share in Israel will no longer be able to take *Jerusalem* captive. Therefore, the people of God will enjoy a time of peace and prosperity. This could align with the time of Jesus' thousand year reign, as predicted in Revelation 20, where Jesus restores the kingdom to Israel, apparently prior to the destruction of this earth and the creation of a new heaven and earth.

Biblical Text

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For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

¹⁵ The sun and moon grow dark

And the stars lose their brightness.

¹⁶ The Lord roars from Zion

And utters His voice from Jerusalem,

And the heavens and the earth tremble.

But the Lord is a refuge for His people

And a stronghold to the sons of Israel.

¹⁷ Then you will know that I am the Lord your God,

Dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain.

So Jerusalem will be holy,

And strangers will pass through it no more.