

Joel 3:18-21

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The LORD describes Judah's final prosperity. He promises to restore their blessings and give them freedom from their enemies.

In this final section, the Suzerain God described Judah's final prosperity. He began with the phrase *in that day* to refer to the time in which He will shower His blessings on Judah. That era will begin after God's judgment on the Gentile nations (Joel 3:14-17; Amos 9:11). In those days, the LORD will dwell among His people in Zion and will protect them from all their enemies (Joel 4:17). As a result, *the mountains will drip with sweet wine and the hills will flow with milk.*

The word translated as *sweet wine* here refers to freshly squeezed and newly fermented juice (Amos 9:13). In Joel 1:5, the drunkards were grieving because the locust plague had destroyed their *sweet wine*. But one day the Suzerain God will restore the blessings of the nation, causing an abundance of *sweet wine*.

In that day, the hills will flow with milk. The term *milk* often symbolizes blessing and luxury (Exodus 3:8, 17). It is used in parallel with *sweet wine* to describe the potential of the region to support a herding economy. Judah's *hills* will be fertile when God restores the nation's blessings. *And all the brooks of Judah will flow with water and a spring will go out from the house of the LORD to water the valley of Shittim.*

The term *brooks* describes the deepest part of a valley flowing with water, bringing life to the wildlife (Joel 1:20). It is associated with the biblical image of water as life. The *house of the LORD* means His holy temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:37-38). It is likely that the temple or *house of the Lord* described in Ezekiel will be the temple in Jerusalem during the thousand year reign of Jesus upon this earth (Ezekiel 40-43). In that temple, a spring of water proceeds from the doorstep of the temple (Ezekiel 47:1). This water source becomes a great river that flows down to the Dead Sea and makes it come to life. The description of a *spring that will go out from the house of the Lord* is likely a parallel description to Ezekiel 47:1.

In Joel 3, the spring that flows from the *house of the Lord* flows to the *valley of Shittim*. The term *shittim* means "acacias." The acacia tree was important for the ancient Israelites since they would regularly use its wood in their construction. It was the wood that the Israelites used for the construction of the Tabernacle and the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:10; 26:15; 27:1). Acacia trees typically grow in dry regions, especially in the Kidron Valley. The *valley of Shittim* may refer to that region in the Kidron Valley, which runs through the arid desert to the Dead Sea (Ezekiel 47:8). This would parallel Ezekiel's description of the river that originates from the doorstep of the temple and becomes a substantial river that flows to the Dead Sea (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

In contrast to the divine blessing that Judah will experience, the lands of the Gentile nations will become a barren waste. God singled out two nations (Egypt and Edom) as those whose lands will

be desolate. He stated, *Egypt will become a waste and Edom will become a desolate wilderness*. The specific reason given here for the punishment of *Egypt* and *Edom* is their mistreatment of God's covenant people. They have *done violence to the sons of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood*. The *violence done to the sons of Judah* seems to refer to an unprovoked killing of the sons of Judah while they lived peaceably in their land.

Throughout history, *Egypt and Edom* were Israel's adversaries. *Egypt* is the same as modern Egypt, while *Edom* was a kingdom to the east of Israel that is now the southern part of the modern country of Jordan. Regarding Egypt, the book of 1 Kings tells us that "in the fifth year of King Rehoboam, that Shishak the king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. He took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and he took everything, even taking all the shields of gold which Solomon had made" (1 Kgs. 14:25-26). It is likely that this passage also refers to later events, perhaps events that are yet to come.

As for *Edom*, one event in view likely occurred during the reign of King Jehoram of Judah. According to 2 Chronicles, "Edom revolted against the rule of Judah and set up a king over themselves. Then Jehoram crossed over with his commanders and all his chariots with him. And he arose by night and struck down the Edomites who were surrounding him and the commanders of the chariots. So Edom revolted against Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time against his rule, because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers. Moreover, he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot and led Judah astray" (2 Chron. 21:8-11). It is also likely that future episodes are in mind as well. Because of the mistreatment of God's people, Egypt and Edom will be judged in the day of the LORD.

But while *Egypt and Edom* will be judged for their evil deeds, *Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem for all generations*. The people of God will enjoy the fullness of divine blessings. The land of Judah will be fruitful, economically prosperous. Water, milk, and sweet wine will be abundant. God's covenant people will dwell safely in their land, while their enemies will suffer. For the LORD declared, *I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged*.

The term *blood* is now used figuratively in this passage to refer to violent death. *Egypt and Edom* violently attacked the *sons of Judah*, shedding their blood innocently. The verb to *avenge* means to do harm to someone in return for the wrong he has done (Deuteronomy 32:43). God is the ultimate judge of all. As He stated to Israel through Moses, "Vengeance is mine" (Deuteronomy 32:35; Hebrews 10:30). In this instance, God has held off judgement, but now is executing judgement. He does not forget. All will be brought to justice.

The concept of blood revenge reflects an ancient Near Eastern custom by which a close relative was responsible to punish a criminal in a way that would fit the crime. In ancient Israel, there were some restrictions regarding this practice. An avenger of blood was required to act only in cases of premeditated murder, but not of accidental killing. That is why the Israelites set aside cities of refuge to provide asylum for the man who committed manslaughter accidentally (Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:1-13). The purpose was so that innocent blood might not be shed in the land which the Suzerain (Ruler) God was about to give Israel as inheritance.

In our passage, however, the avenger of blood is not a man, but the LORD Himself. He will punish *Egypt* and *Edom* to repay them for the crimes they committed against the *sons of Judah*. For the LORD dwells in *Zion*. Mount *Zion* is in the southeastern part of the city of Jerusalem, which is in the southern kingdom of Judah. It was the place where David dwelled, and the seat of authority. God is said to dwell on Mount *Zion* because it is the seat of power in Israel (Isaiah 8:18). It symbolized the place where God dwelt among His people. Thus, the people of Judah *will be inhabited forever* because the LORD's presence will be with them. In this case, this is likely referring to the period when Jesus will reign physically in Israel as king for a thousand years.

The word *forever* is a translation of the Hebrew word "yowm." It is most often translated "day." It connotes a time period, and can refer to an age. It is used to describe the age left to the men of Noah's time, before their destruction. It is translated in Genesis 9:12 as "perpetual" in the phrase "perpetual generations." In that case, it refers to God's promise to not destroy the world with water again so long as the earth remained. This is likely similar, in that Judah *will be inhabited* so long as Israel remained. The same would apply to *Jerusalem for all generations*.

The dominant theme of this book is the Day of the LORD, a time in which He will openly intervene in the world to judge wickedness. According to Joel, that judgment would be far greater than the devastation brought by the locust plague. In view of the imminent approach of this great judgment, Joel called the nation to lament and fast to ask God for forgiveness. The people of Judah followed the prophet's advice and genuinely sought God's face. God forgave them and restored their blessings. God also looks forward to a time when His restored covenant people will be dominant on the world scene. In those days, the LORD will defeat the Gentile nations in a final battle to allow Judah to live with peace of mind.

Biblical Text

¹⁸ And in that day

**The mountains will drip with sweet wine,
And the hills will flow with milk,
And all the brooks of Judah will flow with water;
And a spring will go out from the house of the Lord
To water the valley of Shittim.**

**¹⁹ Egypt will become a waste,
And Edom will become a desolate wilderness,
Because of the violence done to the sons of Judah,
In whose land they have shed innocent blood.**

**²⁰ But Judah will be inhabited forever
And Jerusalem for all generations.**

**²¹ And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged,
For the Lord dwells in Zion.**