

The Day of the Lord

An Expository "Journey" Through the Prophecy of Joel

10- The Valley of Decision and the Magnificence of Jesus- Part 1

November 15, 2020

Joel 3:1-14

1 "For behold, in those days and at that time, When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,

2 I will gather all the nations And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; And they have divided up My land.

3 "They have also cast lots for My people, Traded a boy for a harlot And sold a girl for wine that they may drink.

4 "Moreover, what are you to Me, O Tyre, Sidon and all the regions of Philistia? Are you rendering Me a recompense? But if you do recompense Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your recompense on your head.

5 "Since you have taken My silver and My gold, brought My precious treasures to your temples,

6 and sold the sons of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their territory,

7 behold, I am going to arouse them from the place where you have sold them, and return your recompense on your head.

8 "Also I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a distant nation," for the Lord has spoken.

9 Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare a war; rouse the mighty men! Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up!

10 Beat your plowshares into swords And your pruning hooks into spears; Let the weak say, "I am a mighty man."

11 Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, And gather yourselves there. Bring down, O Lord, Your mighty ones.

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.

14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

To the Glory of God

This past week I've been reading some documents having to do with Jan Hus¹, the Czech Reformer, who was mightily used by God many years *before* Martin Luther. And I found out that Hus was a follower of the English Reformer, John Wycliffe², who was martyred for the "crime" of translating the Bible into English. Yes, you heard that correctly. In England back in the 14th Century- it was a capital crime to publish or even to have a Bible in the English language- meaning if they caught you printing a Bible in English; or having one in your possession; or even reading one- you would be put to death. And knowing full- well the risk- Wycliffe translated it anyway- so the common man in England could read the Word of God.

Friends, when we realize the great cost that was paid by so many so that we all could have and read a Bible in our own language- how many wonderful saints of God were imprisoned and tortured and killed- it will be very hard for people to explain to Wycliffe and the others why they never seemed to find the time to actually read their Bibles- while those people literally died so that we could have the Word of God in English.

Now if you remember your history, you'll remember that Hus was burned at the stake outside the little town of Constance in Southern Germany- by the Roman religious system- because he preached that Scripture held Authority over the pope.

Now Jan Hus believed very firmly in the Sovereignty of God. And, anytime a person begins to fully understand God's absolute Sovereignty- it isn't long before they also begin to believe that God is Sovereign- even in Salvation. And that leads them into believing in the Doctrine of Predestination. But like all of us- Hus didn't come into the understanding of Predestination on his own. What Wycliffe taught him, through his writings, led him to that conclusion. And as these men would

¹ Jan Hus (1372-1415)

² John Wycliffe (1320's- 1384)

articulate the Doctrine of Predestination- both Hus and Wycliffe spoke of the Church as being, the “*Universality of the Predestinate*”.

Now what that means, in Alabama English, is that every person, who is truly saved- became saved- only because God *predestined* them or chose them “FOR” or “TO” Salvation (before the foundation of the world). And Jesus loved His Father so much- that He died to literally *purchase* or *secure* the Salvation of all of those who were predestined. And, in God’s timing, God the Holy Spirit went out throughout the earth to *forcefully* and *effectually* “draw” or “drag” every single person, who has been predestined- to Jesus. And Jesus said in **John 6:37**:

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

And at the Feet of Jesus- God the Holy Spirit sovereignly gives these predestined ones new, spiritual Life- by opening their blind eyes; and unstopping their deaf ears; and by giving them a heart that is both willing and able to believe. And with those new eyes- they see Jesus in His Magnificence. And with those new ears- they hear the Gospel. And with that new heart- they believe the Gospel.

And because their minds and eyes have been unveiled- these chosen rebels see or behold the profound contrast between their own great wickedness and the Beauty and Glory of Jesus Christ. And the result is- they are overwhelmed with very powerful Conviction. And they *respond* to that Conviction- by hating their Sin. And they *respond* to that new- found hatred of Sin- by crying out to God for a Mercy they don’t deserve; and a Grace they haven’t earned.

So, everyone who is truly saved- is saved “BY” the Grace of God; and they are saved “THROUGH” the Gift of “Saving Faith”. *Nobody* is saved by Works- not even good, noble, or religious Works. All of the Works that we do- from being baptized; to partaking of Communion; to helping other people; to serving the saints; to striving for Holiness- are all carried out AFTER we are saved. So, our good and godly Works- are the FRUIT of already being saved. They are NOT what brings about Salvation in the first place. And that means that everyone who is saved- is saved by Grace- ALONE; through Faith- ALONE; in Christ- ALONE; to the Glory of God- ALONE.

And as Jesus receives these humbled and repentant sinners- He allocates His Blood to wash all their Sins away; and His Righteousness to make them fit for Heaven. And these people are now “adopted” into the Family of God. And as adopted children- they join in with all the genuinely saved throughout all of History- to become part of God’s Household.

And, at that very moment- these justified and forgiven sinners are now “in” Jesus Christ. And being “in” Jesus is simply another way of saying that they are now “in” the Church. So, all the predestined ones will be saved. All for whom Jesus died- will be saved. All who have been sovereignly given new, spiritual Life- will be saved. All who have been born again- will be saved. And all the saved- are “in” Jesus. And all those “in” Jesus are also “in” the Church. And so, that’s what the Church is: the “*Assembly of the Chosen*”; or the “*Assembly of the Predestined*”.

So, that’s what Wycliffe and Hus meant by the saying, “*the Church is the Universality of the Predestinate*”. Because all the predestinated people are members of the Church of Jesus Christ, and there are no other members of the Church of Jesus Christ except those who are the predestinated. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he said,

Romans 8:29&30

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

But all this Bible Truth didn’t sit well with what Hus called, the “*Roman Synagogue of Satan*” (what I call, the “*Roman Religious System*” as I see no reason to call them a “Church”) And one of the ones who was responsible for Hus’ death, perhaps more than anyone else, was a former very close friend of his- a guy named, Stepan Palec.

Now when Hus was burned at stake in 1415 in Constance, it would have seemed natural to think that he would quickly be forgotten. Why would history make note of a simple peasant like Jan Hus? I mean, after all- the Romans burned many people at the stake. So, why would we remember Hus? But, of course, the way God *providentially* rules History means that those who belong to Him; and who have been, by the Grace of God, given the privilege of being the kind of martyr for the Lord that Hus was, they’re the ones who are remembered, and the others, who are responsible for their deaths- are largely forgotten.

Today, very few people have even heard of Stepan Palec- much less know anything about him. Yet it was Palec- NOT Hus- who was a very famous and very popular member of the visible Church at that time. Hus, incidentally, called Palec, a “*slebnyk*”, which in Czech means: *a pointer dog who is always anxious to catch his prey*. So, at the time- Palec was well known and Hus was unknown. And yet, today Hus is well- known and Palec is forgotten.

And this illustrates a Principle that flows out from the very Character and Nature of God Himself: that God has “set His Love” upon *some* people- while leaving others to themselves. And that Truth is powerful and even frightening- but it is real and it is true. And Joel’s Prophecy illustrates that for us.

Now the interesting thing about the Jews and all their terrible, historical hardship- is that, since God gave them the “Promised Land”- all the Persecution; all the Subjugation; and all the Enslavement- have come to them because the very *same* God- Who chose to display His Glory through them (under the Old Covenant); and Who called them, “*My people*” was visiting them or “Coming” to them in Judgment.

And as we see this amazing dynamic between God and the original chosen people play out- we wonder after it- with fear and trembling. Because this same God has also told us:

1Peter 4:17-19

For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? *AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?*** Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.**

... and then the Apostle Paul warned us in **Romans 11:17-21**:

But if some of the branches (the Jews) were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.

... so, as we ponder the great Mystery of the relationship between the Jew and God- we see that it is truly Magnificent- but it is also quite a Perplexity.

Now perhaps the most *insulting* and *hurtful* description of the Jew was given by God the Holy Spirit through Stephen, when he said,

The Acts 7:51a

You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit ...

... and in **Jeremiah 31:31&32**, as God the Spirit moved on the Prophet to foretell the Coming of the *infinitely superior* New Covenant- Jeremiah wept and cried out because he said that the Jews had broken the First or the Old Covenant,

Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord.

... and then, in **Jeremiah 3:7&8**, the Prophet said that God Himself had given Israel a "writ of divorce",

I thought, 'After she has done all these things she will return to Me'; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.

Now, normally, that would be the end. I mean when the Owner and Creator of the Universe describes you as being stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart; when He says you are ALWAYS resisting the Holy Spirit; when God says you had broken the Covenant; and that He was divorcing you- you would think that was it. And so, like many other nations of world history- the Jews would then fade into the background and become nothing but a distant memory.

But look at what God Himself said about all this- as to why He continued to deal with people, who didn't love Him:

Ezekiel 20:5a-9

... I chose Israel and swore to the descendants of the house of Jacob and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them, saying, I am the Lord your God, on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands. "I said to them, 'Cast away, each of you, the detestable things of his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.' "But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of

their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. "But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they *lived*, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

... so, even as most people try to teach that it was God great love for His people that caused Him to continue to deal with them- God said that it was for the "*Sake of My Name*" that I acted. So, there is a much *higher* Reason; a much more *important* Reason- as to why God deals with rebellious people- than simply because He loves them. And *that* is the only reason there is a single Jew left alive today. But, before we get arrogant- it is also, "for the Sake of His Name" that He continually deals with us as well. And that makes God to be the most "God-centered" Being in the Universe.

So, even though the Judgment of God against the Jew has been very severe and very harsh, there has ALWAYS been a Jealousy in God for His Own Glory. And *that* is why God dealt with Israel differently from how God has historically judged the other nations and peoples of the world.

For example, **Leviticus 18** is where we find what is called, the "Holiness Code". It is there that we find God establishing only a single form of human sexuality that honors Him and that He blesses: Intimacy between one, naturally born man; and one, naturally born woman- within the Covenant of Marriage.

So, the "Holiness Code" is where God *restricts* and *limits* the sexual behavior of His people- to only one single form. And every other expression of human sexuality is categorically condemned by God as Sin. So, Incest; Adultery; Fornication; Bestiality; and Homosexuality do NOT give God Glory; they are clearly condemned by God; and they are labeled as Sin. And God has promised terrible things to people when they engage in these acts. So, as people tried to *ignore* God's Condemnation against these things- God brought horrific Destruction upon them. In fact, the Issue of Human Sexuality is so important to God- that it is the reason why He drove those people out from their lands:

Leviticus 18:24&25

Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. 'For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.

... and then God warned the Jews that if they began to engage in these sexual sins- God would cast them out too.

Leviticus 18:26-30

'But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, *neither* the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled) so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do *so* shall be cut off from among their people. Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the Lord your God.

Now even though we can very easily find people today, who are descendants from the ancient Jew- it is very hard to find *anyone*, who is a direct descendant of the Jebusites; or the Amalekites; or the Perizzites; or the Hittites; or the Amorites. Why? Because they tried to ignore God's Warning against specific Sins- and God judged these peoples and nations by *eliminating* many of them from the face of the earth!

Now it is true that some ancient civilizations were completely annihilated by war or by starvation and famine. But others were destroyed quickly by a sovereign Act of God- as He visited them with cataclysmic Judgment. But some peoples and even some entire nations were completely decimated through things that God personally intervened to save the Jews from- like venereal disease and by eating foods that destroyed them.³

And yet the Jew remains. But that's NOT a Testimony to their own great resiliency or their steadfast perseverance. This tells us that, God is determined to receive Glory from them.

But think for a moment- why would that be true? What Lesson is God teaching us here as we see God *continue* to deal with people, who are stubborn and rebellious? Doesn't that make God look weak? Well, that's *exactly* what atheists say. People, who don't even believe in God- look at the way God operates- and all they see is Weakness and Foolishness.

³ Jewish women had the lowest incidences of cervical cancer and STDs than any nation of the ancient world because God commanded Jewish men to be circumcised and to remain faithful to their wives. And by giving them dietary restrictions, the Jews were spared many problems resulting from worms and intestinal diseases.

But it isn't Weakness that we see in God's relentless pursuit of rebellious people- no, what we are witnessing is God's white-hot Passion to display His Glory in the earth and have a people to marvel at Him!

You see, God is *determined* to have a people- who will delight themselves in Him. Why? Because that makes God's Grace- look glorious (**Ephesians 1:6**). Nothing pleases God more- than to display His Grace to unworthy sinners- to change them- by what He alone does for them- until they find the highest level of Joy and Affection in making Him look glorious. and I would suggest to you that this is what Salvation is.

So, Joel's Prophecy here about the Jew and Israel- is a tangible and natural example of what God is going to do- *spiritually*- with His Church.

Now one of the most curious parts of this section of Joel's Prophecy is found in verse 2 that says:

I will gather all the nations And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations;

... and I want to notice that the Prophet references the "Valley of Jehoshaphat". And then later on, in verse 12, he mentions it again. But then in verse 14 the Prophet says,

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

... so, two times, he refers to the "Valley of Jehoshaphat" but then he calls it, the "Valley of Decision".

Now what is interesting, is that back in the 19th Century when Charles Finney was *manufacturing* his unbiblical method of "Church growth" with what has become known as the "Altar Call"⁴ (where, at the end of the Service- an emotional plea is made to get lost sinners to "accept Jesus into their hearts")- this false Teacher⁵ used this very

⁴ Charles Finney (1792-1875); was a staunch opponent of the Doctrines of Grace and an advocate of "Christian Perfectionism". Finney taught that lost people could be saved through emotional manipulation. And from that belief came his creation of the Altar Call. Later the seeming breathtaking results of Billy Graham Crusades made Finney's wayward Teaching acceptable to the majority of believers in the 20th Century.

⁵ Charles Finney was a heretic in every sense of the word. For example, he did NOT believe in the Blood of Jesus. He also denied the full Deity of Jesus; and he rejected the notion that God was Sovereign- especially in Salvation. Finney argued that Original Sin was nothing more than "selfishness" that people can overcome if they made themselves a "new heart." He taught that "Sin and Holiness were voluntary acts of mind." He also believed that preachers had important roles in producing revival and wrote in 1835, "*A revival is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means.*"

verse here in **Joel** as his slogan.

So, somebody being in the “Valley of Decision” became synonymous with a person wrestling between getting saved or remaining lost. And even today, some 170 years later, many Evangelistic efforts will tell the congregation that they are in the “Valley of Decision” during the “Altar Call”.

Of course, this reference by Joel to either the “Valley of Jehoshaphat” or the “Valley of Decision” has nothing to do with that. Joel was talking about the Judgment of God against the pagan nations of the world and the gathering of His people.

Now stay with me- because this is important. As we have learned over the last several Sermons- the Old Covenant has been forever ended in Jesus Christ. And so, with His sinless Life; His vicarious Death; and His physical Resurrection- Jesus brought about the glorious New Covenant. And now that the New Covenant has been brought forth- the Old Covenant is no longer in force. And it will NEVER again be in force. The writer of **Hebrews** taught this when he said,

Hebrews 6:1

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity...

The “**elementary Teaching about the Christ**” is the Old Covenant- with its “Signs”, “Symbols”, and “Types” that *represented* the Reality of the New Covenant. But when the Reality comes- there is no further need for that which merely *represents* the Reality. So, with the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus- the New Covenant came into being. And when that happened- by default- the Old Covenant was no longer needed. And that is why the writer says here that the Jews, who had lived under the Old Covenant their entire lives needed to “leave” the Old Covenant.

Now the word that was translated here as “leave” comes from a Greek word (*afieemi*; Strongs #863) that means: *to give up; to let go; or to depart from*. And so, the writer instructs his Jewish audience that, because of all that Jesus is; and because of all that Jesus alone has done- they are to give up; let go; and depart from the Old Covenant.

And then the writer was “moved” to tell these Jews to “**press on**” to “**maturity**”. Now the word that was translated into English here as “**press on**” comes from a Greek word (*feroo*; Strongs #5342) that means: *to bring forward or to go on*. And the word that was translated here as “**maturity**” comes from a Greek word (*teleiootes*; Strongs #5051), that means: *full; final, or completed*.

So, this writer tells his first-century Jewish audience that, because of all that Jesus is; and all that Jesus alone has done- they are to “leave” or “abandon” the

inferior Revelation of God in the Old Covenant that was the “elementary Teaching” about Jesus; and they are to “go on” or “press on into” the “final, full, completed and mature”

Revelation of God that is found only in the New Covenant.

Now keep in mind that the Old Covenant wasn’t ended because there was something wrong with it. No, it was *ended* because the infinitely superior New Covenant has completely *replaced* it. And that means that the New Covenant is not merely “new”. And it isn’t simply “different” from the Old. No, the New Covenant is infinitely *superior* to the Old- in every sense of that word. So, we need to understand that the New Covenant is an infinitely *superior* Covenant; that is based on infinitely *superior* Promises; that was made viable by an infinitely *superior* Sacrifice- offered by an infinitely *superior* High Priest. And *that* is why God will never again resurrect; or use; or even bless the Old Covenant.

But it is one thing to *say* that- while it is a completely *different* thing to understand what the implications of that Truth are. Because the Old Covenant has been completely and eternally replaced by the New Covenant- *everything* that made the Old Covenant work- have *also* been replaced. So, for example, the Temple in Jerusalem; the Levitical Priesthood; Animal Sacrifices; and the Sanhedrin Court are all relics of an obsolete Covenant. And since the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus- those things have no purpose or usefulness with God today.

So, for example, anyone today offering an animal sacrifice to God- (even with the very best of intentions)- *dishonors* Jesus Christ and commits blasphemy. Anyone or any group that seeks to have; or to create; or to maintain a hierarchical system of Priests- *dishonors* Jesus Christ and commits blasphemy. Anyone trying to acquire Favor with God by travelling to Jerusalem once a year to participate in the various Ceremonies and Feasts prescribed by Moses under the Old Covenant- *dishonors* Jesus Christ and commits blasphemy.

So, it isn’t enough to simply understand that the New Covenant has replaced the Old. Because the New Covenant has also “done away with” all of the Old Covenant tools; procedures; and offices as well. But that means that we also must *extend* this new Reality to all the unfulfilled Old Testament Prophecies as well- *especially* as it pertains to the Jews and to Israel.

So, for example, when we read about “God’s people” in an unfulfilled Old Testament Prophecy- we need to know that God is NOT speaking of the Jew- but the saved- whether they be Jew or Gentile. The Prophecies concerning some future fulfillment of the nation of Israel- is now referring to the Church. The Prophecies detailing God’s Judgment against various Gentile nations that existed when the Jew operated under the Old Covenant- are now referring to either those nations or perhaps even demons or particular sins.

So, we take all the physical, tangible, natural and earthly terms and places and events and peoples in those unfulfilled Old Testament Prophecies and we understand them- *spiritually*. And we also understand them to be fulfilled- in, by, and through Jesus Christ- in the New Covenant.

And that means that the main thing that the Jew can look forward to in the future- is NOT the rebuilding of their Temple in Jerusalem; it is NOT a newly constituted Levitical Priesthood; or the resurgence of animal sacrifices; or a new Sanhedrin Court- but SALVATION- and their joining in with the “wild olive branches” as the saved Jew will become part of the Christian Church- where Jesus is

Lord of all!

Therefore, what Christians today should be doing- is NOT helping the Jew maintain their Jewishness; it isn't in giving them money so they can go even deeper into their false religion. No, Christians today should love the Jew enough to preach the Gospel to them- so they may repent and put their Faith and Hope and the Affections of their hearts in the Lord Christ alone- and be saved. Because once the Jews are saved- as the Apostle Paul taught- they will also belong to the Church- not some resurrected nation of Israel.

Now with all of that in mind- look again at verses 1-3, where Joel was “moved” by God the Holy Spirit to say:

1 For behold, in those days and at that time, When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,

2 I will gather all the nations And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; And they have divided up My land.

3 "They have also cast lots for My people, Traded a boy for a harlot And sold a girl for wine that they may drink.

Now right off the bat- we understand that Joel had something very specific in mind when he wrote this. And at least *part* of what Joel was seeing had to do with God, somehow *favoring* the Jews and the nation of Israel- while judging the various Gentile nations of the world. Why? Because the Jew had stopped sinning? No. They sinned grievously against the Lord. So, why would God favor *them* above the other nations? For the Sake of God's Glory!

We need to remember that, back in **Joel 1**- God had just recently brought Judgment to Israel in the form of a locust invasion, as we studied in Chapter 1.

And that invasion by those insects was used by God to humble His people and cause them to weep; and to pray; and to fast; and to repent. And now, on the other side of that Divine Judgment- Joel sees a day when God is going to restore His Favor on His people.

And of course, this is *symbolic* of how God continues to work with His Church today- even though there is much Sin; and much Compromise; and much Worldliness. And so, periodically, in His great Love to the chosen people of the Church- God will bring redemptive and corrective Discipline to the saved- so they may be brought to a place of Humility and into a place of genuine Repentance. Hear the Word of the Lord from **Hebrews 12:4-12:**

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Now Joel says here that God is going to gather the pagan nations of the world into the "Valley of Jehoshaphat" in order to judge them. But the Reality is that the nations of the world would never fit into this Valley. It's simply too small for more than a few thousand people to fit into it at a time. So, obviously, this Prophecy is *symbolic* of something else. And many Bible scholars through the

Centuries (since Joel gave this Prophecy) have thought that Joel was actually predicting the Second Coming of Jesus and the Destruction of the Wicked.

Another Issue that we have to deal with here is the reason behind WHY Joel said that God was going to judge these nations. He said,

On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; And they have divided up My land...

... so, God is going to enact Divine Retribution against the Gentile nations because of all the Evil they have inflicted on the Jews and on Israel. So, that would be “Divine Vengeance”. In other words, these nations beat up Israel and now God is going to beat them up. And that mentality would be fine- UNTIL JESUS CAME.

Remember, before Jesus was born- Israel was God’s chosen people. And so, *everything* God was doing in the earth at that time- He did through the Jew and through Israel. But after Jesus came- being a Jew or a Gentile became entirely irrelevant. The Apostle Paul was moved to write this in **Galatians 3:26-29**:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

So, nationality; ethnicity; bloodline; or genealogy; mean absolutely *nothing* under the New Covenant. No group has a leg up on any other group. The only difference between those, who will spend Eternity in Heaven; and those who will scream forever in the lake of fire is that, before time began- God purposed in Himself to give the people in Heaven- His Mercy; while those in Hell received God’s Justice. That’s it.

It is a terrible mistake to think that the people, who will spend Eternity in Heaven, are “better” people than those who will burn forever. That simply isn’t true. Neither is it true that the people who will burn in Hell forever are “worse” than those who will enjoy Heaven. It is also unbiblical to assume that certain ethnicities; or certain nationalities; or certain people, who are descendent from someone else – are closer to God than others. All of that kind of logic and thinking is categorically and clearly and repeatedly *condemned* in the New Testament

The humiliating Truth is that *everyone* on earth is a sinner. Every Jew and every Gentile in existence have broken God’s Law repeatedly. And that means

that *nobody* deserves Heaven. *Nobody* is entitled to Heaven. But it also means that *everybody* deserves Hell. And it also means that God is not *obligated* to save anyone. But in His Mercy, God has chosen to “set His Love” upon *some* of the fallen children of Adam.

And if you are chosen- you will believe. And if you believe- you will be saved. And if you are saved- you have been FOREVER removed from being underneath God’s Wrath. Yet those who do NOT believe- live every second of every day underneath God’s Condemnation. And that is true- whether you are a Jew or a Gentile.

This is the “Magnificent Perplexity” of Old Testament Prophecy. You have an Old Testament Prophet predicting the future- using terminology and language and symbols that are inherently Old Covenant. In other words, you have a prediction of what God is going to do in Jesus Christ, under the auspices of the New Covenant- by a man, who has never and will never see Jesus; or the New Covenant in his lifetime. So, as we read and study and struggle to understand these Prophecies- we must take the symbolism and terminology that Joel (and all the other Old Testament Prophets) used and *update* them with a New Covenant Reality.

Before Jesus- the Goal of the average Jew was to go to Jerusalem- where the Temple was. But the Goal now- is to go to Heaven- to be with Jesus forever- because Jesus is better than the Temple. The Goal before was to maintain their Jewishness through dietary; ceremonial; and sacrificial distinctions. The Goal now is to strive to possess the Beauty of Holiness through the Power of the Holy Spirit to the Glory of God. The Goal before was to make sure that the right sacrifice was offered by the right priest in the right place in the right amount. The Goal now is to judge our own hearts to make sure we are trusting fully in the “once for all” Sacrifice of Jesus. The Jew looked forward to a Jewish Messiah who would restore Israel to its former Glory under King David. The Church looks for the King of the entire Universe to come- Who will change our vile bodies to be like unto His Own glorious Body- so that we will never sin against Him again. The Goal before was Jews and Israel- to the *exclusion* of the rest of the world. The Goal now is that Christ builds His Church with people from every nation, tribe and tongue who will all praise God in a breathtaking crescendo of voices that will echo throughout the Heavens forever!

So, under the Covenant in which Joel operated- the “fortunes of both Judah and Jerusalem” were measured in how free the land was from oppression by other nations; and in how much Judgment God could bring on the Gentiles. Nothing is said of Salvation in a spiritual and eternal sense. It is all measured in earthly and temporal and physical and tangible terms. Also notice that the Gentiles receive no Mercy at all from either God or the Jews. And this illustrates the *inferior* quality of the Old Covenant.

But we must also notice something else. The fact that God will periodically bring Judgment on His Own disobedient people does not mean that God will forget about the Sins of the ungodly- or that He will neglect to mete out Judgment to them as well.

And whereas the Judgment of God toward His Own people always has a *redemptive* quality to it- the Judgment against the non-elect is like the huge body of water collecting behind a great dam. The Bible teaches that the Wrath of God is ever growing against the unrepentant- in both its fierceness and its frightening display of unquenchable Power. So, God’s Wrath has been gathering and it has been increasing- as it awaits the day when it will be released in Divine Fury- against those individuals and nations- who refused to repent and delight themselves in God.

Paul spoke of that Day when he told the Athenians:

The Acts 17:30&31

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

This is what Joel speaks of in this Prophecy. Earlier, he warned Israel of God’s Judgment if they didn’t repent. But now he reminds even the pagans- that they too will be called to account for their offenses.

Now the idea of God’s Wrath is very unpopular for obvious reasons. Yet this is the only point in God’s final Dealings with sinful people that has any real logic to it. In most theological systems within Christianity- the Doctrine of “Last Things” (Eschatology) centers around three great Truths:

1. The Return of Jesus Christ to this earth
2. The physical and bodily Resurrection of people
3. The final Judgment

... but it is only the last of these that is logical. There is nothing logical about the Return of Jesus Christ to this earth- from a human standpoint. And in many ways- it goes completely *against* logic. Jesus already came once and was rejected. If He went away and never came again- it would be only what we should expect. Why should He come back where He isn't wanted?

And there is nothing logical about the Resurrection either. Moses wrote:

“For you are dust, And to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19)

...and that is God's Word to sinners. Yet God promises, “illogically” to raise us to life. Why?

The only really sensible thing is God's Judgment. But why is that logical? Because we are guilty. We have broken God's Laws; We have sinned against Him- *repeatedly*- in thought, word, and deed. And by our Sins; and by the fact that we strive to do what is right in our own eyes- with little or no thought of what God's Will is- we testify that we really don't think too much of God; and we certainly don't think He is worthy of our love; or our devotion; or our obedience. So, our Sins *belittle* God's Glory. And any Being, that lays claim to be all-Righteous- simply can't allow that to stand. His Righteousness must be defended- or else God agrees with us- that His Glory is not worth defending.

So, above all things- the Judge of all the earth must do right! And so, if we will not repent of Sin and submit to His Authority over our lives- gladly- then God MUST judge us. And that is what Joel sees as coming- NOT merely to the pagan Gentiles- but to all the people of the earth, who refuse to bow and to delight themselves in Jesus Christ.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

