



The Sword & The Plow

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Commentary on Joel Chapter 3

Editor's note: I have been writing a commentary on Joel, which has been published here over the last several months. Chapter three is the final installment.

1 – For, behold, in those days, and in that time,

The word “for” ties what is said here to what went before, indicating that “in those days, and at that time” has reference to the period earlier described as “afterward,” or the “last days” of the pre-messianic age (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17-21). Thus, the judgments depicted in the following verses are connected with the “great and terrible day of the Lord” portrayed in the closing verses of the preceding chapter, and are part of the “deliverance” of God’s people from their adversaries (Joel 2:32).

when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

To “bring again the captivity” refers to the return of those captured and taken into captivity by a foreign enemy, where they were made slaves or forcibly

resettled. However, the phrase was also used parabolically for one’s deliverance from affliction. Hence, scripture says “the LORD turned again the captivity of Job” (Job 42:10), although Job had not been carried into captivity by a foreign enemy. This wider, parabolic sense of restoring the fortunes of Israel was used to describe the salvation and blessed state of God’s people by the coming of the Messiah. Hence, the Psalmist says “Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad” (Ps. 14:7; cf. 53:6). Similarly, in a passage quoted by James as being fulfilled in Christ (Acts 15:14-18), the Lord said “I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel” (Amos 9:14). In still another messianic passage, the prophet Isaiah foretold the time when the Lord would “set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people” (Isa. 11:11). Finally, Hosea wrote “Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek

*the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days” (Hos. 3:5). “David their king” is a clear reference to Christ and shows that although the prophets in these passages had in immediate view the return of the Assyrio-Babylonian captivities, the *plenior sensus* looked to the gathering of God’s scattered people by the gospel of Christ. Moreover, the context of the present passage allows us to go further and say that to “bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem” includes the “times of refreshing” (Acts 3:19) that would attend the second coming of Christ, when he would redeem his people out of the hand of their persecutors and put his enemies (the Jews and Romans) beneath his feet.*

2 – I will also gather all nations,

The day of the Lord upon Jerusalem and the Jewish nation now widens to include the nations of the Roman Empire that would participate in persecution of Christ’s people and gospel. Christ’s government over all nations was foretold by the Psalmist when he wrote: *“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Ps. 2:8, 9). Jesus represents this prophecy as an accomplished fact in John’s missal to the church in Thyatira: “But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father” (Rev. 2:25-27). Jesus’ words to the church in Thyatira indicate that his coming was near, and prove that the second coming was not a far off or distant event, but would be accomplished within the lifetimes of first-generation believers. In fact, the imagery of Revelation is a portrayal beforehand of Christ’s coming to vindicate his gospel and redeem his church out of the hands of her persecutors by the judgments he visited upon the Jews and nations of the Roman Empire. It is this judgement that Joel sees here.*

and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat,

It is helpful to our understanding of the valley of Jehoshaphat if we first speak briefly about the valley of Megiddo. The valley of Megiddo was a strategic location originally captured by Joshua (Josh. 12:21), and later fortified by Solomon (I Kng. 9:15). It was in Megiddo that Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera, captain of the host of Jabin, king of the Canaanites (Jud. 5:19). The valley of Megiddo was also the place where Gideon defeated the Midianites (the valley

below the hill of Moreh - Jud. 7:1). Megiddo was located on the southwestern portion of the plain of Esdraelon. The area around the city of Jezreel in the same plain was sometimes called the valley of Jezreel (Hos. 1:5). Jezreel was the capital of the northern kingdom under Ahab (I Kng. 18:45, 46; 21:1, 23); it was the place where Jehu defeated the house of Ahab, and where queen Jezebel was slain (II Kng. 9:30-37). Ahaziah, king of Judah, who was allied with the house of Ahab, was wounded in the battle of Jezreel, and fled to Megiddo, where he died of his wounds (II Kng. 9:27). Hence, Megiddo was the site of several historic battles in which the Lord destroyed his enemies; it therefore attained symbolic eschatological importance as the place where the enemies of Christ would be defeated at his second coming (Rev. 16:16). The valley of Jehoshaphat is Joel’s eschatological equal of Megiddo as the place where God would judge the nations and enemies of his people.

The valley of Jehoshaphat attained symbolic significance when God destroyed the allied armies of the Moabites, Ammonites, and the inhabitants of Mount Seir when they came up against Judah. Jehoshaphat was told that they would not have to fight, but only to trust in God, who would deliver these three armies into his hand. Jehoshaphat and Judah thus marched into the wilderness singing unto the Lord where they found the armies of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Mount Seir had destroyed one another, leaving the valley filled with dead bodies. The abundance of riches and precious jewels discovered among the dead bodies was more than could be carried away, so that they were three days in gathering the spoils it was so much. On the fourth day they assembled and blessed the Lord for causing them to rejoice over their enemies, and called the name of the place the “valley of Berachah” (“blessing”), which name it retained thereafter (II Chron. 20:1-30). Joel thus evokes this valley to foreshow the great deliverance God would work for his people at the time of the *eschaton*, when Nero, the nations of the Roman Empire, and the Jews were gathered against the church to exterminate it.

and will plead with them there

The prophet has placed the time of this judgment in the New Testament era by the words “in those days, and at that time” (v. 1), referring to the period marked by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. This time of judgment would attend the commencement of Christ’s universal government over the nations. Paul thus told his Gentile audience at Athens:

Forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or

silver, or stone, graven by art of man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. Acts 17:29-31

In saying God had “appointed a day,” Paul does not mean that the judgment would *last* only one day, but rather that it would *commence* on a set day and thus continue thereafter. All judgment has been given unto the Son (John 5:22; Acts 10:42) and as long as the world endures he is its ruler and judge. Moreover, whereas God had not undertaken specifically to eradicate idolatry from the nations in former times, he now would, and his wrath is upon any nation that persists in rebellion against the gospel.

for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations,

The prophecy pertains to New Testament times, but evokes past offences of Israel's neighboring nations. Since it seems unlikely that these offenses would only belatedly become ripe for judgment after the appearance of Christ, the better view is that they are cited because they are *representative* of the sort of violence and depredations God's people had historically suffered, but which Christ would reverse and avenge as he advanced the fortunes of his people and put his enemies beneath his feet. Since this time of judgment occurs in the era of the Spirit, “my people” and “my heritage Israel” should be understood to refer to the New Testament church, which is the Israel of God by faith (Rom. 9:6-8; Gal. 6:16). Even so, there is a continuity of identity of the people of God that transcends the Testaments. Although branches of the unbelieving Jews were broken off and believing Gentiles were grafted in in their place, the olive-tree of God's people, supported by the root, which is Christ (Rom. 11:16-23), reaches across the Testaments. The woman in Revelation twelve is the Old Testament people laboring to be delivered from her enemies, but becomes the New Testament people by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rev. 12:1-17). The scattering of God's Old Testament people occurred primarily through wars and invading armies; scattering the church began as early as the persecution that arose over Stephen (Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19). Like scattered coals and embers of a fire that catch flame in the grass, the Jews' persecution of the church only served to spread the gospel; for those that were scattered “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

and parted my land.

When enemy forces invade a land, whole villages and cities often take flight, abandoning their homes and possessions, which the enemy then occupies. Joel evokes this familiar image against the enemies of God's people when he mentions “parting my land,” of which the Old Testament provides several examples (I Sam. 31:7; I Chrn. 10:7). Christians who fled for their lives at the outbreak of persecution necessarily had to abandon their homes and property, which their persecutors then plundered and spoiled, as testified by the epistle to the Hebrews:

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great flight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion on me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:32-34).

3 – And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.

Having taken a city or village, ancient warfare was such that the inhabitants were sometimes sold into slavery, or required to pay ransom for their release. In such cases, the captives were treated like part of the booty for which soldiers would gamble and cast lots. Intent upon carousing and fornicating after their victory, the soldiers might then part with their captives cheaply, giving a boy for money to buy a harlot, or a girl for money to buy drink.

4 – Yea, and what have ye to do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? will ye render me a recompence? and if ye recompence me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head;

National and regional jealousies historically incited military violence by neighboring peoples against Israel, seeking to settle old scores and grudges. The inhabitants of Tyre and Zidon were Phoenician; the inhabitants of the coasts of Palestine were Philistines. The prophet Amos mentions similar acts of predation by Tyrus against the Jews:

Thus saith the Lord: For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant. But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof.” Amos 1:9, 10

The punishment of Tyrus mentioned by Amos was almost certainly accomplished in the Assyrio-Babylonian invasions, particularly the armies of Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 26-28), and shows that judgment mentioned by Joel should be understood *typically*, as pointing in a general way to the time of Messiah, when his providential rule of the nations would avenge the oppression of his people against their enemies, of which of Tyre, Zidon, and Palestina were examples.

5 – Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things:

II Chronicles records events in the days of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, who ruled after his father's death, which may recount the incidents here referred to. Jehoram was a wicked king who walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for he had the daughter of Ahab for a wife. In his days, Edom revolted and the Philistines invaded and carried away all the substance of the king's house (II Chr. 21:1-20; cf. Amos 1:6-12). The atrocities and predations of the Philistines and Edomites alluded to here may have been avenged in part in the days of Uzziah (II Chr. 26:6, 7) and Hezekiah (II Kng. 18:8), kings of Judah, as it seems was foretold by Amos when he wrote "The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem" against the Edom and remnant of the Philistines (Amos 1:7, 8, 1, 12).

6 - The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border.

It is likely that at the time Edom revolted and the Philistines invaded Judah during the days of Jehoram that captives were taken and sold to various peoples, including the Greeks. Although these ravishes were permitted against Judah and Jerusalem for its sins, the bitter hatred and cruelty of the Edomites and Philistines was deserving of divine vengeance and would not go unpunished.

7 – Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head:

It was a strategy of ancient warfare to prevent renewal of hostilities by deporting conquered peoples to foreign lands. This would not work in the present case, for God would bring again the captives. This may have been fulfilled in the time of Alexander the Great and his successors when many Jewish slaves were set at liberty. Ptolemy Philadelphus set free a vast number of Jews to secure a translation of the Hebrew scriptures

for his library in Alexandria (Josephus, Ant. 12.2.3), and Demetrius wrote to Jonathan Maccabeus, to secure him as an ally, that he set at liberty all Jews who were captive or slaves in his kingdom (Josephus, Ant. 13.2.3).

8 –And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the LORD hath spoken it.

J. J. Given notes that following the seven month siege of Tyre by Alexander the Great, 13,000 citizens were sold into slavery.¹ During the period of the Maccabees, the Tyrians together with the citizens of Ptolemais made an incursion into Galilee to waste the Jews, but were defeated and chased to the very gates of Ptolemais by Simon Maccabeus, who slew about 3,000 of them, took the spoils of those they had slain; and such as were inhabitants of Galilee and Arbattis Simon took captive, together with their wives and children, and carried them into Judea (I Macc. 5.14-23; Josephus, Ant. 12.13.1, 2).

9 – Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up:

Verses 4-8 stand as something of a parenthesis recounting the past offenses of Israel's neighbors and their vindication, which would be typical of the vengeance Christ would accomplish for his New Testament church. Hence, Christ's coming against the church's enemies would be spiritual and providential, not physical and visible, just as it had been against Tyre, Zidon, and the Philistines during the intertestamental period. Christ thus issues the war cry against the unregenerate of the nations that they should prepare for war, because his wrath would shortly overtake them for their persecution of his people. The marginal reading is "sanctify for war," pointing to the religious rites used by various nations to evoke the favor of the gods in preparing for battle. At bottom, the contest would be spiritual; drawn along religious lines; divided between those who served Christ and those that opposed him.

10 – Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong.

The exigencies of war require the quick manufacture of arms; men are thus urged to convert their implements of agriculture into swords and spears to meet the crisis

¹ J.J. Given "The Book of Joel" in *The Pulpit Commentary* (Peabody, MS, Hendrickson), 49.

before them. None are exempted from the contest; all must prepare; the weak amongst the heathen must take courage and say he is able and strong. The case is therefore the opposite of the people of Christ's kingdom. When the Jews disobeyed the Lord, he left the nations of Canaan unconquered in order to "teach them war" (Jud. 3:2; cf. 2:1-23), meaning to teach them the horrors of war and the terrible price of their rebellion and disobedience to the voice of the Lord. Conversely, the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah looked to a time when God's people would "beat their swords into plowshares and the spears into pruning hooks" and would not "learn war anymore" because of their faith and obedience to Christ (Isa. 2:2-5; Mic. 4:1-5). In the coming battle against the heathen persecutors, Christ would wage war on his people's behalf; like in the days of Jehoshaphat when Judah marched into the wilderness only to spoil the dead, Christ's church would not have to fight, but merely stand by and watch the destruction of their enemies.

11 – Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD.

This verse describes the marshaling of heathen armies unto their doom. But the heathen here must be understood to include the apostate nation of Jews, for they were allied with Rome against Christ and the church. "Thy mighty ones" is God's angelic host whose unseen orchestration of events works providentially to defeat the enemy.

12 – Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about.

Gathering unto the valley of Jehoshaphat is merely figurative, and describes the nations' persecution of the church under Nero and the Jews, and the victory God would work on his people's behalf. Ezekiel describes Nero's end-time persecution under the imagery of Gog and Magog, a great heathen hoard that descends like a storm upon "restored Israel" (the church), which dwell in "un-walled villages, having neither bars nor gates" (possessing no earthly defenses) (Ezek. 38:1-11):

Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord God; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a might army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen

may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes. Ezek. 38:14-16

Like Pharaoh and Egypt whom God raised up in order to show his power by putting them down (Ex. 9:16; cf. Rom. 9:17), Christ would manifest his divine power and godhead in Nero, the Jews, and the nations of the Roman Empire when he avenged the blood of his apostles and prophets.

13 – Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great.

Christ's vengeance upon his enemies is likened unto treading a wine press; men and nations are brought together in war where they are made to drink the cup of divine wrath. Isaiah foretold the time when God's servants would see his wrath upon their oppressors:

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This is that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?

I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?

I have trodden the wine press alone; and of the people there was none wit me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. Isa. 63:1-4

14 – Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: Josephus reports that 1,100,000 Jews perished in the siege of Jerusalem. However, the whole number Jews that perished in the war was 1,337,490. According to Josephus, "the multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world."² But heaven's wrath was not confined to the Jews. Italy and Rome also bore the stamp of divine disapproval:

Upon this year, disgraced by so many deeds of shame, Heaven also set its mark by tempest and by disease. Campania was wasted by a whirlwind, which far and wide wrecked the farms, the fruit trees, and the crops, and carried its fury to the neighbourhood of the capital, where all classes of men were being decimated by a deadly epidemic. No outward sign of a distempered air was visible. Yet the houses were filled

² Josephus, Wars, 6.9.3, 4

*with lifeless bodies, the streets with funerals. Neither sex nor age gave immunity from danger; slaves and free-born populace alike were summarily cut down, amid the laments of their wives and children, who, themselves infected while tending or mourning the victims, were often burnt upon the same pyre. Knights and senators, though they perished on all hands, were less deplored—as if, by undergoing the common lot, they were cheating the ferocity of the emperor.*³

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

These were but the beginnings of sorrows. In the very midst of the Jews' war with Rome, civil war broke out in the Roman Empire and the "year of four emperors" (AD 69) ensued. The slaughter of Romans by Romans was exceeding great, as the armies of competing claimants for the throne destroyed one another. Tacitus reports that Otho's troops "'burned, devastated, and looted" Italy "as if they were on foreign shores and in an enemy's cities."⁴ The armies of Vitellius behaved much the same:

But the distress of Italy was now heavier and more terrible than that inflicted by war. The troops of Vitellius, scattering among the municipalities and colonies, indulged in every kind of robbery, theft, and violence and debauchery. Their greed and venality knew no distinction between right and wrong; they respected nothing, whether sacred or profane. There were cases too where, under the disguise of soldiers, men murdered their personal enemies; and the soldiers in their turn, being acquainted with the country, marked out the best-stocked farms and richest owners for booty or destruction, in case any resistance was made. The generals were subject to their troops and did not dare to forbid them...Italy, whose wealth had long before been exhausted, now found all these troops, foot and horse, all this violence, loss, and suffering an intolerable burden.

Dio Cassius reports that 40,000 fell in one battle between the forces of Otho and Vitellius.⁵ Some forty days after the battle, Vitellius surveyed the scene where the corpses of 40,000 soldiers lay rotting: "When he came to the plains where the battle was fought and some shuddered with horror at the mouldering corpses, he had the audacity to encourage them by the abominable remark that the odour of a dead enemy was sweet and that of a fellow citizen sweeter still." Later, in a battle between the forces of Vitellius and Vespasian, 50,000 perished at Cremona and 50,000 more in the siege of Rome.

³ Tacitus

⁴ Tacitus, *Histories*, 2:12.

⁵ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 63.10.3

15 – The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.

Armies going forth to battle look for favorable signs and portents to heighten their morale for the battle. Instead, darkness and despair descend upon the disobedient of the nations; the sun and moon are darkened and the stars withdraw their bright shining.⁶

16 – The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake:

Like a lion roaring upon his prey, the Lord would shout from Zion and utter his voice from Jerusalem. The sound would be so terrible, the very heavens would shake and the foundations of the earth would be moved out of place. The disorders of the natural world bespeak the upset of earthly political and military powers as Christ establishes his kingdom over the world.

but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.

Although there would be great wrath upon the nations, God would be a sun and a shield to his people.

17 – So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy,

Under the Old Testament economy, God's presence dwelt in Zion between the cherubim within the Holy of Holies (Ex. 33:7-11 34:34; 7:89; I Sam. 4:4). However, the earthly Jerusalem of the Old Testament was replaced by the heavenly Jerusalem of the New Testament, and the tabernacle has been replaced by the church:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly

⁶ Evoking similar imagery, Shakespeare thus causes the heavens to be frown upon Richard the Third as he goes to meet his doom in battle:

K. Rich: "Tell the clock there. Give me a calendar. Who saw the sun today?"

Rat: "Not I, my Lord."

K. Rich: "Then he disdains to shine; for by the book He should have brav'd the east an hour ago: A black day will it be to somebody. Ratcliff—"

Ratcliff: "My lord?"

K. Rich: "The sun will not be seen to-day; The sky doth frown and lower upon our army."

framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Eph. 2:19-22; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5, 6

and there shall no strangers pass through her any more.

The meaning here is that the heaven Jerusalem, the church, will never suffer capture by foreign armies, but will rest secure as the spiritual city and covenantal habitation of the saints. According to John “*And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life*” (Rev. 21:27).

18 – And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters,

“In that day” describes the era marked by the outpouring of the Spirit. New wine, milk, and waters bespeak the fatness of the land and great plenitude God’s people would enjoy. Following the vengeance upon the persecutors, God’s people would enjoy great peace and plenty, irrigated by the Spirit of God and the word of the Gospel.

and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD,

The fountain is the gospel; the house of the Lord, the church. The world would be irrigated with the gospel of salvation by the church preaching the word. Zechariah uses similar imagery to speak of the redemption and remission of sins that would flow from Jesus’ cross: “*In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness*” (Zech. 13:1). Ezekiel describes the gospel as a small rivulet flowing from the house of the Lord that grew as proceeded until it became a mighty river bringing life wherever it went, even healing the waters of the Dead Sea (Ezek. 47:1-12).

and shall water the valley of Shittim.

The valley of Shittim is the plain east of Jordan opposite of Jerecho where the Israelites encamped before crossing Jordan. (Num. 25:1; 33:49). It is also the place where the Jews committed whoredom with the daughters of the Moabites and seems here to symbolize the great trackless wastes of paganism that would be water with the gospel and bear fruit to God.

19 – Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

Egypt and Edom were ancient oppressors and persecutors of God’s people, and thus stand for all who set themselves as enemies of Christ and the gospel. Although the gospel would irrigate the world and bring salvation to all peoples, the enemies of the gospel are destined to become desolate wastes “because they have shed” the blood of the saints “in their land.” Ezekiel makes the same point when he says that although, the river of the gospel would carry life wherever it went, “the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt” (Ezek. 47:11). The miry places and marshes represent the nations of those refusing the gospel, who instead of receiving life and blessing, are given over to “salt” and burning. Zechariah makes the same point this way:

And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be plague, wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles” Zech. 14:17-19

The “feast of tabernacles” commemorated the Jews first encampment at *Succoth* after departing from Egypt; which term signifies *booths*, thus serving for the name of the feast *tabernacles*, and thus stood for God’s great deliverance (Ex. 12:37; Num. 33:5; cf. Lev. 23:39-44). However, here, rather than pointing back to the exodus from Egypt, tabernacles looks to our salvation from sin by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and is therefore the symbolic equal of Christ as our Passover Lamb.

20 – But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation.

This verse bespeaks the security of God’s people. Under the Old Testament economy, possession of the land had been provisional and conditional upon obedience to the law of the covenant. When the Jews broke the law, abandoning God, their nation was invaded and the people were carried into captivity. The spiritual nation of the New Testament, although equally capable of apostasy by individual members, can never be carried into captivity itself, but rests secure within the breast of all sincere believers wherever they may be.

21 – For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion.

When the Judah was carried into captivity to Babylon, it was because God was unwilling to forgive the innocent blood shed by Manasseh:

Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon. II Kng. 24:3, 4

The innocent blood that God was unwilling to forgive leading to the captivity, would be pardoned and the Jews restored to their land. Hence, the captivity of the Jews was followed by a second exodus from Assyria and Babylon and all the places where God had driven them, and thus became a prophetic foreshadow of the great deliverance that God would affect in Christ by whose cross God would cleanse the blood theretofore he had not cleansed, forgiving us all our trespasses, reconciling us to himself by the blood of Jesus.

This photo is of a group baptism in the Philippines by a preterist minister who has received The Sword & The Plow for many years. What a happy moment to see so many souls added to Christ! Keep up your good work, Percival.



Questions from our Readers

Q: Hello! Thank you for the newsletter! For some reason, I just saw the e-mail today.

In the preterist world I am familiar with Don Preston, William Bell, Holger Neubauer, and my good friend Steve Baisden, but I ran across your name because someone shared your commentary on Daniel - good stuff by the way!

Would you mind giving me a call sometime, or we can stick to e-mail, and further explain some of the differences between your understanding and Preston's?

A: The difference between Don Preston and myself and the majority of Preterists is that Don believes that the eschatological resurrection consisted in a *restored relationship* with God. That is to say, Don does not believe Christ's atonement was complete at the cross; Don's believes the law was still binding, valid, and obligatory so that the saints continued under bondage to sin until AD 70 when they were only then justified from sin and "resurrected" out of the grave of sin-death. Thus, Don spiritualizes the resurrection, making it equal to justification from sin. Justification does not come until AD 70 because in Don's view the law, and hence, sin and death, was still reigning. Only in AD 70 does Don believe the law was taken away and we were justified from sin.

I believe Don's view contradicts the historical faith of the church, which says that justification and atonement were complete at the cross and that grace triumphs over the law. Col. 2:14-17 is crystal clear that at the cross God "took out of the way" the handwriting of ordinances that were against us, and that Jesus triumphed over the powers of sin and death in his cross.

Essentially, Don's paradigm ends up making the destruction of Jerusalem the essential focus of salvation, rather than the cross. In my mind, this is serious because strikes at the very foundation of our salvation.

The Bible is very clear that the law ended at the cross: "Christ is the end of the law to all that believe." Rom. 10:5. Circumcision, the dietary restrictions, prohibitions against fellowship with Gentiles, etc., were all abolished in Christ's cross (Eph. 2:15). To

argue that the law continued to reign over Christians until AD 70 is to say that law triumphed over grace and that nothing happened at the cross. To me, that is a dangerous message. Fortunately, however, Don is in a minority position among Preterists. Most preterists do not agree with his view of the resurrection.

Hope that helps. (P.S. – I consider Don a talented and beloved brother in Christ despite our differences on this issue.)

Q: Daily Bible Reading - December 1 - We Will Judge Angels? Our local "experts" don't have an answer to this question; do you? Paul states "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" What is meant by that?

A: My take on this is that "judging" carries the sense of "ruling," like the judges of Israel before the period of the kings. During that period, judges like Samuel ruled the nation. In the resurrection I believe we will help Christ govern the world, and will be given responsibility for various aspects of ministering to the saints and advancing the gospel. (See Jesus' parable of the talents where the faithful are given cities to rule, Matt. 19:12-27.) That we shall "judge" angels in my mind means that in heaven we may have angels under our authority as our assistants to help govern the world from the heavenly realms, advancing the gospel, *etc.*

Another possibility is that "angels" here are like the "sons of God" in Gen. 6 and describe apostates from the faith, false prophets of Israel, and the like. The word "angel" merely signifies a messenger. The idea that angels are strictly heavenly beings is a concept imported by our English language, not the original Greek or Hebrew. Men are called angels many times in the NT (John the Baptist, for example when Malachi says "I will send my messenger before you," the Greek is *angelos*). Thus, Paul may be saying that we will join in judging false teachers and false prophets, similar to the passage where Jesus says the Queen of Sheba would rise up in the resurrection and condemn the Jews, etc. I do not however believe in fallen angels or demonic spirits, so I do not see this verse as pointing to anything like that.

Hope that helps. Blessings!

The New Heavens and Earth

Kurt Simmons

Introduction

There are many misconceptions about the new heavens and new earth mentioned in the Bible. Some believe that the eternal state is alluded to; others that a future paradise on earth is in view; still others that the New Testament is symbolized. However, none of these views enjoys support of the scriptures. The following is a verse-by-verse exposition of the promised new heavens and earth. We will conclude that the new heavens and earth were symbols for the prevailing conditions and changed fortunes of God's people in the world under the reigning Christ following the tribulation of the last days; they look to New Testament times, but are not the New Testament itself.

Isaiah: The Source of the Imagery

The promise of the new heavens and earth occurs in Isaiah, where the prophet uses it to describe the happy circumstance of God's people after the time of tribulation and persecution is past, and their enemies are destroyed. The prophecy moves alternately between the coming destruction of the rebellious among the Jews and the blessing of salvation upon those that obey. The historical context may look in the first instance to the nation's captivity under the Assyrians and Babylonians and the return of the captivity under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, but, unquestionably, the prophecy looks beyond these events unto the eschatological judgments and blessing of the Messiah.

Jews Refuse the Gospel

First, the prophet describes the Jews' obstinate rebellion and unwillingness to obey God's word, and the resultant wrath they would suffer:

I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name. I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts...Behold, it is

written before me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom...I will measure their former work into their bosom." Isa. 65:1, 2, 6, 7

St. Paul applies these verses to the time of the Messiah, when the Jewish nation was resisting the gospel and persecuting the church, but the Gentiles were flowing into the kingdom like flocks of sheep. (Rom. 10:20) Those that had not formerly sought God now suddenly found him; but those whom God had eagerly sought after and entreated, refused his offer of grace. The like *scenario* played out in the days of the Assyrians and Babylonians, in which the prophets warned and entreated only to be persecuted and slain, yet strangers from among the Gentiles, like Nebuchadnezzar, obeyed the living God.

A Remnant of Jews Would Believe and Obey

The prophet next describes God's salvation for the remnant of those that obey:

Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not: for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there. Isa. 65: 8, 9

The prophet then alternates between the two in a series of verses (vv. 11-13), which conclude with the destruction of the wicked among the Jews, who leave their name (Israel) as it were a curse for God's people (so hated were they among the nations), but God would call his faithful by a new name: *Christian*.

Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name. Isa. 65:14, 15

In the beginning of the gospel, the Roman world did not distinguish between Jews and Christians, for they seemed to be but sects of the same religion. Thus, the confusion caused the Jews' name to be applied with disadvantage to the Christians in hatred and reproach. However, by the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, this was no longer true, and the world came to distinguish distinctly between the two. The Lord would thus slay the Jews, but assign a new name to his people. The term Christian is the divinely appointed name for God's people. It was given first at Antioch of Syria. (Acts 11:26) Peter says if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but to glorify God in this behalf. (I Pet. 4:16)

The Promised New Heavens and Earth after the Time of Trouble

Isaiah next describes the happy estate of his servants when the time of tribulation and persecution is past:

The former troubles are past forgotten...they are hid from mine eyes. For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembers, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. Isa. 65:16-19

The new heavens and earth describe the changed circumstances of God's people, in which the former troubles were now forgotten. Whereas they had been under oppression and persecution by their fellow countrymen who refused to heed God's word, they would see happier times. The time of national and personal sorrow under the Assyrians and Babylonians (in the first instance, but in the Messianic context, under the Jews and Romans,) would give way to a time when the faithful of God's people would enjoy security and peace. The Jerusalem that had suffered siege and famine would give way to a Jerusalem that enjoyed an abundance of peace. The inhabitants of the new Jerusalem would "dwell every man under his vine and under his fig tree." (Isa. 65:21) We should not mistake the poetic description of the new Jerusalem for the new heavens and earth. The prophet's language saying "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock" refers only to "the holy mountain" of the Lord (Isa. 65:25), not the world at large. Only in the church do the conditions described prevail. Millennialists commonly make this very

mistake by applying language intended only for the church to the whole world, supposing a time of universal peace is foretold.

The Second Coming

The preceding portion of the prophecy makes no direct reference to the coming of Christ; we are told the rebellious would be destroyed, but not how. The prophecy continues in chapter sixty-six; this time, however, the prophet makes unmistakable reference to the destruction of the Jewish nation by the second coming of Christ. First, the prophet describes God's anger for the Jews' idolatrous devotion to the temple:

Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. Isa. 66: 1, 2

Stephen quoted this verse before the Sanhedrin when accused of saying that Christ would come and destroy the city and temple. (Acts 6:14, 15; 7:48-50) His point in quoting the prophet is to show that he was affirming nothing that had not been foretold centuries before and therefore could not be accused of impiety toward the temple and service of God. However, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, the Sanhedrin would not listen, and stoned Stephen. The Jews' obstinate refusal to accept the gospel even while clinging to the empty temple ritual was foreseen by Isaiah, who thus foretold the coming destruction in the prophecy here. Hence, the prophet next describes God's disdain for the temple cultus:

He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. (Isa. 66:3, 4)

The offerings of the temple are likened to unclean and abominable things; they were no longer acceptable because Christ had carried his blood within the Holy of Holies. The continuing temple ritual was an implicit denial of Christ's sacrifice.

Jewish Persecution of Christians Foretold

Next, Isaiah speaks to the persecution of Christians by unbelieving Jews and the promise of Christ's coming:

Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. Isa. 66: 5

Christ "Appears" to Save His People, and Destroy the Jews

The "appearance" of Christ is referred to by the writer of Hebrews, who says Christ as our High Priest would appear a second time to put his enemies beneath his feet. (Heb. 9:27) The apostle John seems to have this verse in mind when he exhorted his readers to persevere under persecution that they "be not ashamed before him at his coming." (I Jno. 2:28) The appearance of Christ would be providential, not physical or visible, and would mark the destruction of Jerusalem and the relief of the church. This is clear from what Isaiah says next, describing Christ coming in wrath upon the nation:

*A voice of noise from **the city**, a voice from **the temple**, as voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies...For, behold, **the Lord will come with fire**, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. Isa. 66: 5, 15*

Here is explicit reference to the coming of the Lord to destroy his enemies in the events culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, predictions repeated by Christ in his Olivet discourse. (Matt. 24, 25; Mk. 13; Lk. 21) We can know that the second coming is being described because the prophet portrays the new heavens and earth following the destruction of the city and temple. (Isa. 66:22-24; cf. Matt. 19:28; Rev. 21, 22) The prophet states that those who escaped the siege – *Christians who obeyed Jesus' warning to flee when they saw the city compassed about with armies (Lk. 21:20, 21)* – would declare God's glory (preach the gospel) among the Gentiles. (Isa. 66:19) Isaiah states that these would become the spiritual "priests and Levites" (cf. I Pet. 2:5) of the New Testament in the new heavens and earth:

*"And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord. For as the **new heavens and the new earth**, which I make, shall remain before me,*

*saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall **all flesh** come and worship before me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."* (Isa. 66:21-24)

"All flesh" is equivalent to "every creature" and "all nations" of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15, 16). "Worshipping before the Lord" points to the assimilation of the Gentiles into the kingdom (church). Those whose carcasses were eaten of fire and worms refers to the bodies of the Jews who perished in the ravages of war, famine, and pestilence during the siege. Josephus reports that eleven-hundred-thousand Jews (1.1 million) were slain in the siege of Jerusalem.⁷ These were cast out of the city into the valley of Gehenna during the siege, where they lay swollen and putrefied, eaten of maggots and worms.⁸

This brief survey shows that the new heavens and earth spoke to the time when the church would emerge victorious after a time of persecution. Whereas they had been scorned and rejected, put out of the synagogue and even put to death, the Lord would vindicate his gospel and avenge his servants' blood. The Jews would be destroyed in the war with Rome, but the church would go on to *inherit the world*.

Other Aspects of the New Heavens and Earth

Conclusion

The new heavens and earth were symbols for the prevailing conditions and changed fortunes of God's people in the world under the reigning Christ following the tribulation of the last days; they look to New Testament times, but are not the New Testament itself.

⁷ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI, ix, 3. This figure does not include that perished in foreign cities or died in battles throughout the rest of the Judah and Galilee.

⁸ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V, xii, 3, 4.

Restored Israel

and the Kingdom of the Messiah

Kurt Simmons

One does not have to move in dispensationalist circles long before he hears that the establishment of modern state of Israel in Palestine fulfills prophecies that mark the imminent return of Christ. Underlying this doctrine is the belief that modern state of Israel has a continuing claim upon God's special favor and occupies an important place in future pages of redemption's story. However, this view is sorely mistaken. The modern state of Israel is antichrist; it is a cursing and execration; its very existence stands in denial of the Sonship, Kingdom, and Priesthood of Christ, and has no further role to play in the sacred history of salvation. It is not the *political* restoration of Israel the prophets spoke to, but the *spiritual* restoration of man in Christ.

The Tower of Babel and the Call of Abraham

Scripture records that, early into the history of the race, God was required to divinely intervene to save mankind. The first such instance was the flood of Noah. The circumstance bringing on the flood was a general turning away of men from God, but, more especially, the apostasy of the world's few believers, called the "sons of God," by profanely marrying the daughters of unbelieving men. The children of these unions grew up to be "giants" (Heb. *Nephil*, a "tree-feller" *e.g.*, a tyrant or despot, *cf.* Isa. 14:8 where the like term is used of the king of Babylon), who filled the earth with violence and oppression. (Gen. 6:1-4, 11) By their marriages to unbelieving women, the existence of a righteous seed was threatened, requiring God's divine intervention lest the righteous perish from the earth. The absolute necessity for the flood may be seen in the fact that, out of all mankind, only eight souls were brought through its waters. (I Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 2:5)⁹

After the flood, scripture records that the earth was of one tongue and lived and dwelt together in the plain of

Shinar. (Gen. 11:1, 2)¹⁰ The people's manner of life at this juncture can only be described as one of disbelief and disaffection from God, epitomized by the erection of a tower whose height they intended to reach to very heaven itself. (v. 4) Like weeds choking out the goodly herbs and vegetables of a garden, the commingling of the righteous and the wicked in a single social and political organization threatened extinction of the godly seed. Hence, God divinely intervened to save mankind a second time by confounding their language, causing them to part asunder and populate the remote places of the earth and the isles of the sea in order that, by scattering abroad mankind, the goodly seed might have room to grow unaffected by the habits and customs of the wicked. (Gen. 11:1-9) It is against this background that we are introduced to Abraham.

The call of Abraham is given in Gen. 12:1-3:

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

The evil manners of the wicked are transmitted more readily than the righteousness habits of the believing are learned. The commingling of the righteous and wicked, whether by marriage before the flood or in a single social structure after the flood, had threatened the existence of a righteous seed altogether. The significance of our introduction to Abraham at this juncture of sacred history is to show God's work in preserving a goodly seed in the earth by making of Abraham a *separate* nation unto himself. However, this work would not culminate in the founding of national Israel under Moses, but in the *church* of the

⁹ These same men are probably the "angels" that sinned and were cast down to tartarus under chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment. (II Pet. 2:4)

¹⁰ The crisis requiring confounding the people's tongue came only 101 years after the deluge. This is seen from the genealogies in Gen. 11:10-16 tracing the offspring of Shem unto Peleg, in whose days the earth was divided. (Gen. 10:25)

Lord Christ. National Israel was merely *provisional*; it served to nurture and keep alive a righteous seed until the kingdom of the Messiah, into which people of every race and language would be gathered. This is the meaning of the promise that in Abraham *all nations* of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3) Under the Mosaic economy, one's ability to participate in the blessings of Israel depended upon his status under the law; to inherit a patrimony and be enrolled in the congregation depended upon whether one was slave or free, male or female, Jew or Greek. In Christ, none of these distinctions affect one's hope of salvation. Through obedience to the Gospel, every race and language of men are made heirs of the promise to Abraham: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heir according to the promise." (Ga. 3:27-29; cf. Jno. 1:13; 3:3-5)

No nation can exist as a separate entity without laws defining its borders, organizing its powers, and enforcing its decrees. God instituted Israel as a nation separate from the heathen by the ordinances of the Mosaic law, which served as a "wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile. (Eph. 2:14; cf. Isa. 5:1-7) However, in Christ, the wall of partition was broken down that he might create in himself one new man, and reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God in *one body* by the cross. (Eph. 2:14-16; cf. 1:10) If all soteriological distinction between Jew and Gentile is abolished in Christ, what basis is there for believing that national Israel occupies some favored place in the divine scheme after the institution of the church?

Nationhood consists in the sum total of the laws and institutions which mark a people off from the rest of mankind. Abolition of the law separating Jew from Gentile of necessity meant the termination of fleshly Israel as a nation before God. To be a Jew, if such is to have any Biblical meaning at all, must find its origin in the sacred scriptures. Therefore, if the law was abolished under scripture, so was Biblical Judaism. Having been thus dissolved like so many grains of salt in the sea, Judaism can only be restored by reinstatement of the Mosaic law. But the temple service and sacrifices of the law pointed to Christ; they were merely the types and shadows of which Christ is the body and substance. (Col. 1:19; 2:16, 17; Heb. 10:1-4) Hence, reversion to the law of Moses is an implicit *denial* of the Sonship and priesthood of Christ. And this is nothing if not apostasy.¹¹ "For if I

¹¹ Apparently some accommodation was made for Jewish Christians living in Palestine during the transition period, permitting them to

build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." (Gal. 2:18) Indeed, it was their obstinate adherence to the temple and its service that marked the Jewish nation for destruction in A.D. 70 by the hand of Rome:

"He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies." (Isa. 66:3-6)

Jesus made the like prophecy regarding destruction of Jerusalem and Judea (Matt. 23:34-24:34; Lk. 19:41-44; 23:27-31), as did both Peter and Stephen. (Acts 2:20, 40; 6:14) God was pleased to destroy the nation for rejecting Christ; the Old Covenant is abolished, the Jews have *no* covenantal relationship with God today. The modern state of Israel is founded in very denial of the Lordship of Christ. Far from being a token of God's continuing favor toward the Jews, the reestablishment of the modern state of Israel is a token of their continuing rebellion against Christ and God. We may fairly assume that, in God's own time, they will again suffer wrath and destruction.

Restored Israel in the Prophets

So much for the big picture of Israel's provisional place in God's redemptive purpose, how does this picture bear out in the prophets? Does the image given in the prophets accord with the one we have just sketched? Listen to Isaiah:

"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria, and

continue certain customs and observances associated with the Mosaic law that Gentiles were prohibited to keep as denying the truth of the Gospel. (Cf. Acts 21:20-25; Gal. 5:1-4; Col.2:14-17)

from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.” Isa. 11:10, 11

The Messianic context of this prophecy is seen in the reference to the “root of Jesse,” which points to the promise that Christ would spring from the fruit of David’s loins. (II Sam. 7:12-14) The catalogue of nations mentioned reflect the places where Israel and Judah were scattered in the desolations suffered under Assyria and Babylon and show that a modern-day fulfillment is beyond the contemplation of the text. The point of the prophecy is that, as God gathered his people a *first* time in the return of the captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah, so he would gather them a *second* time into Christ. Jesus is the standard or ensign around which all men would rally, a beacon to give light to those in darkness, providing glorious rest from the labor and anguish of sin. John the Baptist spoke to the gathering of Israel by the Messiah when he said: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matt. 3:11, 12) The “garner” is Christ’s kingdom-church, into which are gathered all who obey the gospel message; the “chaff” consisted of unbelieving Jews who were consumed in the conflagration (“baptized with fire”) that enveloped the nation in A.D. 70.

In Hosea we read concerning the restoration of Israel:

Now when she had weaned Loruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel. (Hos. 1:8-11)

This prophecy spoke to the Assyrian invasion and carrying into captivity of the northern tribes. For their abominations they “were not God’s people” and hence were cast away. However, in time to come, God would gather his people together again from all the places where they had been scattered. Although presumably this began to be fulfilled in the return of the captivity

from Babylon, the prophecy looks beyond national restoration unto the spiritual restoration of *all* mankind in Christ. We may be certain of this inasmuch as the New Testament writers, by the Holy Ghost, apply this passage unto the conversion of the Gentiles. (Rom. 9:25, 26; I Pet. 2:10) “For they are not all Israel which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” (Rom. 9:6-8) The children of “Israel” who would be united with the children of Judah were not the *physical* descendants of Abraham carried away by the Assyrians. The children of Israel were the *spiritual* seed and progeny of Abraham, the children of the Promised Seed, Jesus Christ. Thus, the prophecy of Hosea did not have in view the political restoration of national Israel at all, but the gathering together of earth’s peoples under the “one head” of Christ. (Eph. 1:10; 2:16)

Ezekiel made the like prophecy of Israel’s restoration:

“Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all...And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them...and I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.” Ezek. 37:21-26

Ezekiel is not saying that Christ would be an earthly king over restored Israel in Judah. Indeed, when Jesus perceived that the people would come to take him by force to make him king, he hid himself apart in a mountain alone (Jno. 6:15) – conduct inconsistent with one appointed to reign from an earthly throne. The Jews wanted a national liberator to free them from the yoke of Rome, but Jesus came to free men, not from political or military rule, but from the bondage of *sin and death*. Having brought his people back from Babylon and the places they were scattered, their true King would reign over them *spiritually*, not nationally or politically. Thus, when Christ was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, Gabriel said “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” (Lk. 1:32, 33) The angel’s prophecy was fulfilled in Christ’s resurrection and ascension. At his ascension, Jesus received coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords,

and was given the throne of David. Peter makes this plain in the very first gospel sermon preached after the Lord's ascension:

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:32-36)

Thus, by the plain statement of Peter by the Holy Ghost, Jesus sat down upon the David's throne in heaven, thenceforth to await his enemies to be made a stool beneath his feet.

Amos provides the following picture of restored Israel and the Davidic throne:

"In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this...and I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." Amos 9:11-15

The Davidic throne had been thrown down in the captivity under Babylon and the Gentiles ruled over God's people. Amos thus looks to a time when the Davidic throne would be restored and its occupant rule over the Gentiles in restored Israel. Although this prophecy may well have begun to be fulfilled in the return of the captivity from Babylon, it is clear that the idealized picture it represents looks beyond national restoration unto spiritual restoration in Christ. Hence, James indicates fulfillment of this prophecy by the bringing in of the Gentiles into the church. (Acts 15:13-17)

The union of men from every race and language under the kingship of Christ bespeaks a reversal of the division made at Babel. Hence, we may expect language pointing to a time when a common tongue would be restored to mankind. Just such a picture is

given in Zephaniah: "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." (Zeph. 3:9) The first, faint glimmerings of the fulfillment of Zephaniah's prophecy occurred on Pentecost after Christ's resurrection, when people from the whole inhabited world heard the apostles speak to them the wonderful works of God in their own tongue. (Acts 2:1-11) Of course, Zephaniah's prophecy is merely poetic and not intended to indicate that all languages would one day vanish and single tongue obtain again among mankind. The "pure language" the prophet mentioned is better understood as the word of the gospel. Rather than the babble of confused religious profession that formerly obtained, the nations would be turned the pure faith of the gospel, and Jew and Gentile "with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 15:6)

The Destruction of Jerusalem

The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 marked the final earthly scene in the restitution of all things. This is because the kingdom of the Messiah had to be purged of all who refused to serve Israel's King before it could properly be deemed restored. "And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." (Acts 3:21-23) Hear Isaiah:

"And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinner shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed." (Isa. 1:25-28)

The restoration of Israel's judges and counselors would be effected by the purging of her dross and the destruction of her sinners. Then would the kingdom be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. But this never happened in national Israel's history. Even after the return of the captivity the people never recovered their national piety and devotion. Malachi speaks to the apostasy of the children of the captivity and prophesies the coming of a second "Elijah" (John the Baptist) to restore the spiritual foundations of the kingdom and prepare a people for the Lord. (Mal. 3:7-4:6; cf. Matt. 11:14) It is therefore manifest that Isaiah's prophecy looks beyond national restoration from the captivity unto the kingdom of the Messiah. (Cf. Isa. 2:1-4) Numerous parables of Jesus make plain this aspect of Israel's restoration.

“A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return...But his servants hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having receive the kingdom, then he commanded...those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me.” (Lk. 19:12-27)

This parable speaks directly to the destruction of Jerusalem. The King’s enemies were the Jews who did not want to live under Christ’s reign. Having received the church-kingdom, Jesus caused the unbelieving Jews to be slain. “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never save suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” (Lk. 23:28-31) Jesus was the green tree, the disbelieving Jews were the dry tree. If Jesus suffered such things, what would the Jews suffer? “Trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 12), the disobedient were cut down and cast in the fire. (Matt. 3:10)

“As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of his world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:40-42)

The “end of the world” (*Gk., aion*) is the end of the Mosaic age and dispensation. At the end of the age, Jesus would cause all the rebellious and unbelieving servants to be gathered out of his kingdom and cast into a “furnace of fire.” The furnace here answers to the “unquenchable fire” that John the Baptist said would consume the chaff. (Matt. 3:12) The angels are the ministers of God’s wrath, the Romans: “For he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” (Rom. 13:4) The Lord of the vineyard came and destroyed the husbandmen, and gave the vineyard to others. (Lk. 20:9-16) The kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to a nation bringing for the fruits thereof. (Mat. 21:43)

Conclusion

The restoration of Israel was spiritual, not national or political. National Israel’s place in the divine economy

was merely provisional. They were “vessels of wrath” (Rom. 9:22) fitted for destruction, which God bore with over long centuries of rebellion and disobedience. They filled up the measure of their national sin when they crucified the Lord of Glory and persecuted his church and, hence, were destroyed. Today, the church is the Israel of God. (Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:16) It consists of men of every race and language who men are gathered into the Messianic kingdom where they worship and adore their Saviour.

Calvin the Prophet

(Editor’s note: A recent trip to Walmart and the display of scantily clad, tattooed women reminded me of Calvin’s perspicuity and the verity of his prophetic powers)

“So if women are thus permitted to have their head uncovered and to show their hair, they will eventually be allowed to expose their entire breasts, and they will come to make their exhibitions as if it were a tavern show; they will become so brazen that modesty and shame will be no more; in short they will forget the duty of nature...So, when it is permissible for the women to uncover their heads, one will say, ‘Well, what harm is uncovering the stomach also?’ And then after that one will plead [for] something else: ‘Now if the women go bareheaded, why not also [bare] this and [bare] that?’ Then the men, for their part, will break loose too. In short, there will be no decency left, unless people contain themselves and respect what is proper and fitting, so as not to go headlong overboard.” Seth Skoinitsky Translation, Men, Women, and Order in the Church: Three Sermons by John Calvin (Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1992), pp. 12, 13

