

Joel 3:12-16 “The Valley of Jehoshaphat” August 5-7, 2017
Pastor Don Sutton – St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN

Joel 3:12-16

Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. ¹³ Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!” ¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. ¹⁵ The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. ¹⁶ The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

Introduction

I would guess that you have heard of Death Valley - hot. You also have likely heard of Napa Valley - wine. You probably have heard of the Red River Valley - Fargo. For sure you have heard of the Valley of the Jolly – Ho! Ho! Ho! – Green Giant. But have you heard of the Valley of Jehoshaphat?

Today we are going to hear of it. We’ll hear that in **The Valley of Jehoshaphat ... There God will judge his enemies ... and ... There God will bless his people.**

Jehoshaphat

First let’s focus on this name – Jehoshaphat. Where do we know that name from? Well, back in June, in a sermon entitled, “Don’t Listen to the Spin-doctors,” based on 1 Kings 22, we heard that Jehoshaphat was a king of Judah from about 875 to 850 B.C. In that account Jehoshaphat was entertaining an invitation from King Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel to go to war against Ramoth-Gilead. You, see, the two kings were linked by the marriage of their children to one another. While Ahab was wicked, for the most part Jehoshaphat was a godly king. He was known as a just king who set up a judicial network through his kingdom. That’s Jehoshaphat.

The Location of the Valley

This brings us to “the valley.” Where is it? Among people providing answers there is no clear-cut answer. Popular legend identifies the middle section of the Kidron Valley that lies between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives as the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Arab tradition says that it’s between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives which again puts it in a part of the Kidron Valley.

In 2 Chronicles 20 there is an account where nations to the east and southeast of Judah allied to attack Jehoshaphat. But the Lord caused confusion among them result in their killing one another. When the king and his men saw what had happened they praised the Lord in that valley called the Valley of Berakah, or the Valley of Praise. Some think that this is the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

Jewish Tradition says that the Valley of Jehoshaphat is not a geographic location but sort of a play on words. For one thing, reasoning goes, Jehoshaphat was strong proponent for a strong judicial system in Judah. Secondly, his name means “The Lord Judges.” Then there is the fact that it is also called “The Valley of Decision (v. 14).”

The Valley of Decision

As I was preparing the sermon this week out of curiosity I wondered how a Pentecostal preacher would handle this phrase. In one sermon I read through, the preacher never dealt with the context, but right away went down the road of “Decision Theology” basically saying, “All have sinned. All need a Savior. Jesus is the Savior we all need. The Valley of decision reminds us that we all have to make a decision for or against Christ.”

But note in verse 12 that the Lord is speaking here. He says, **“There I will judge the nations on every side.”**

The Valley of Jehoshaphat is not a place where people judge whether they want to accept the Lord, but where the Lord judges people.

The Immediate Context

If one reads the Book of Joel, it seems initially that the Lord is judging the nations around Israel for what they did to Israel when they were down. The first chapter of Joel describes an extraordinary, devastating locust plague that hit Israel in the Old Testament times. As a result of this locust plague, Israel was vulnerable. Nations took advantage of them. So initially, it seems that God is speaking about gathering them for judgment and destruction.

The Long-term Connections

But when one considers our verses with verses from other places in Scripture, it's becomes obvious that the Lord is looking beyond just the nations around Israel when he talks about the Valley of Jehoshaphat the judging he will do there.

Compare 3:12&14 – **“Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side...¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision,”** with Revelation 19:11-21: **I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war ... his name is the Word of God.¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.”¹⁹ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army.”**

Compare v. 13 - **Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!”** - with Revelation 19:15 – **“...He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. Or with Revelation 14:14-20 - I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. ...¹⁶ So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.¹⁸ Still another angel ... called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.”¹⁹ The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath.**

Compare v. 15 - **The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine – with Matthew 24:29 - “Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’³⁰ “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.**

Isn't it obvious that the Lord is talking about the Day of the Lord being the day of Christ's return and the Lord's last judgment?

Sobering Thoughts

With this in mind doesn't the Lord lay some sobering thoughts before us? Not only will the enemies of ancient Israel be gathered there so will all God's enemies be gathered for judgment. So will all people who have ever lived. In Daniel 12 God reveals, **“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”** We will be there too. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (5:10).”**

Isn't there a scary aspect to this? Imagine hearing and seeing the glory of the Lord – the blazing light and the thundering sound. Imagine standing before a holy, all-powerful God, who knows all – your every thought, your

every word, and your every action. In our Thursday current events we read the word of Jesus in Matthew 12: **“But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every empty word they have spoken.³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”** There are all those things we shouldn’t have said as well as should have said. There are the thoughts we shouldn’t have thought. There are all those actions we shouldn’t have done as well as those we should have.

Don’t we deserve being trampled in the winepress of God’s wrath? Don’t we deserve what Jesus talked about in our gospel reading – **“⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”?**

Therefore, now is the time to look at our lives to see where sin is being overlooked and not dealt with. Now is the time to stop telling ourselves that some sin really doesn’t matter. Now is the time to stop ignoring the fact that Jesus is coming any day – maybe even today – to gather us and all in the Valley of Jehoshaphat for judgment. Now is the time turn to God and confess our sin and our sinfulness. Now is the time to turn to Jesus and grab hold of him in faith.

Comforting Assurances

Joel concludes our text, **“But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.”**

A refuge is where we go when there are storms or other threatening things. A stronghold is a place we go for safety. This would be the basement or the storm shelter when a tornado is coming. For soldiers under fire this could be a bunker or a solid building. For a child afraid in the night this could be the arms or the bed of Dad and Mom.

The Lord will be a refuge and stronghold for his people when it comes to his judgment and the resulting wrath that should come up sinners. He was holy for us – **“like us in every way but without sin (Heb. 4).”** Yet in our place he became the biggest sinner carrying all our sin and suffering our punishment on the cross – **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** As a result God says to us through the Apostle Paul, **“I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you (Acts 13).”**

Because through faith in Jesus we wear his righteousness. Through faith in Jesus we enjoy his forgiveness. Through faith in Jesus, there now is no longer any condemnation awaiting us on the last day whether of life or of time. Through faith in Jesus we are God’s people and heirs of eternal life. So we don’t have to be afraid of The Valley of Jehoshaphat. While it is true that there he will judge and punish his enemies, there he will also bless his people. Through faith in Jesus we can look forward to experiencing Jesus’s words in today’s gospel: **“⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. “**