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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THE DAY OF THE LORD” ~ Joel 3:1-21

- ☑ **Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I’ve tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.** {Robert Frost, “Fire and Ice”}

📖 Eschatology is the branch of theology dealing with death, judgment, and humankind’s final destiny. It is all about the End: the end of earthly life, the end of history as we know it, the end of this world.

Many people who care little about doctrine in general have strong convictions about the End. Some are not at all open to adjusting their view, even when they are presented with conflicting evidence. A minority refuse association with anyone whose eschatology is substantially different from theirs.

How can otherwise flexible people be so dogmatic and defensive about the End Times? My theory is that our eschatological beliefs ① are an expression of our basic worldview. As such ② they tap into our deepest hopes and concerns, and ③ shape our attitudes and day-to-day conduct. In other words, there is a lot of “us” wrapped up in these beliefs.

In a way, to change one’s doctrine of the End Times is to change oneself (or at least it is to allow oneself to be changed). Few people do this well or easily. No one does it casually.

{Ro 8:29} It is not my objective to change your mind to match mine. My objective is for me and you to be transformed by the Holy Spirit and the Word, so that our worldview, our hopes and concerns, our attitudes and conduct, will correspond to those of God the Son, so that we will **“be conformed to [his] image.”**

- ❓ How will the world end?
- ❓ And what shall we do in preparation?
- Please turn with me to Joel 3:14.

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

📖 **“The day of the LORD”** refers to occasions when God decisively reveals that he is victor by defeating his enemies and vindicating his faithful ones.

- The phrase is used of current events. In Joel 1:15, 2:1, and 2:11 it alludes to the locust plague.

{Is 13:9} It is used of future events. In Isaiah it refers to the destruction of Babylon a century and a half later.

- And it is used of the culmination of history. In Joel 2:31 and now in 3:14, **“the day of the LORD”** is shorthand for history’s Grand Finale. Through his prophet, God addresses our question of how the world will end.

★ The answer is summarized in two words: judgment and blessing. First, the judgment.

■ In verses 2-3, the LORD God declares

**<sup>2</sup> I will gather all the nations  
and bring them down to the Valley of  
Jehoshaphat.**

**There I will enter into judgment against them  
concerning my inheritance, my people  
Israel.**

**for they scattered my people among the nations  
and divided up the land.**

**<sup>3</sup> They cast lots for my people  
and traded boys for prostitutes;  
they sold girls for wine  
that they might drink.**

This raises some questions.

As for location, it is foretold that the judgment will occur in **“the Valley of Jehoshaphat.”** But where is that?

Is it the *emeq Berakah* eleven miles south of Jerusalem? Is it the Kidron, which runs along the eastern perimeter of the old city? Jewish scholars have preferred one or the other.

{Rev 16:14-16} Is it Armageddon? No one calls that plain **“The Valley of Jehoshaphat,”** but the Book of Revelation states that this is where the nations will gather for **“the battle on the great day of God.”**

Are Joel and John even talking about physical geography? Do they even care about it?

**“Jehoshaphat”** literally means **“YHWH has judged.”** Perhaps the prophets are not concerned with the

location, but are using a place name to emphasize the sheer fact of judgment.

As for the LORD’s **“inheritance,”** he identifies them as **“my people Israel.”**

Are they ethnic Israel, the biological Jews, the genetic descendants of Abraham?

Or is the LORD’s inheritance spiritual Israel, all who have entered into covenant with him through the blood of his Son, regardless of ethnic heritage?

The Old Testament can be used to corroborate either option, depending how you read it. The New Testament gives more support to the latter, as do Christian tradition and historical theology.

What is certain is that on the day of the LORD, God will judge the nations. He zeroes in on their sins against his people: violence, enslavement, and exploitation.

God speaks of **“my inheritance,” “my people.”** In verse 3 the possessive pronoun is unstated, yet implied: these are *my* **“boys”** they **“traded,”** *my* **“girls”** they **“sold.”** An offense against Israel (ethnic or spiritual) is an offense against him. God takes it personally!

■ This is not all that we know. In verse 4 the Almighty warns, **“I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done.”**

The penalties inflicted by God are congruent and proportional. They are just in every way.

■ We also know that God’s enemies will administer these penalties themselves. Verse 9:

**<sup>9</sup> Proclaim this among the nations:**

**Prepare for war!**

**Rouse the warriors!**

**Let all the fighting men draw near  
and attack.**

According to Isaiah {2:4} those who embrace life in the kingdom of God

**Will beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.**

■ But these nations hear and heed the drumbeat of war. In doing so, they seal their own doom. Verse 10:

**Beat your plowshares into swords  
and your pruning hooks into spears.**

■ And verse 12:

**<sup>12</sup> “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.**

God will punish the nations by allowing them to act as the agents of their own destruction.

★ The second word is blessing.

■ Verse 16: **“But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.”**

God will preserve his people from punishment on the day of the LORD.

■ Verses 17 and 20:

**<sup>17</sup> Then you will know that I, the LORD ...  
dwell in Zion, my holy hill.**

**Jerusalem will be holy;  
never again will foreigners invade her.**

**<sup>20</sup> Judah will be inhabited forever  
and Jerusalem through all  
generations.**

God’s people will enjoy abundant life and total security in his presence in the new Jerusalem.

■ Verse 18:

**the mountains will drip with new wine,  
and the hills will flow with milk;  
all the ravines... will run with water.**

The Creation will finally be liberated from its burden of decay imposed by our sin. God’s people will be fully satisfied by its beauty and fruitfulness.

? How will the world end? In judgment and blessing.

? What shall we do in preparation? The same kinds of things Joel has prompted us to do in times of calamity.

↗ <sup>1st</sup>, we shall lament.

● **“Wake up... and weep!”** (1:5). **“Mourn”** (1:8). **“Despair”** (1:9). **“Put on sackcloth... and mourn”**

(1:13). We are to lament the immense tragedy that human beings have opted for death instead of life.

✎ 2<sup>nd</sup>, we shall repent.

● Don't we sometimes take God's grace for granted, as though his mercy entitles us to sin without consequence? Shame on us! Joel 2:13:

**Rend your heart  
and not your garments.  
Return to the LORD your God,  
for he is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and abounding in love,  
and he relents from sending calamity.**

✎ 3<sup>rd</sup>, we shall cry out to God.

● Joel 2:32

**And everyone who calls on  
the name of the LORD will be saved;  
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem  
there will be deliverance...  
even among the survivors  
whom the LORD calls.**

✎ 4<sup>th</sup>, we shall surrender to God's sovereignty.

The day will come in the right way, at the right time.

It is futile to try to force God's hand. It is wrong to try to usher in the End by judgment others (by the way, that is precisely what ISIS is attempting to do). It is not the day of *the Church* or the day of *America*; it is "**the day of the LORD.**"

✎ {Lk 12:43, 47} The 5<sup>th</sup> recommendation comes from the gospels. Messiah tells us that "**It will be a good thing for that servant whom the master finds doing [his will] when he returns.**"

{Mt 22:37, 39; 28:19-20} And what is his will? It is that we "**love the Lord [our] God with our entire being, love [our] neighbor as [ourselves],**" and "**make disciples of all nations.**" If we do this, we shall be faithful and wise and ready.

**Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.**

Either way, it will be the day of the LORD.

Joel chapter 3 is the word of the Lord.