

## Interesting References in Joel Chapter 3

### **Introduction**

One of the common idioms in Scripture is that of **symbolic references**. Basically, many of the items listed in Scripture are not *literally* true – instead, they are figurative references to *other* items in Scripture.

One very well-known example of such a symbolic reference occurs in 1 Corinthians 5:7 – in which Paul tells us that “Christ is our Passover lamb”. Similarly, in John 1:29, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God”.

Of course, Jesus is not *literally* a Passover lamb. Instead, those verses are **symbolically** comparing Jesus to the Passover lambs that were sacrificed during the tenth plague in Egypt. Those Passover lambs allowed the Israelites to be saved from the tenth plague – the death of the firstborn. In a similar way, the death of Jesus allows all of us to be saved from permanent death.

There are many, *many* other examples of symbolic references in Scripture as well. In particular, the writings of the prophets – and the book of Revelation – are *replete* with such references.

The reason why these symbolic references are important to be aware of is because in many cases, the references are not obvious. In other words, it is not always immediately clear **what** Scripture is referring to, when it makes a symbolic reference. The “Passover lamb” reference is very easy to discern; but many other references are not – and that can cause quite a bit of confusion when studying Scripture.

In addition, many of the references in Scripture specify the names of *countries* or *regions* – and of course the names in question are ancient place names. As a result, in many cases it is not clear **where** the regions in question are located today – and that, in turn, prevents people from fully appreciating the significance of such references.

Some chapters in Scripture contain *both* types of references – symbolic references, and references to ancient place names. One such chapter is Joel 3. That chapter contains information about events that will happen in the end times. In essence, the chapter describes a concerted **attack** against Israel by other nations; as well as the events *after* the attack. The sections below describe some of the references that are made in Joel 3; along with explanations about those references.

### **The Valley of Jehoshaphat**

Verses 2 and 12 in Joel 3 make references to “The Valley of Jehoshaphat”, as follows:

#### **Joel 3:1-2,12**

<sup>1</sup> “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,  
<sup>2</sup> I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

<sup>12</sup> Let the nations stir themselves up  
and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat

The Valley of Jehoshaphat is a valley which runs next to the eastern side of Jerusalem; it separates the Temple Mount area from the Mount of Olives. It is also known as the Kidron valley.

The name “Jehoshaphat” means “Yahweh will judge”, or “Yahweh will decide”. This is why Joel 3:14 refers to the valley of Jehoshaphat as the “valley of decision”:

**Joel 3:14**

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

Also note that when Jesus returns, he will initially appear on the Mount of Olives – and then he will go to the Temple Mount. So, the valley of Jehoshaphat is directly between the two areas to which Jesus will return!

**Tyre and Sidon, and Philistia**

Joel 3 verse 4 refers to *three* separate places – the cities of Tyre and Sidon; and the regions of Philistia:

**Joel 3:4**

<sup>4</sup> “What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily.

Tyre and Sidon reside in southern part of the modern country of Lebanon. The group called Hezbollah is based in that very region – and Hezbollah has launched **numerous attacks** against Israel from there.

The area of Philistia corresponds to modern Gaza – the area where the group called Hamas is in control. Note that in 2005 Israel unilaterally *withdrew* from Gaza – and immediately after that, Hamas started *attacking* Israel from Gaza.

**The Sabeans**

A group called “the Sabeans” is referenced in Joel 3:8:

**Joel 3:8**

<sup>8</sup> I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away, for the Lord has spoken.”

The Sabeans were an Arabic tribe, who lived in the *extreme* southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula – within modern-day Yemen. Of course, Yemen is over 1000 miles away from Israel – and as a result, it makes sense that that area would be referred to as “a nation far away”.

## Swords and Plowshares

Joel 3:9 and 3:10 prophesy a great war against Israel. One of the references in that passage is quite “intriguing”, as follows:

### Joel 3:9-10

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

Consecrate for war;

stir up the mighty men.

Let all the men of war draw near;

let them come up.

<sup>10</sup> Beat your plowshares into swords,

and your pruning hooks into spears;

let the weak say, “I am a warrior.”

The underlined area in the above passage is the **exact opposite** of the text in Isaiah 2:4 – which prophesies peace among the nations:

### Isaiah 2:4

<sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations,

and shall decide disputes for many peoples;

and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

neither shall they learn war anymore.

So, what is going on here? Why do the above passages contain the exact *opposite* information? The reason is that Joel 3:9-10 is describing events that occur before Jesus defeats a prophesied attack against Israel – while Isaiah 2:4 refers to the world after that victory, with Jesus ruling over us in peace.

## Wine, Milk and Flowing Water

Three distinct symbolic references are contained within a single verse: Joel 3:18. Those references are quite interesting:

### Joel 3:18

<sup>18</sup> “And in that day

the mountains shall drip sweet wine,

and the hills shall flow with milk,

and all the streambeds of Judah

shall flow with water;

and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord

and water the Valley of Shittim.

The above passage states that wine, milk and flowing water will be present in the world, after Jesus’ victory. The exact wording of the passage indicates that **symbolic references** are being used – e.g., “the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk”. (It is very unlikely that those statements are *literally* true...)

It turns out that all three of the referenced items – wine, milk, and flowing water – are used as “symbols” about different *qualities* in our lives.

Wine is used as a symbol for happiness in many places; for example:

**Psalm 104:14-15:**

<sup>14</sup> You cause the grass to grow for the livestock  
and plants for man to cultivate,  
that he may bring forth food from the earth  
<sup>15</sup> and wine to gladden the heart of man,  
oil to make his face shine  
and bread to strengthen man’s heart.

Milk is a symbol for growth – both *physical* growth (through nutrition) and *spiritual* growth (through learning about God). For example:

**Isaiah 7:21-22:**

<sup>21</sup> In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep, <sup>22</sup> and because of the abundance of milk that they give, he will eat curds, for everyone who is left in the land will eat curds and honey.

**1 Peter 2:2-3:**

<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—  
<sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Flowing water is a symbol for spiritual cleanliness. Basically, **flowing** water is symbolic of “washing away our sins” – which therefore allows us to be **saved**. Note that flowing water is often referred to as “living” water in Scripture. For example:

**Jeremiah 17:13**

O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water.

**Zechariah 13:1**

“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

**John 7:37-39:**

<sup>37</sup> On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

Overall, Joel 3:18 describes the conditions that will be present in the world, after Jesus has defeated the attack on Israel. That verse tells us that when Jesus is reigning over us, people will have the following *qualities* in their lives:

- People will be **happy**;
- People will **grow** both physically and spiritually;
- People will become **spiritually clean** – their sins will be washed away.

Come, Lord Jesus!

## **Edom**

The region of Edom is referenced in Joel 3:19:

### **Joel 3:19**

<sup>19</sup>“Egypt shall become a desolation  
and Edom a desolate wilderness,  
for the violence done to the people of Judah,  
because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

Edom is a region in the southwest corner of modern-day Jordan. Some of the descendants of Esau settled in this region. In fact, Esau himself was given the nickname “Edom”; because the Hebrew word “edom” means “red” – and of course Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of red stew. (Genesis 25:29-34).

## **Conclusion**

There is one final “reference” to mention. The first section of Joel 3 contains a description of Jesus “judging” the nations, as follows:

### **Joel 3:1-3**

<sup>1</sup>“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,  
<sup>2</sup>I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, <sup>3</sup>and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.

From what I can see, the “Sheep and Goats” judgement, in Matthew chapter 25, refers to the above judgment in Joel! In other words, the judgment listed in Joel 3 is the same judgment as the one listed in Matthew 25!

The article at following page describes the many similarities between the Joel 3 judgment, and the Matthew 25 judgment:

[What is the Sheep and Goats Judgment About?](#)