

## **THE VALLEY OF DECISION**

**Today's Text: Joel Chap. 3**

### **Extracts:**

***“Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; ... for their wickedness is great.” Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. ... “So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain; then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again” [Joel 3: 12, 13, 14, 17]***

*The American 2008 Presidential Elections may well go down as a historic watershed. The nomination process is currently ongoing in the form of primary elections from one state to another as candidates vie to be their party's official candidate. In the Republican Party [the party of the outgoing President-George Bush], a 71-year old Vietnam War veteran, Senator John McCain, is the leading candidate who is likely to get his party's nomination. In the Democratic Party, that is hungry to return to power after eight years, there are two equally strong contenders. The second-term New York Senator Hilary Clinton is the wife of Bill Clinton, the charismatic ex-President (1992-2000). Her opponent, first-term Illinois Senator Barack Obama, is a Harvard-educated black man, the son of a Kenyan father and a white American mother. On Tuesday, 4 November 2008, American voters will go to the polls to elect the next President of the most powerful nation in the world. On that day, Americans will move from speculation to reality. Their choice will be either an old war veteran that supports the continuation of an unpopular war in Iraq, or the first woman or first black. Americans have an appointment with history and their 'valley of decision' is near!*

*Believers are in a similar situation. They have heard over and over again that Jesus Christ will soon return to judge the whole world. In today's lesson, we are told that the event will take place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat that the prophet Joel has also called the valley of decision [Joel 3: 14]. Everybody, believer or non-believer, will be affected. Some people think that Christ's return is a myth perpetuated by Christians. Some people neither believe in the here-after nor in the existence of God. No matter what you believe, we know that truth will soon be revealed. When it happens, whatever you believe will be immaterial. Can you wait until you reach the valley of decision before you decide? Will it not be too late then?*

*Let us find out in today's study.*

## 1. Christ's return: An emergency or a false alarm?

In a story that we were taught in primary school, a young shepherd boy was fond of playing pranks on the villagers who constantly worried about the fate of their flocks in the midst of predators. One day, he cried out, "Wolf! Wolf!" The villagers came out with weapons only to discover that there was no wolf. It was a false alarm. He did it again and again until the villagers got fed up with him. Then, one day, the wolves really came! He cried for help as in the past but nobody responded. The wolves devoured his flock!

In like manner, preachers have for the past two thousand years raised the alarm of the return of Jesus Christ to judge the world. Their main purpose has been to make sinners confess their sins and be ready to be received into God's eternal glory in Christ's Kingdom. Since He has not returned, some people, including even believers, now have other ideas about it. Here are some of such ideas:

### a) *It is a myth*

Some people put the story of Jesus in the same genre as fairy tales or fiction or humanism to teach us principles of good and evil. Therefore, such people would like the bible to be taught like literature side by side with Harry Potter books or stories of witches and wizards, myths like King Arthur, and so on. Jesus was not better than a good teacher of moral principles. At any rate, if He ever came in flesh, He was dead and that was it. Such people do not believe in the hereafter or in the resurrection. When we die, we are not different from animals, they reason.

Take the case of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers that Paul encountered in Athens, Greece, during his missionary journey there [Acts 17: 16-33]. They were hungry for new ideas but would only receive those that confirmed their view of life rooted in self-sufficiency. So, when Paul brought the gospel of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead, they called him a "babbling" [v. 18]. As he spoke of God that made all things and created all humans equal, that required repentance and acceptance of Christ raised from the dead, they mocked him, and dismissed him with a polite, "We will hear you again on the matter" [v. 32].

All in the name of adapting to a changing world so as to look "progressive," some believers may find themselves lured into accepting fables and myths concerning the return of Christ. Even when Jesus had said that no one would know the day or the hour of His return except His Father [Matt. 24: 36], some believers have fallen into the trap of false prophets and soothsayers who have given specific dates that have since passed! That is why Paul in his old age charged young Timothy to be steadfast in the truth because "the time will come when (believers) will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their

own desires, ... and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” [2 Tim. 4: 3-4].

b) *Prove it!*

Some people will not accept anything that they cannot explain empirically, that is, they cannot feel, touch, taste, smell or see. Therefore, why should they believe in life-after-death if they cannot prove it? It is not by accident that most atheists are scientists. Since they cannot prove the existence of God in the laboratories, therefore, He does not exist! If God does not exist, why should they believe in the return of Christ?

Surprisingly, many believing Christians have doubts about Jesus even when they believe in God, heaven and hell. However, we can easily point such people to some empirical proofs. For example, apostle Thomas was skeptical when he was told that Christ had risen from the dead. Thomas said, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and *put my finger* into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” Jesus proved His resurrection to Thomas by showing him the nail prints. It was then that Thomas fell on his knees and acknowledged the divinity of Jesus [Jn 20: 25-28].

In another example, Peter who was with Jesus at the Transfiguration, before His crucifixion, knew that Jesus is the Son of God, when the voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Before Peter’s death, he wrote, “Shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover, I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease, *for we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you, the power and coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty*” [2 Pet. 1: 14-18]. If Christ’s first coming has been empirically proved, His return is also sure for, as two angels told His disciples on the day of His ascension, “*this same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go to heaven*” [Acts 1: 12-13].

c) *What is truth?*

Many believers may accept that Jesus is divine but they do not understand why and how He is the *only* way to God. What of other faiths that believe in God? Are Christians not too self-righteous to say that only their Lord can lead us to salvation? The answer lies in knowing what truth is. In the classical encounter between the Roman governor, Pilate, and Jesus during His trial, Pilate asked Him if He was a king. Jesus replied, “You say rightly that I am a king. *For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice*” [Jn 18: 36-37].

There are as many truths as there are faiths or philosophies but *it is not every truth that is true!* For example, scientists have taught us that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, implying a movement. But we know that the sun does not move at all! It is the earth that moves around the sun, thus giving the illusion of movement, just as trees tend to move when we are in a moving vehicle. Therefore, sunset or sunrise may be a *fact* (it can be proved) but it is not *truth!* In like manner, there are many religions and philosophies that we have come to accept as truth but they are actually the views of ordinary human beings. Ten years ago, scientists taught us that Pluto is a planet. Today, it is no longer one! Who knows what comes next? *Only truth that does not vary with additional information can be called truth.*

Jesus brought the contrast out clearly during His discussion with Nicodemus on the question of being born again. Based on his limited human knowledge of birth, Nicodemus asked Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus gave the following ‘out-of-the-box’ response, “We speak what We know and testify what We have seen... *No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven*” [Jn 3: 1-4, 11, 13].

Herein lies the key to knowing the truth of God. Prophets or scientists or philosophers speak about celestial (heavenly) matters from their limited earthly perspectives, and certainly not beyond what God gives them the privilege to know [Deut. 29: 29]. It may not be better than Jules Verne’s view of the moon in his science fiction, *From the Earth to the Moon* (1866) compared to that of the American *Apollo 11* crew that landed on the moon in 1969! *Only Jesus Christ who came down from heaven knows what is up there.* So if He says that He is the truth and the only way to the Father and that He will return to judge the world, who are we to question it? You can only take it or leave it but either choice has its prize and price!

## 2. Your valley of decision may already be here!

Chapter 3 of the book of Joel addresses end time issues, such as the restoration of Israel, the judgment of the Gentile nations and the establishment of Christ’s Kingdom on earth. As we already well know, the modern state of Israel was restored in 1948, that is, sixty years ago. Therefore, the bell of Christ’s return is already tolling!

The Day of the Lord will begin with the rapture of the Church [1 Thes. 4: 13-17] and end with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth [[Rev. 21: 11]. The judgment of the Gentile nations described in Joel Chapter 3 is reinforced in the description of the Battle of Armageddon in the book of Revelation [Rev. 19: 1-21]. How does this affect us? It is simply that we cannot escape the Day of the Lord. For example, you may die before the rapture. In that case, you will be

among the dead saints that will rise first to meet Christ in the air [**1 Thes. 4: 16, 17**]. Or, since Christ could return today, it is better to be ready than to be tardy. In this study, therefore, we shall pay attention to how we are directly affected by developing events. Note the following issues:

a) *You may already have arrived in the valley of decision!*

On account of their rebellion, God had allowed Israel to be scattered all over the world and the nation's wealth carted away by Gentile nations. Their gold and silver and prized possessions from God's temple were removed. Their sons and daughters were sold into slavery [**vv. 3, 5, 6**]. Having shown mercy to them on account of the promise to Abraham, God would bring back the captives to resettle in the Promised Land [**Joel 3: 1**]. That prophecy was fulfilled in 1948.

Rather than leave them alone, the Gentile nations are threatening Israel each day. Arab and Moslem nations will not rest until they wipe Israel out of the map of the world, even after losing so many wars and territory since 1948. One day in the future, they will gather together in the valley of Jehoshaphat to attempt to destroy God's people and inheritance [**v. 2**]. That is arrogant provocation. So, God will ask the oppressors of His people, "Will you retaliate against Me? But if you retaliate against Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your retaliation upon your own head" [**v. 4**].

Clearly, it is the wicked that will first provoke God to judge them. When you pursue material wealth and earthly ambitions outside of God's purpose and principles, you are heading for the valley of decision. When you refuse to forgive those who have offended you, you have taken a one-way ride to the valley of decision. When you pollute your body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, with sexual immorality, your valley of decision is a bus-stop away. A time will come when God cannot tolerate your provocation any longer. As He will ask the Gentile nations, He is asking you right now, "Will you retaliate against Me?"

b) *And, God is waiting for you there!*

As multitudes and multitudes gather "in the valley of decision," little do they know that "the day of the Lord is near" [**Joel 3: 14**]. Today, there are hotels on top of Mount Zion. You can imagine what evil goes on there. In recent years, gays and lesbians have done their annual 'Gay Parades' on the streets of Jerusalem. As an assembly of believers, we have also come to "Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" [**Heb. 12: 22**] but not with clean hearts. But do you know what? Soon, "the Lord will roar from Zion" and the wicked Gentile nations "shall know that (He is) the Lord (their) God, dwelling in Zion (His) holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy and

no aliens shall ever pass through her again” [vv. 16, 17]. Then, you will know that God is not a dormant volcano. He is a consuming fire [Heb. 12: 29]!

The war against the Gentile nations in the valley of decision will be led by Christ Himself, as was shown to the apostle John in a vision in the island of Patmos. John wrote [Rev. 19: 11-10]:

*Now I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war... He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God, and the armies in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron... and He has on His robe and ... thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

Who can defeat such a force? Then will the children of Israel come to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah they had been waiting for! You have a head start on them when you give your life to Christ right now [cf: Rev. 7: 1-14].

c) *Thereafter, Christ dwells in Zion forever!*

With the enemy Gentile nations totally destroyed, the everlasting kingdom of David will be established in Israel; “Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation... for the Lord dwells in Zion” [Joel 3: 20, 21]. As a true believer in Christ, He dwells in your heart and, being filled with His love, you will in turn be filled with all the fullness of God [Eph. 3: 17, 19].

### **3. Conclusion: You can avoid the valley of decision!**

Knowing the truth will set you free. Now that you do, why should you reach the valley of decision before you decide for Christ? There, judgment surely awaits you. Here, grace is already assured.