

JOEL

The Author:

Nothing is known about the prophet Joel whose name this book bears. His name means: “YHWH is God.” He was the son of Pethuel. No further details are given about him anywhere in Scripture. *The Pulpit Commentary* relates some information from “Pseudo-Epiphanius, who, in his ‘Lives of the Prophets.’ gives many legendary stories concerning these personages asserts (bk 2, 245) that he was of the tribe of Reuben, and born at Bethom, or Bethhoron, identified with *Beit Ur*, a place ten miles north-west of Jerusalem. Here, too, he is said to have been buried. Equally insecure is the opinion held by many that he was a priest or Levite; the only argument in favor of the notion being that he often mentions the offerings and festivals of the temple service; while, on the other hand, he addresses the priests as a class to which he did not belong; ‘Ye priests, ... ye ministers’ he says (... Joel 1:13) and he calls upon them officially to proclaim the fast which he enjoined.”

Time of Writing:

Opinions as to the date of this prophecy vary from very early to very late. Some scholars place Joel as the first of the Minor Prophets during the reign of Joash, others as the last one, later than Malachi, in the post-exilic period. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “On the whole it seems safest to assign to Joel a period antecedent to Amos, and, if we must fix the time more precisely, we may offer our adherence to the opinion which has the greatest weight of authority, that he exercised his ministry during the minority of King Joash, and aided Jehoiada in re-establishing and in maintaining the pure worship of Jehovah in the southern kingdom.”

J. Sidlow Baxter, in his book *Explore the Book*, states: “One strong indication of the earlier date assigned to the book is that the only enemies of Judah mentioned in it are the Phoenicians, Philistines, Edomites, and Egyptians.”

The Pulpit Commentary furthermore observes: “The sin of idolatry is nowhere mentioned, and the regular worship of Jehovah is everywhere presupposed. Under the three monarchs preceding Joash, idolatry was prevalent; and under Joash himself pure worship was lamentably degraded as soon as the reverent hand of Jehoiada the high priest was withdrawn; so that it is concluded that Joel’s prophecy must be set in the earlier part of Joash’s reign, when the young king was under tutelage.” This would place this book in the period of about 835 B.C. until 796 B.C., which is the time during which Joash reigned.

Style of Writing and Theme:

It is generally acknowledged that Joel wrote his prophecy in classic Hebrew. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: “There is this also to be said of its literary character, that ‘the style of Joel is bright and flowing,’ his ‘imagery and language are fine’ (Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*); ‘his book is a description, clear, well arranged, and carried out with taste and vivacity, of the present distress and of the ideal future. Joel may be reckoned among the classics of Hebrew literature. The need of a commentary for details, as is the case with Amos and Hosea, is here hardly felt’ (Reuss, *Das Alte Testament*).” And J. Sidlow Baxter, in his book *Explore the Book* adds: “His pen-pictures of the plague-stricken land, the invading locust-army, and the final gathering of all nations to the valley of judgment, are miniature masterpieces of graphic vigor.”

The theme is “the day of the LORD,” an expression we find five times in the book.¹ Baxter remarks about the setting of the term: “This phrase ... is used in three ways – first in a *local* sense; second in a *final* sense; and third in a *double* sense.”

The event that became the occasion for this prophecy was an unusual and extraordinary plague of locust that invaded the land and devastated it. This extent and impact of this locust plague was so enormous that some scholars have judged it impossible to have occurred the way Joel describes it. Several commentaries, however, refer to a passage from Van Lennep’s book *Bible Lands* in which the following description of a locust plague is found. This quotation is copied from *The Pulpit Commentary*: “The young locusts rapidly attain the size of the common grasshopper, and proceed in one and the same direction, first crawling, and at a later period leaping, as they go, devouring every green thing that lies in their path. They advance more slowly than a devouring fire, but the ravages they commit are scarcely inferior or less to be

¹ ch. 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14

dreaded. Fields of standing wheat and barley, vineyards, mulberry orchards, and groves of olive, fig, and other trees are in a few hours deprived of every green blade and leaf, the very bark being often destroyed. Their voracity is such that, in the neighborhood of Broosa, in the year 1856, an infant, having been left asleep in its cradle under some shady trees, was found not long after partly devoured by the locusts. The ground over which their devastating hordes have passed at once assumes an appearance of sterility and dearth. Well did the Romans call them 'the burners of the land,' which is the literal meaning of our word 'locust.' On they move, covering the ground so completely as to hide it from sight, and in such numbers that it often takes three or four days for the mighty host to pass by. When seen at a distance, this swarm of advancing locusts resembles a cloud of dust or sand, reaching a few feet above the ground, as the myriads of insects leap forward. The only thing that momentarily arrests their progress is a sudden change of weather; for the cold benumbs them while it lasts. They also keep quiet at night, swarming like bees on the bushes and hedges until the morning sun warms them and revives them and enables them to proceed on their devastating march. They 'have no king' nor leader, yet they falter not, but press on in serried ranks, urged in the same direction by an irresistible impulse, and turn neither to the right hand nor to the left for any sort of obstacle. When a wall or a house lies in their way, they climb straight up, going over the roof to the other side, and blindly rush in at the open doors and windows. When they come to water, be it a mere puddle or a river, a lake or the open sea, they never attempt to go round it, but unhesitatingly leap in and are drowned, and their dead bodies, floating on the surface, form a bridge for their companions to pass over. The scourge thus often comes to an end, but it as often happens that the decomposition of millions of insects produces pestilence and death. History records a remarkable instance which occurred in the year 125 before the Christian era. The insects were driven by the wind into the sea in such vast numbers that their bodies, being driven back by the tide upon the land, caused a stench which produced a fearful plague, whereby eighty thousand persons perished in Libya, Cyrene, and Egypt. The locust, however, soon acquires its wings, and proceeds on its way by flight, whenever a strong breeze favors its progress. Our attention has often been attracted by the sudden darkening of the sun in a summer sky, accompanied by the peculiar noise which a swarm of locusts always makes moving through the air, and, glancing upward, we have seen them passing like a cloud at a height of two or three hundred feet. Some of them are constantly dropping to the earth, and, after resting awhile, are driven by a common impulse to rise again and proceed with the wind, so that, besides the principal cloud, single locusts or a few together may be seen in almost any part of the sky. During a great flight, they sometimes drop so thickly upon the ground that it is impossible to step without treading upon some of them."

In the original, the book consists of 4 chapters, which, in our version, are reduced to 3 by making the portion which constitutes chapter 3 in the Hebrew the concluding portion (verses 28-32) of chapter 2. A definite turning point in the book is found in ch. 2:12, where we read: " 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' "

The Relationship between Joel and other Old Testament Prophets:

The Pulpit Commentary researches this relationship in quite some detail, suggesting that this proves that Joel antedated all the other prophets. We read: "Isaiah quotes Joel, or has him in mind when he writes certain passages. The paragraph in Isaiah (...Isaiah 13:6), 'The day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty,' ' is cited verbatim from Joel, including the alliteration in the original, and the remarkable use of the name *Shaddai*, Almighty.' In the same chapter of Isaiah there are other reminiscences of the earlier seer: as ... Isaiah 13:10 compared with ... Joel 2:10, 31, where the substance, if not the words, are similar; ... Isaiah 13:13 with ... Joel 3:15, 16; ... Isaiah 13:8 with ... Joel 2:6. Obadiah 1:11, 'cast lots upon Jerusalem,' ' with ... Joel 3:3; ... Obadiah 1:10, 'violence against thy brother Jacob,' ' with ... Joel 3:19; ... Obadiah 1:15 with ... Joel 1:15, etc. So, again, Zechariah has many similarities of wording and meaning. This will appear at once on a comparison of ... Joel 2:30-32 with ... Zechariah 12:2, 9; 14:1, 5-11. One such hint is found in the name, 'the valley of Jehoshaphat' (... Joel 3:2), which is possibly a proof that Joel lived after that king, and, by the symbolical use of that locality, refers to some event that had happened there, and this can be nothing else than the defeat of the Moabites and their allies, narrated in ... 2 Chronicles 20:22, etc."

Outline of the Book:

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary gives us the following outline:

- I. The Day of the Lord in the Past ch. 1

	A. The Past Day of the Locust	1:1-12	
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The Text:

I.	The Day of the Lord in the Past	ch. 1
	A. The Past Day of the Locust	1:1-12

1 The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel.

2 Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days

or in the days of your forefathers?

3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.

4 What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten.

5 Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips.

6 A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness.

7 It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white.

8 Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth.

9 Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests are in mourning, those who minister before the LORD.

10 The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails.

11 Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed.

12 The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree-- all the trees of the field--are dried up. Surely the joy of mankind is withered away.

In his identification of himself, Joel bypasses his family background in order to fully emphasize the divine revelation of his message. Like John the Baptist, he is merely “the voice” of the Lord.

Joel begins his prophecy with a description of a locust plague that was unprecedented in Israel’s history. He calls upon generations past and future to emphasize the enormity of the disaster that devastated the land and ruined the infrastructure of the country overnight.

There can be little doubt that a literal locust plague occurred. The prophet links his words to the words of Moses who, when announcing the eighth plague to Pharaoh in Egypt, said that it was: “something neither your fathers nor your forefathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now.”² This plague is described, in the most literal sense of the word, as “an act of God.” *The American Peoples Encyclopedia* defines that “Act of God”: “as legal expression, signifies any occurrence not caused by human negligence or intervention; such as storms, lightning, tempests, the consequence of which no party under any

² Ex. 10:6

circumstances (independently of special contract) is bound to make good to another.” This “Act of God,” however, was, in a sense, caused by human negligence or intervention: human sin.

In this chapter the prophet addresses four types of people in the nation: the elders, the drunkards, the priests, and the farmers. This choice of audience ought to arrest our attention because there does not seem to be any logical link between them. The first category, the elders, is chosen because of their memory of the past. In ancient times, before literacy made a general impact upon a culture, the history of a nation was preserved in the memory of the older generation. In his book *Roots*, the author Alex Hailey, tells how one of the old men of a tribe in Mali, Africa, had committed the history of the tribe to memory, which covered several centuries. In appealing to the memory of the elder, Joel did what was natural in his day. The point he wanted to make was that the locust plague was unprecedented.

There lies hope in his appeal to the children. Israel’s history would not stop with Joel but would continue for years to come. There would be future generations for whom it would be of vital importance that they not forget. The tragedy of mankind, however, is that people do forget their own history. History has little or no impact upon the thinking and acting of men. We do seldom learn from history and even the fact that we do not learn is not acknowledged. Those who survived the two great world wars in Europe in the twentieth century believe that the world must remember the holocaust for the sake of its own survival. In the twenty-first century, the event is considered by many irrelevant ancient history and sometimes its historicity is even denied. Nothing in Israel’s subsequent history indicates that the plague had any impact upon people.

Joel uses four different Hebrew words to describe the creatures that ravage the country: *gazam*, ‘*arbeh*, *yekeq*, and *chaciy*. The KJV renders these respectively: “palmerworm, locust, cankerworm, and caterpillar.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states that there are approximately eighty or ninety species of locusts in the East. That *Commentary* provides the translation: “shearer, swarmer, lapper, devourer.” According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, “The common or general name for locust is *arbeh*, from *rabhah*, to be many; the *gazam*, or palmer-worm, is the *gnawer*, or biter, from a root (*guzam*) which signifies ‘to gnaw, bite, or cut off;’ the *yeleq*, or canker-worm, is the *licker*, from *yalaqlaqaq*, to lick, or lick off; the *chasil*, or caterpillar, is the devourer, from *chasal*, to cut off.” On the matter whether these four categories mentioned are actual species of locusts or representations of enemies to come, the scholars are greatly divided. The point Joel wants to make is, obviously, that wave after wave of locusts razed the countryside till nothing was left for human consumption.

What do we learn from a locust plague? God created both the locust and the green grass. The plague demonstrates that nature destroys itself. It can never have been God’s original plan for His creation that one animal would devour another animal and that swarms of vermin would ruin a whole harvest. That is not the way God created this planet, but this is what the world is like at present. All this is the result of man’s fall into sin. Creation, separated from God, destroys itself. A wooden fence moulds away without any human intervention. That which we observe in nature in general, also occurs in the human soul. Man, separated from God, becomes corrupt. If nothing interferes in the heart of man, corruption will penetrate deeper and deeper till there is no hope of salvation. The drunk serves as an example. The pleasure of drinking overpowers a human being to the point of enslaving and destroying him. God’s judgment touches the sin in human life. God had created man for real joy, but man surrenders himself to a substitute of the real thing: to pleasure and fun, which leads to his destruction. Even the priest ends up standing before God with empty hands. What can a human being offer God if God does not give him anything to offer? In the words of David: “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”³ But we are running ahead of our subject.

The fact that Joel focuses first of all on drunkards as victims of the locust plague seems strange. We would expect that the first class of people to be effected would be the farmers. Those are mentioned later on, but not as a category by themselves; we find them linked with the wine growers. The fact that the prophet zooms in on addicts to alcohol suggests that the whole of Israel must be considered to be in a condition of intoxication, given to enjoyment and pleasure that separates them from reality. But Joel may not only have excessive drinking in mind; dependence upon things that make life pleasurable can also be harmful to the soul. As *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* remarks profoundly: “The more we are wedded to our creature-comforts that harder it is to part with them.”

The Hebrew word for “wine,” which is used here is *`aciyc*, which is “must” or fresh grape juice, called “sweet wine.” It is generally supposed that this drink is non-fermented and, consequently, not

³ I Chr. 29:14

inebriating. But Isaiah uses the same word in a context that seems to contradict this. We read: “They will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine.”⁴

Vs. 6 – “A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness.” Some commentators see in these words a reference to an invasion by a foreign army. Others understand this to be a description of the legions of insects mentioned above. These insects cause a destruction that surpasses anything any human army could bring about. There is no doubt in my mind that Joel describes here locusts and not human beings. John in Revelation, however, assigns a spiritual dimension to a plague of locusts that will destroy this planet in the end times. We read: “The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.”⁵ John’s locusts are, obviously, demons released from the Abyss. They had come, not to feed upon the land, but upon the souls of men. Although, Joel does not focus on this aspect of the plague he describes, the demonic element is not completely absent from it. And, as John’s use of Joel’s prophecy suggests, the locust plague of Joel’s day foreshadows a greater plague in the last days yet to come of world history. It is significant to note that Joel opens his prophecy with a demonstration of that which is demonic in nature and closes with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

When we place Joel’s words in the broader context of the biblical message, we understand that the prophet points to a spiritual condition, compared to drunkenness, which prevents man from being aware of the spiritual dangers that surround and threaten him. In the broad outline of Revelation, we see the appearance of the Antichrist, a human being who pretends to be an incarnation of God, who is not begotten by the Holy Spirit but by Satan. This man and his followers call upon demonic powers to achieve their goal of world domination. Demons come to help mankind fulfill their ambition, but they do not come in as servants who are ready to leave when the objective is reached. When they come, they come to stay. That which was intended to be a human endeavor ends in satanic domination. Man’s eyes will only be opened to this danger when it is too late. Some of this warning can be found in Joel’s appeal to people who have given themselves to a substitute of the joy of the Lord. They will not only have a hangover when they sober up, but they will find themselves caught in a web from which there is no escape.

The locusts damage more than just the fields and the trees; they eat the bark of the human soul and leave it exposed to greatest danger.

Vs 8 – “Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth.” Greater sadness can hardly be imagined. There is a young girl whose life was filled with the joyful anticipation of marrying the man she loved. But the young fiancé dies just before the wedding night, leaving behind a broken heart. This message is addressed to those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.⁶

The spiritual dimension of the disaster is expressed in the priests who appear empty handed in the temple, unable to present their grain and drink offerings before the Lord. The grain and drink offerings were essential elements of the daily offerings brought in the morning and evening. These sacrifices were prescribed by law, as we read in Exodus: “This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight. With the first lamb offer a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives, and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning--a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire.”⁷

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary explains: “In later Judaism nothing was more dreaded than the suspension of the Tamid (see Dan 8:11; 11:31; 12:11). Josephus felt this breach of daily sacrifice to be the most terrible and unprecedented calamity in the siege of Jerusalem.” If this was felt in later centuries, how much more at the time of Joel, when the temple ritual had never been disturbed before. *The Keil & Delitzsch*

⁴ Isa. 49:26

⁵ Rev. 9:7-11

⁶ See Rev. 19:9

⁷ Ex. 29:38-41

Commentary adds: "Now Israel could not suffer any greater calamity than the suspension of the daily sacrifice; for this was a practical suspension of the covenant relation—a sign that God had rejected His people. Therefore, even in the last siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, the sacrificial worship was not suspended till it had been brought to the last extremity; and even then it was for the want of sacrificers, and not of the material of sacrifice (Josephus, *de bell. Jud.* vi. 2, 1)."

Apart from the substitute of joy, illustrated in the privation of the drunkard, there is the natural joy of living that God intends humans to experience. The content of verses 10-12 is summed up in the words: "Surely the joy of mankind is withered away." This joy, which Schiller in his *Ode to Joy*, describes as "the beautiful divine sparks" has been taken out of life by this divine judgment.

Joel's language is very expressive. The Interlinear Transliterated Bible reads: "The land is wasted, the field mourns; the corn is dried up for the oil is wasted; the new wine languishes." In the places where the NIV uses the one word "dried up," the Hebrew, actually, uses two different words, *shadad* and *yabesh*. *Shadad* means: "to ravage." It is derived from a word that means: "to be burly, or powerful." *Shadad* means: "to be ashamed."

Although poetry usually invites us to looking beyond the ordinary meaning of words, there is a danger of looking too deeply in the meaning of the words "wine" and "oil." But wine is often an image of blood in the Bible. We think especially in Jesus' use of it in the Last Supper, where taking the cup of Passover wine, He says: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."⁸ It is clear that oil and anointing symbolize the Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. We understand that atonement was impeded by the lack of repentance and that the Spirit had departed from the people, but these may not be the truths Joel tries to express here.

Modern translators do not know what to do with the Hebrew word *buwsh* in the context of Joel's prophecy. The literal meaning is "to turn pale," or "to be ashamed." It is found in the verse: "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."⁹ But here the NIV renders it: "despair." Evidently in the Hebrew mind, the farmer is emotionally involved in the crop he sows and harvests. Failure to produce what was anticipated amounted to personal failure, which was a reason to feel shame. The same thought is expressed in the concept of waiting for God to act. Isaiah proclaims God's Word: "For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me."¹⁰ This suggests a justification of the person who risks his reputation by putting his trust in the Lord. The apostle Paul expresses this in Romans: "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."¹¹ Jeremiah depicts the negative side in his description of the great drought that devastated the country: "Their nobles have sent their lads for water; they went to the cisterns and found no water. They returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded and covered their heads. Because the ground is parched, for there was no rain in the land, the plowmen were ashamed; they covered their heads."¹² Although the reason for failure was factors beyond man's control, yet it was experienced as personal failure. The Hebrew mindset may be traced back to God's original plan for man to rule His creation. When God placed Adam in paradise, He put him in charge of His creation. We read in Genesis: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."¹³ The failure of nature, as evinced in the locust plague, amounts ultimately to the failure of man. Modern man tends to deny responsibility, calling it an "Act of God." Consequently, we translate *bush* with "despair," or "disappoint."

B. The Past Day of the Drought

1:13-20

⁸ Matt. 26:28

⁹ Gen. 2:25

¹⁰ Isa. 49:23 (NKJV)

¹¹ Rom 5:5 (KJV)

¹² Jer. 14:3,4 (NKJV)

¹³ Gen. 2:15

13 Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God.

14 Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.

15 Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.

16 Has not the food been cut off before our very eyes- joy and gladness from the house of our God?

17 The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods. The storehouses are in ruins, the granaries have been broken down, for the grain has dried up.

18 How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering.

19 To you, O LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the open pastures and flames have burned up all the trees of the field.

20 Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures.

Evidently, the locust plague was followed by a severe drought that pushed the land and its inhabitants beyond the limits of despair. We can imagine that the farmers, who had witnessed their fields turn into a scorched earth by the locusts, had placed their hope in the seed that they had stored for the next sowing. When sowing failed because of drought, they saw themselves faced with starvation. It was now a struggle for survival. Joel's address to the priests, instead of to the farmers and the population in general, suggests that the crisis was not the survival of man but the survival of God. By this we do not mean that God's personal existence could be in danger but that man's relationship with God would not survive. This is what Jesus meant when He said to His disciples: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"¹⁴ When people say that God is dead, they mean that their relationship with God has died.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes here: "Here the transition begins from the plague of locusts to the worse calamities (Joel 2)-namely, invading armies about to come on Judea, of which the locusts were the prelude."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The priests are the persons first addressed, and that not only because, in discharge of their priestly functions as ministers of Jehovah and ministering at the altar, they had been specially touched by the present distress; but also because of their official position they were to present an example to the people whose leaders they were and on whose behalf they ministered (comp. ... 1 Corinthians 9:13, 'Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?')." "

The command to the priests to put on sackcloth contradicts, in a way, all that God intended the priest to be and to do. The purpose of the priest's being in the sanctuary was particularly to praise God. We read in the Psalms: "Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you."¹⁵ The high priest particularly was not allowed to get involved in any of the practices of mourning that the common people exhibited. We read in Leviticus: "The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes. He must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother, nor leave the sanctuary of his God or desecrate it, because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am the LORD."¹⁶ This command does not specifically forbid the wearing of sackcloth but it strongly suggests that mourning was not part of the priest's calling. Since now, however, the means of praise-grain offering and wine-were being withheld from the priests, he had no option but to lament instead of praise. The priesthood formed the bridge between God and man. This bridge was broken by sin and repair could only be affected by contrition and repentance.

The cessation of praise in the sanctuary meant that the lifeline from heaven to earth had been cut. The life of all of mankind, not only of Israel, was in jeopardy. At this crucial junction, Joel points toward the

¹⁴ Luke 18:8

¹⁵ Ps. 84:4

¹⁶ Lev. 21:10-12

moment at which the line with heaven was actually cut, when Jesus cried out, hanging on the cross: “‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’-which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”¹⁷ In the psalm from which Jesus quoted, he David connects his being forsaken by God with the praise that is due to God. We read: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.”¹⁸ The NKJV reads more literally: “But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel.”

Joel does more than calling priest and people to repentance, he points to God’s grace in the “repentance” of Jesus on the cross. Our sackcloth, however pertinent a mode of penitence it may be, will not save us from judgment; we are saved by the nakedness of Jesus hanging on the cross. In Him sin was completely uncovered, totally exposed and confessed. In human experience sin and covering up go together. When Adam and Eve sinned for the first time, they tried to undo the damage with a fig leaf. God replaced this with the skin of an animal. But the only way to undo sin is to expose and confess it.

Joel urges the priests to take the initiative in proclaiming a fast and calling together all the people of Judah into, what may be called, a council of national emergency. The Hebrew word used is *`atsarah*, which simply means “an assembly.” The word is used in connection with a festival or holiday, such as for the Feast of Tabernacles or the Day of Atonement. King Jehoshaphat proclaimed such an assembly when faced with an invasion by Ammon and Moab. We read: “Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.”¹⁹ But the example was initially set by King Solomon, who in his prayer for the dedication of the temple, said: “When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, and when a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel—each one aware of the afflictions of his own heart, and spreading out his hands toward this temple—then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men), so that they will fear you all the time they live in the land you gave our fathers.”²⁰

The Pulpit Commentary observes about vs. 14: “This verse directs attention to three things — the duty commanded; the persons called upon to discharge it; and the place of its performance.

1. The duty required was a fast and a solemn assembly; and the priests are strictly enjoined to see to it that both these shall be duly announced and rightly observed. The fast was abstention from food in token of sorrow for sin; it was intended to be the external evidence of penitential sorrow for sin. The solemn assembly, or ‘day of restraint,’ as it stands in the margin, was a public meeting of the people for the purpose of solemn supplication that the Almighty might be entreated to deliver them from the sore calamity with which he had seen fit to visit them. It was a season during which they were restrained from all servile work, and attention given exclusively to humiliation and prayer.

2. The persons summoned for this purpose were the elders, those who were so both by age and office — the magistrates as examples to others, and as having been implicated in the sins from which they now suffered. With the word ‘elders’ are joined all the inhabitants of the land — the whole of the people, poor and rich alike; all had had their share in the national sin, all were sharers in the national suffering, and it therefore behoved all to repent of their sins and seek the Lord.

3. The place of assembly was the house of the Lord; that is, the temple, or that portion of it called ‘the court of the Israelites.’ Nor were they to assemble there without an errand; the purpose of their assembling in that sacred place was to supplicate the Lord to alleviate their distress, or rather remove it altogether. They were directed to cry mightily to the Lord; to cry unto him with vehement earnestness and importunate perseverance till he would be pleased to send relief. The proclamation of a fast was a common expedient, to which people, Jewish and Gentile, according to their respective light, resorted in the day of their difficulty and distress.”

¹⁷ Matt. 27:46

¹⁸ Ps. 22:1,3

¹⁹ II Chr. 20:3,4

²⁰ I Kings 8:37-40

The Matthew Henry's Commentary enters upon a detailed observation about the meaning of the proclamation for a fast, from which we copy the following: "We have observed abundance of tears shed for the destruction of the fruits of the earth by the locusts; now here we have those tears turned into the right channel, that of repentance and humiliation before God. The judgment was very heavy, and here they are directed to own the hand of God in it, his mighty hand, and to humble themselves under it. Here is,

I. A proclamation issued out for a general fast. The priests are ordered to appoint one; they must not only mourn themselves, but they must call upon others to mourn too: 'Sanctify a fast; let some time be set apart from all worldly business to be spent in the exercises of religion, in the expressions of repentance and other extraordinary instances of devotion.' Note, under public judgments there ought to be public humiliations; for by them the Lord God calls to weeping and mourning. With all the marks of sorrow and shame sin must be confessed and bewailed, the righteousness of God must be acknowledged, and his favor implored. Observe what is to be done by a nation at such a time:

1. A day is to be appointed for this purpose, a day of restraint (so the margin reads it), a day in which people must be restrained from their other ordinary business (that they may more closely attend God's service), and from all bodily refreshments; for,

2. It must be a fast, a religious abstaining from meat and drink, further than is of absolute necessity. The king of Nineveh appointed a fast, in which they were to taste nothing, Jonah 3:7. Hereby we own ourselves unworthy of our necessary food, and that we have forfeited it and deserve to be wholly deprived of it, we punish ourselves and mortify the body, which has been the occasion of sin, we keep it in a frame fit to serve the soul in serving God, and, by the appetite's craving food, the desires of the soul towards that which is better than life, and all the supports of it, are excited. This was in a special manner seasonable now that God was depriving them of their meat and drink; for hereby they accommodated themselves to the affliction they were under. When God says, You shall fast, it is time to say, We will fast.

3. There must be a solemn assembly. The elders and the people, magistrates and subjects, must be gathered together, even all the inhabitants of the land, that God might be honored by their public humiliations, that they might thereby take the more shame to themselves, and that they might excite and stir up one another to the religious duties of the day. All had contributed to the national guilt, all shared in the national calamity, and therefore they must all join in the professions of repentance.

4. They must come together in the temple, the house of the Lord their God, because that was the house of prayer, and there they might hope to meet with God because it was the place which he had chosen to put his name there, there they might hope to speed because it was a type of Christ and his mediation. Thus they interested themselves in Solomon's prayer for the acceptance of all the requests that should be put up in or towards this house, in which their present case was particularly mentioned. 1 Kings 7:37, If there be locust, if there be caterpillar.

5. They must sanctify this fast, must observe it in a religious manner, with sincere devotion. What is a fast worth if it be not sanctified?

6. They must cry unto the Lord. To him they must make their complaint and offer up their supplication. When we cry in our affliction we must cry to the Lord; this is fasting to him, Zech 7:5."

It seems paradoxical that, when the land has been ravaged by plagues and drought to the point where food has to be rationed, that the people would be advised to fast in order to find a solution to the problem. In the book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom recounts that she and her sister Betsy decided to fast in Ravensbrück, the Nazi concentration camp. The food was horrible and the rations were conducive to starvation. Corrie explains that she and her sister felt the necessity because of the obvious demonic presence in the camp, and the extra hunger their decision caused helped to eat everything that was given to them, however unpalatable. Fasting puts the importance of food in its right perspective. Moses said to the people of Israel: "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."²¹

The call to repentance is not only made to reflect upon the calamities of the past but in order to prepare the people for the judgment to come. This is called "the day of the LORD." The prophet says to the people: "If you think what has just happened to you is bad, wait till you see what is ahead." A clear vision of God's judgment would make every person an instant evangelist. Jesus says in the story of *The Rich Man and Lazarus*: "In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his

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Deut. 8:3

side. He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ”²²

According to *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, the Syriac Bible repeats the “Alas,” as does the Vulgate, and the Septuagint. The Arabic version has it three times: “Alas, alas, alas, for the day!” This reminds us of the announcement of the judgment in Revelation, where John records: “As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: ‘Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!’ ”²³ These piercing cries of despair give voice to God’s compassion about the suffering of mankind. The word compassion must be taken literally in the sense of “com-passion – suffering together.” Jesus demonstrated this in His weeping over Jerusalem. We read: “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.’ ”²⁴

Isaiah almost literally quotes Joel, saying: “See, the day of the LORD is coming --a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger--to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.”²⁵

The locust plague and the drought were a judgment of God upon the land of Israel and its people. They were also an image of the judgment to come. As *Barnes' Notes* observes: “All judgment in time is an image of the Judgment for eternity.” It is of the greatest importance that we understand the reason for the adversities and sufferings God places in our ways. They are warnings of the final day of reckoning. They are opportunities for us to make amends and allow the Lord to make our way straight. The apostle Paul warns us: “If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.”²⁶

There is a danger in adhering to the doctrine of eternal security and resting our soul upon it, that our vigilance against sin slackens. I am not saying that we should doubt our salvation or not rejoice in it, but we should take to heart Jesus’ admonition to watch. We read in Mark’s Gospel: “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.”²⁷

In the setting of the Old and New Testament world, watching evoked an image of an enemy invasion. The watchman had to be alert and sound the alarm at any kind of unsuspected hostile activity. In Jesus’ parables the enemy is often found within. In the story in Luke’s Gospel, the enemy is not the master who is coming home but the servant who changes allegiance. We read: “But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and womenservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.”²⁸ Our natural sinful inclination is to please ourselves. That is the greatest danger to watch for. If loving and pleasing the Lord is no longer the priority of our life, we have lost our first love and we ought to repent. God’s locusts and God’s drought serve the purpose of bringing us back to the basics. We must allow ourselves to be reconciled.

Some commentators interpret vs. 15 to be the words Joel suggests for the people to say in their prayer of repentance. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, the Syriac Version introduces the verse with the words: “And say.” Some understand them to be an introduction to the locust’s plague and the drought, but that would mean that there is no chronological order at all in these verses. We rather take the meaning to be that the recent afflictions were an image of the day of God’s ultimate judgment. In the words of the apostle Peter: “By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will

²² Luke 16:23,27,28

²³ Rev. 8:13

²⁴ Luke 19:41,42

²⁵ Isa. 13:9

²⁶ I Cor 11:31,32

²⁷ Mark 13:35

²⁸ Luke 12:45,46

disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”²⁹

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “This day of the Lord comes suddenly, secretly, and irresistibly; and, when it comes, it is a destruction from the Almighty, or, according to the Hebrew paronomasia, *kesnod misshaddai*, equivalent to ‘ruin from the Resistless.’”

As earlier in the chapter, Joel emphasizes that the real tragedy is not in the lack of food and the physical hunger but in the lack of means of fellowship with God. It was not literally true that God had forsaken them; otherwise there would have been no prophetic word. The very fact that Joel spoke to them proved that God was still with them, although He was also against them. The plague and drought, however, were meant to make the people understand what it would feel like if God really abandoned them.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on vs. 17, stating: “Several difficult expressions occur in this verse, *Perudoth* is from *parad*, to scatter about, or to sow, broadcast, and hence signifies ‘scattered things,’— seed or grain sown. *vb"l"* is to dry up, molder, wither; and is said of seeds that lose their germinating power *Megraphoth* are clods of earth, the root being *garaph*, to wash away ... (Judges 5:21); the noun, therefore, denotes a clod of earth rolled together by water and swept away. *Otsaroth* were the storehouses, but these were allowed to molder away, as there was no reasonable prospect of a harvest or of grain to store in them. The *mam-megurah* or *megurah*, viz. the barns, had now become a useless appendage of the farmstead.”

In the moaning of the cattle the extent of the affliction was exemplified. The people of Nineveh understood that the whole of creation ought to be involved in repentance and contrition. We read in Jonah that the king of Nineveh issued a decree: “Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.”³⁰ The moaning of the cattle intoned the lament that the people were to join.

Thus far the prophet had not given any indication of being personally affected by the message he addressed to the drunk, the priests, the elders, and the people. In the last two verses of this chapter, however, it becomes evident that the Word of God touched him deeply and he cries out to the Lord in his own voice: “To you, O LORD, I call.” It is always God’s intention that the Word of God should have an effect on those who handle and proclaim it. Especially if the Word involves an announcement of judgment. Isaiah and Amos, among others, demonstrate that they were deeply moved themselves by what God wanted them to say to others. When Isaiah was commissioned by God to go, he cried out: “For how long, O Lord?”³¹ When Amos received his vision of a locust plague, we read: “I cried out, ‘Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!’”³² And Jeremiah’s emotional outbursts earned him the name of “the weeping prophet.” If we are in a position where we handle the Word of God in ministering to others, God will never allow us to adopt a professional unemotional attitude. He wants us to be involved in what we preach and to be moved with compassion. Jesus Himself gives us the example when He saw the crowds and “had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”³³ Just before His triumphal entrance in Jerusalem, we read: “As he approached Jerusalem, and saw the city, he wept over it.”³⁴ As we preach the Word we should follow in the footsteps of the Master.

Joel’s argument in his prayer is that if the Lord withholds compassion from people who are hardened in their sin, He should at least have pity on the innocent wild animals that are the victims of man’s wrongdoings. In our present day we are confronted with an avalanche of ecological nonsense. A society that kills babies without blinking an eye utters cries of despair in order to “save the whale.” But this does not mean that mankind does not bear any responsibility for the other part of God’s creation. In his exposition of the grace that saves us from condemnation, the apostle Paul links man’s redemption to the restoration of all

²⁹ II Peter 3:7,10

³⁰ Jonah 3:7,8

³¹ Isa. 6:11

³² Amos 7:2,4

³³ Matt. 9:36

³⁴ Luke 19:41

of creation. We read in the Epistle to the Romans: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself will be delivered from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."³⁵ In the same way as all of creation suffered when man fell, so will the redemption of man also mean to deliverance of the animal world. We may count on it that God will be susceptible to our prayer if we plead the cause of our fellow creatures.

The Pulpit Commentary notes that the various Hebrew words used respectively denote the cries of the different animals. According to Rashi, they express the cry of deer, the roar of lions; the low of oxen; the neighing of horses; and the twitter or chirp of birds.

II. The Day of the Lord in the Future 2:1--3:21

A. The Coming Day of the Lord 2:1-27

1. Prophecy of the Coming Invasion of Judah 2:1-11

1 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand-

2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come.

3 Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste- nothing escapes them.

4 They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry.

5 With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle.

6 At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale.

7 They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course.

8 They do not jostle each other; each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks.

9 They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves they enter through the windows.

10 Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.

11 The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

A superficial glance at this chapter would make us believe that Joel goes back to the beginning and again depicts the same plague of locusts. In a way this is true, because the prophet borrows pictures from his own first chapter. We do not believe, as some commentators do, that this time he speaks about an invasion by a human army. Phrases like: "They have the appearance of horses" and "they charge like warriors" are clearly meant as a comparison, not as a description of an actual scene.

The topic is stated as being "the day of the LORD." We mentioned earlier that John, in Revelation, returns to Joel's prophecy and portrays an army of demons who had been released from the Abyss by a fallen star, called Apollyon.³⁶ One of the problems we face in the interpretation of these verses is that the events described are called "the day of the LORD," but the essence of the plague is demonic. And what does God have in common with demons? The obvious answer is: "nothing." Yet, God allows Satan to carry out his ploys of destruction and even uses them to achieve His own purpose. In several instances God even takes credit for what the devil does. It is hard for us to understand how God, whose goodness is perfect, can be involved in designs that are intrinsically evil. We may not be able to fully understand the strategy of the chess game that is played between God and Satan, we know that God is white and the devil is black, and White is winning.

³⁵ Rom. 8:19

³⁶ See Rev. 9:1-11

We observed earlier that God created the locusts as well as the grass and all other vegetation. But creation was never meant to destroy itself. The destructive element was introduced with the fall of Lucifer and later the fall of man. In “the day of the LORD” this corruption comes to a head, the boil bursts open. God avenges Himself upon the sin of man by pulling up the fences and allowing evil to run its course.

In the broader picture of Revelation, we see in the images that depict the Great Tribulation the appearance of a human being, called the Antichrist. What happens in the scenes John describes relates to what man does. This is presented under the symbol of “the Seven Seals.” In the retake of the same scene, man has called upon demons for help to achieve his purpose. The demons come in and take over, dominating the situation. This is presented under the image of “the Seven Trumpets.” In the third take of the scene of this Great Tribulation, the image used is called “The Seven Bowls of God’s Wrath.” This third picture includes the two other ones.

This same truth can be applied here to Joel’s prophecy. In the scene of man’s mismanagements, evil powers have introduced themselves. God reveals Himself in all this and allows His wrath to work without restriction.

The sounding of the trumpet in Zion is a warning and implies the opportunity for repentance and a reversal of the events is still an option. When God announces judgment it is always done as an act of grace. Jonah understood this and made it the basis for his refusal to obey God’s command to preach in Nineveh. He did not want the Assyrians to have a chance to escape God’s judgment by an act of repentance.

The trumpet was to be sounded on God’s holy hill. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains about Mount Zion: “It rose to an elevation of 2539 feet above the level of the Mediterranean Sea. It was the place of the ark in David’s day, and so of the visible symbol of the Divine presence, and therefore the holy mountain, though subsequently Moriah was chosen as the temple-hill.”

The NIV reads: “The day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand.” The Hebrew reads literally: “The day of the LORD has come” putting it in the perfect tense. *The Pulpit Commentary* asks the question how it is possible for the day of the LORD to have come and at the same time to be “at hand.” It answers its own question by saying: “Keil’s solution of the difficulty is more satisfactory: every particular judgment that takes place in the history of God’s kingdom is the day of the Lord, and yet only approaching as far as the complete fulfillment was concerned.”

It was the responsibility of the priests to blow the trumpet together the people to gather for any special event, but especially in case of war, when the enemy invaded the country. We read in Numbers: “The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to blow the trumpets. This is to be a lasting ordinance for you and the generations to come. When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the LORD your God and rescued from your enemies.”³⁷ Any attack upon Israel was always considered to be a spiritual matter. Israel’s wars were never meant to be purely political affairs. Even the conquest of Canaan was an expression of God’s wrath upon the sins of the original inhabitants of the country. Also, any attack on Israel endangered the coming of the Messiah.

Inasmuch as the invasion of locusts was a picture of an attack by the powers of darkness upon the people of God, the counter move must be spiritual. Paul’s reminder stands: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”³⁸

The great factor in Joel’s day, however, was not so much the enemy without as the enemy within. The gist of Joel’s message throughout the whole book is not the ruin of the grass and the fruit trees, but the corruption of the human soul. The worm inside presents a much greater danger than the locusts. There is always a relationship between what is outside and inside. In the positive sense, we see that quiet waters and green pastures have power to restore the soul. As David sings: “He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”³⁹ But negatively also, the corruption of the soul responds to the enemy outside. Our flesh answers to

³⁷ Num. 10:8,9

³⁸ Eph. 6:12

³⁹ Ps. 23:2,3

the call of the world. Hell is the place where the worm within, responding to the fire without.⁴⁰ That is why Jesus also says: "Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."⁴¹

The trumpet must be blown in Zion, the place of God's revelation. The sound of the trumpet must wake us up. It is the revelation of God's holiness that stems the decay of the soul. Isaiah reacted to the vision of God's holiness by crying out: "Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."⁴² That was his salvation. The infilling with the Holy Spirit always begins with a conviction of sin. There is nothing wrong with a conversion that is born out of fear of judgment. If our fear of the Lord makes us flee to the Lord, we are on solid ground. God sometimes uses Satan to bring us to Himself. He uses darkness to drive us to the light. As the huge army of locusts obscured the light of the sun, so the legions of demons threaten us with their power of darkness.

It startles us that Joel calls such a phenomenon: "The Day of the Lord." Even the comparison with the spreading of the dawn across the mountains goes against the grain of logic. Evidently, God wants us to be startled by this reversed use of language. Joel uses his poetic powers in a masterly way. He uses words that evoke images of beauty and glory to depict horror and despair. How ought we to react to dawn on the mountains? What do we feel at the mention of the Garden of Eden? What happens to creation as it is meant to be? What are we in comparison to what we are meant to be?

Joel states that the enemy invasion has no equal in history. That statement lifts the event out of the context of Joel's day and places it at the end of time, of which Jesus says: "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again."⁴³ During the reign of the Antichrist, the powers of darkness will have full sway over the lives of people. All this is depicted in the locust plague.

Joel compares the advance of those insects with an invasion by a human army that proceeds with ruthless precision and perfectly organized discipline. They scourge the fields and raze the cities, causing the earth to quake and eclipse the sun.

Again, we revert to the question why God takes credit for such an unequaled outburst of demonic fury? Joel concludes his description by stating: "The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?" Speaking about the day on which God will reveal His wrath, the writer of Hebrews observes: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."⁴⁴

We could see in Joel's words about the Lord thundering at the head of His army a counter offensive to stem the tide of evil, but that interpretation, obviously, violates the unity of Joel's prophecy. It is clear that this fury of human and demonic evil does not occur outside the will of God. God may not wish this to happen but here He does more than merely allowing it. There may be more unintended truth in Beaudelaire's sinister remark: "If there is a God, He is the devil." Can we say that the Nazi camp of Auschwitz or the atomic bomb on Hiroshima were God's doing? Joel seems to say we can. All this appears irreconcilable with God's love. We must remember, though, that sin means choosing against God's love. Only those who have withdrawn from the protecting love of God's hand fall into the dreadful hands of the living God. The reason God paints this vivid picture of despair and destruction is so that we would cast our vote against it.

2. Conditional Promise of the Salvation of Judah 2:12-27

12 `Even now,` declares the LORD, `return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.`

⁴⁰ See Mark 9:48

⁴¹ Mark 9:49,50

⁴² Isa. 6:5

⁴³ Matt. 24:21

⁴⁴ Heb. 10:31

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.

14 Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing-grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God.

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly.

16 Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber.

17 Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare your people, O LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?''

18 Then the LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people.

19 The LORD will reply to them: 'I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.

20 'I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise. 'Surely he has done great things.

21 Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice. Surely the LORD has done great things.

22 Be not afraid, O wild animals, for the open pastures are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches.

23 Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before.

24 The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.

25 'I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten-the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm-my great army that I sent among you.

26 You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.

27 Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed.

“Even now” opens a door of escape from judgment. Jesus opens this door for us when He says: “I tell you the truth, (Amen, amen) whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”⁴⁵

Verses 12-17 describe in detail what it means to repent from sin.

1. It means returning to the Lord (vs. 12). The name “the LORD” is the translation of YHWH. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains: “The divine name YHWH appears only in the Bible. ... Apparently Adam knew Him by this personal or covenantal name from the beginning, since Seth both called his son Enosh (i.e., man as a weak and dependent creature) and began (along with all other pious persons) to call upon (formally worship) the name of YHWH, ‘the Lord’ Gen 4:26. The covenant found a fuller expression and application when God revealed Himself to Abraham Gen 12:8, promising redemption in the form of national existence. This promise became reality through Moses, to whom God explained that He was not only the ‘God who exists’ but the ‘God who effects His will’: ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord [YHWH] God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord [YHWH] God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites...’ Ex 3:15-17. So God explained the meaning of ‘I am who I am’ Ex 3:14. He spoke to the fathers as YHWH, but the promised deliverance and, therefore, the fuller significance or experienced meaning of His name were unknown to them Ex 6:2-8.”

⁴⁵

John 5:24

2. It involves our heart. The Book of Proverbs calls the heart: “the wellspring of life.” We read: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”⁴⁶
3. It means an appeal to grace (vs. 14).
4. It involves more than personal commitment alone. Repentance pertains to society as a whole. It is, therefore, part of evangelism (vs. 15,16). It bridges the generation gap (vs. 16). It permeates sexual relations (bridegroom and bride – vs. 16).
5. It requires intercession (vs. 17).
6. It is vital to our testimony (vs. 17).

1. Returning to the Lord entails a complete break with idolatry, that is of everything and everyone that usurps the place of God in our lives. We read the words of Samuel: “If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”⁴⁷

It means: loving God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”⁴⁸

It means: making a U-turn in life. The word “return” means that God was the original but abandoned goal and purpose.

It means: going home.

2. The “heart” represents more than the emotional part of our being alone. It is not the heart in contrast with the head, but the heart as the core of self. It is “the wellspring of life.” Returning to the Lord with the heart means: being genuine, remorseful, crushed. Jeremiah says about the heart: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”⁴⁹ Rending the heart means allowing God to search and cleanse it. Jeremiah continues by saying: “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”⁵⁰ David exemplifies what the rending of the heart means. We read in his psalm of contrition: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”⁵¹

Rending our clothes is symbolic for being naked before God. It means more than taking off one’s clothes; it is tearing them off. The embarrassment of physical nakedness is nothing in comparison with the nakedness of the soul. Adam and Eve experienced this. They felt naked before one another and they did not like what they saw in themselves and in each other. If we uncover ourselves before God, He will provide His cover for our shame, as He did for Adam and Eve. The rending of the garment, originally, refers to a condition of leprosy. The law stated: “The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’”⁵²

3. We will discover God’s grace when we bare ourselves before Him. God is never out to embarrass us; He loves us. Love and shame do not go together. Paul says about love, God’s *agape* love: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”⁵³ The Greek word rendered “protect” is *stego*, which literally means: “to roof over,” or “to cover with silence.”

At my conversion, I thought God would embarrass me by revealing all my sins to others. As it turned out, He was not even willing to talk about them.

⁴⁶ Prov. 4:23

⁴⁷ I Sam. 7:3

⁴⁸ Deut. 6:5

⁴⁹ Jer. 17:9

⁵⁰ Jer. 17:10

⁵¹ Ps. 51:17

⁵² Lev. 13:45

⁵³ I Cor. 13:4-7

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the words “He is gracious and merciful”: “The Hebrew words are intensive, very gracious and very merciful. The attributes of God here are taken from the Pentateuch (Ex 34:6-7, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’).”

God will provide us with the means to serve Him and He even pays us for our services. He places a crown on the heads that are bowed before Him.

4. Repentance must involve all generations. In a sense, repentance bridges the generation gap. For nursing babies, repentance can hardly be a conscious act of the will. For them it is more a matter of being fed the concept while drinking their mother’s milk. It is often a shocking discovery for children that their parents need repentance. Parents tend to project the image of always having their act together. The best thing parents can do for their children in educating them is to apologize and humble themselves when they have made mistakes. A child must learn to apologize and there is no better way than for a parent to show them how it is done. We have to demonstrate to our children how we receive the grace of God. Salvation consists in the knowledge of the forgiveness of sin. Zechariah sang at the birth of John the Baptist that God would: “give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.”⁵⁴ Only sins confessed become sins forgiven.

In order for repentance to reach all levels of society, there must be evangelism. Without hope of forgiveness, people will not be willing to confess. A case in point is the miraculous solution of the problem of racial tensions in South Africa. The new government issued blank pardons to all who came to confess their crimes committed under the white apartheid regime. The Gospel of forgiveness of sin must be preached before forgiveness can become a reality.

The bridegroom and bride are ordered to postpone their honeymoon. In the lives of most married couples, the first night together after the exchange of vows is the exciting beginning of a new life together. Joel suggests the postponement of a lifelong sexual relationship in order to establish a lasting relationship with God. In this chapter, the context for such a decision is repentance. But it also suggests that, in order to have a happy married life, we must love the Lord more than each other.

The apostle Paul also suggests temporary abstinence as a form of fasting and dedication to prayer. We read in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”⁵⁵

There seems to be a progression in the kind of people called upon to repent. The first appeal is to the people as the broad basis of the pyramid; then it peaks in the call for repentance of the priests.

The place where the priests must weep is designated as “between the temple porch and the altar.” It is impossible to determine with certitude the significance of this location. If in fact, as was suggested at the beginning of our study, Joel prophesied during the reign of King Joash, this may indicate that the murder of the prophet Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, had already taken place. We read the report of this murder in the Book of Second Chronicles: “But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the LORD’s temple.”⁵⁶ Jesus also mentions this crime in His indictment of the Pharisees and scribes of His day: “And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”⁵⁷ (About the discrepancy between the names mentioned in Chronicles and Matthew, *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes that: “Jerome says that, in the Gospel of the Nazarenes, it was Jehoiada, instead of Barachiah. [And] That Jehoiada and Barachiah have the very same meaning, the praise or blessing of Yahweh.”) The priests, then, had to confess their sins, the sins of their king, and of the people at the scene of the crime.

⁵⁴ Luke 1:77

⁵⁵ I Cor. 7:3-5

⁵⁶ II Chr. 24:21

⁵⁷ Matt. 23:35

In the suggested confession, Israel is referred to as God's inheritance. The expression originated from Moses who pled with God after Israel sinned with the Gold Calf. We read: "I lay prostrate before the LORD those forty days and forty nights because the LORD had said he would destroy you. I prayed to the LORD and said, 'O Sovereign LORD, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.'" ⁵⁸ That thought was probably the farthest from the people's mind. One has to consider oneself to belong to the Lord before worrying about God's inheritance. But, evidently, God worries about it! He wants us to realize what we lose when we leave Him. The apostle Paul emphasizes our inheritance in his Epistle to the Romans by stating: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."⁵⁹ According to Paul's definition, God's heritage among His people is: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."⁶⁰ In principle, God's inheritance among Israel was the same, although people in Joel's day cannot have understood this.

The idea that human beings may be God's inheritance sounds strange to us. We think of a heritage as a windfall that brings a person in possession of a wealth that had been unavailable before. Poor people become rich that way. But how can God, who is the epitome of riches, be enriched by human poverty? We can understand the reverse, but not this. Evidently, sin has turned our concept of truth upside-down. In God's plan of creation, man is destined for glory. Jesus is called "the author of [our] salvation," who brings "many sons to glory."⁶¹ God is glorified in our glorification. Man's fall into sin has not cancelled this process; it has only interrupted it. Sin is merely a parenthesis in the history of the universe.

If, however, we understand that we are God's inheritance, the thought that the inheritance could become an object of scorn should horrify us.

Instead of the words: "a byword among the nations," as we find in the NIV rendering of vs. 17, the KJV reads: "that the heathen should rule over them." The newer translations seem to lean toward the former rendering.

The reaction of the outsiders: "Where is their God?" is interesting. Unbelievers often have a clearer concept of truth than believers. Outsiders are quick to notice inconsistencies in the lives of people who claim to believe in God. The nations surrounding Israel knew better what the lifestyle of God's chosen people ought to be than Israel knew it. It has been said that God's greatest enemy is not Satan but Christians!

In the context of this confession, Joel makes us understand that only the Spirit of God can make people walk worthy of the Gospel. If God is not in it, His inheritance will turn into an object of scorn. God does not like to be mocked. He will hold us responsible if our behavior causes others to turn against Him. But He will also be quick to answer our cry for help if we call upon Him to maintain our testimony.

This section is again introduced by the sound of the trumpet. The same trumpet sounded in vs. 1 of this chapter. There it was a warning of God's judgment to come. Here, it also introduces a judgment, not God's judgment over our life, but our own evaluation. The apostle Paul states: "If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment."⁶² The safest way to escape God's judgment is to judge ourselves first and confess what we find to be wrong.

Vs. 18 marks the turning point of this book. When people sincerely confess their sins before God, Joel promises that God will not fail to respond. We read: "Then the LORD will be jealous for his land." The verse seems to suggest that the land of Canaan is considered to be God's heritage. The Scriptures refer to the Promised Land as God's rest. When Israel aggravated the Lord in the desert, He responded: "They shall never enter my rest."⁶³ The writer of Hebrews digs deeply into the meaning of these words and he comes to the conclusion: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest

⁵⁸ Deut. 9:25,26

⁵⁹ Rom. 8:17

⁶⁰ Col. 1:27

⁶¹ See Heb. 2:10

⁶² I Cor. 11:31

⁶³ Ps. 95:11

also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”⁶⁴ Obviously, God’s inheritance is not merely a piece of real estate. It is a condition of rest, of accomplishment of a perfect act of creation of which the Sabbath is symbolic. People become God’s inheritance inasmuch as they enter into God’s sabbatical rest.

The Hebrew keyword that describes God’s reaction is *qana*, “jealous.” It is the word that is used in a marriage relation that has gone wrong. The Mosaic Law stated: “If a man’s wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him by sleeping with another man, and this is hidden from her husband and her impurity is undetected (since there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act), and if feelings of jealousy come over her husband and he suspects his wife and she is impure--or if he is jealous and suspects her even though she is not impure...”⁶⁵ Israel’s relationship with God is elsewhere described as a marriage. Isaiah states: “For your Maker is your husband--the LORD Almighty is his name--the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.”⁶⁶

The word “jealous” also has a competitive meaning. In that sense, it can also be applied to God. God does not share His glory with anyone else. God told Isaiah: “I will not yield my glory to another.”⁶⁷ It is obvious that God’s jealousy has nothing to do with envy, as human jealousy often does. *Vine’s Expository of Old Testament Words* suggest that the meaning of the word, in this context, is better rendered “zealous” instead of “jealous.” Interestingly, the difference in English is only one letter!

“Zealous” is a high-energy word. It may be difficult for us to imagine the Almighty releasing a sudden burst of energy. Yet, in Jesus’ Parable of the Prodigal Son, that is exactly what the father does. We read: “But while [the boy] was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”⁶⁸

God promises to send grain, new wine, and oil. The way this is stated, it does not sound to be the normal outcome of a natural harvest, the result of human labor with God’s added blessing. It seems to come in the form of a miraculous intervention. The grain, wine, and oil had been the elements of sacrifice to the Lord, which had to be discontinued because of the lack of it. Now, these ingredients would be available again, so that the fellowship with God could continue and flourish. This renewed relationship guaranteed the lifting of the “scorn of the nations.” No longer would people have to ask: “Where is God among the Israelites?” His presence would be overwhelmingly obvious.

Barnes’ Notes, quoting Hugo de S. Victor, breaks out in a beautiful acclamation, celebrating the return of blessing upon confession of sin. We read: “O fruitful and manly penitence! O noble maiden, most faithful intercessor for sins! A plank after shipwreck! Refuge of the poor, help of the miserable, hope of exiles, cherisher of the weak, light of the blind, solace of the fatherless, scourge of the petulant, axe of vices, garner of virtues. Thou who alone bindest the Judge, pleadest with the Creator, conquerest the Almighty. While overcome, thou overcomest; while tortured, thou torturest; while wounding, thou healest; while healthfully succumbing, thou triumphest gloriously. Thou alone, while others keep silence, mountest boldly the throne of grace. David thou leadest by the hand and reconcilest; Peter thou restorest; Paul thou enlightenest; the Publican, taken from the receipt of custom, thou boldly insertest in the choir of the Apostles; Mary, from a harlot, thou bearest aloft and joinest to Christ; the robber nailed to the cross, yet fresh from blood, thou introducest into Paradise. What more? At thy disposal is the court of heaven.”

The use of the Hebrew words for “grain,” “wine,” and “oil” is interesting. *Dagan*, rendered “grain” is derived from a word, meaning “to increase.” *Tiyrowsh*, “wine,” comes from *yarash*, which means, “to expel,” or “cast out.” *The Pulpit Commentary* mentions the meaning: “To take possession of the brain.” *Yitshar* comes from a word that can also be rendered: “to shine.” The fact that the article prefixes each of these words makes them into the product mentioned. But the original meaning from which the words are derived must have been prominent in the minds of the hearers of Joel’s prophecy and added an extra glow to the promise.

⁶⁴ Heb. 4:9,10

⁶⁵ Num. 5:12-14

⁶⁶ Isa. 54:5

⁶⁷ Isa. 48:11

⁶⁸ Luke 15:20

In the promise of the destruction of the enemy, Joel captures both the locusts and the armies of Assyria, of which the locusts were an image. The locusts would drown in the Mediterranean and in the Dead Sea. Zephaniah uses similar words to predict the destruction of Assyria: "He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, leaving Nineveh utterly desolate and dry as the desert."⁶⁹

It is interesting to see that the promise of blessing precedes the destruction of evil. God does not first destroy the locusts and then provide the abundance. As in nature, the leaves of a tree fall off because of the pressure of the new bud that will burst open in spring, so, spiritually, evil cedes its place to the new life that God imparts. The key of the process is man's repentance. None of God's promises take effect if the people do not confess their sins and repent of them.

Beginning with vs. 21, the prophecy turns more into poetry. The land and the wild animals are admonished not to fear, as if they possessed personality. Zion is told to rejoice because of an abundant harvest of righteousness, exemplified in a wealth grain, wine, and oil. Poetry often has a way of penetrating to the core of truth that is beyond the reach of prose. Joel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, does this in a beautiful way in these verses.

There is a complete reversal of the former judgment, effecting, in ascending line, the beasts, the fields, and the people. The cattle that moaned and the wild animals that panted are admonished not to be afraid. The land that was scourged by drought will bloom again, and the people who were ordered to mourn and lament may rejoice.

The productivity of Palestine heavily depended on rainfall, which came in two separate seasons. There was the October rain, called *moreh*, which promoted germination of the newly planted seed and there was the March rain, called *malquosh*, which stimulated the ripening of the grain. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* explains: "The autumnal, or 'former rain,' from the middle of October to the middle of December, is put first, as Joel prophesies in summer, when the locusts' invasion took place, and therefore looks to the time of early sowing in autumn, when the autumnal rain was indispensably required."

There is an interesting footnote to the words: "for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness." Other readings are: "For he hath given you the former rain moderately,"⁷⁰ or "For he has given the early rain for your vindication."⁷¹ The Hebrew word *moreh* or *mowreh* has the additional meaning of "teacher." We recognize the connection in the opening words of Moses' monumental address in Deuteronomy: "Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants."⁷² In several older manuscripts, Hebrew and Chaldee, the footnote reads: "For He has given you the teacher of righteousness." This is supported by Jerome and some Hebrew scholars, and strongly opposed by others, among whom is Calvin. We may assume, however, that, generally speaking, the double meaning of certain words must always have been present in the mind of the Hebrew hearers and that, even if the second meaning was not understood to be the primary one, it must have lent depth to the primary meaning.

The autumn rain and the spring rain are also considered to be images of the Holy Spirit, of whom Jesus said to His disciples: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."⁷³ This connection may serve as a confirmation of the interpretation of "the teacher of righteousness" as one of the meanings of the rain. We still speak of the Holy Spirit in terms of "showers of blessing" and "mercy drops." That, definitely, fits in with the meaning of the oil and the wine, which in the context of Joel's prophecy, have a spiritual connotation.

The NIV reads vs. 25: "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten." The KJV reads: "I will restore..." The Hebrew word *shalam* is related to *shalom*, meaning "to be complete," or "to reciprocate." The word is found in the verse: "If a man uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit must pay for the loss; he must pay its owner, and the dead animal

⁶⁹ Zeph. 2:13

⁷⁰ KJV

⁷¹ RSV

⁷² Deut. 32:2

⁷³ John 14:26

will be his.”⁷⁴ It seems strange to us that this particular word is used in the context of God’s blessing upon sinners who repent of their sin. The profound truth behind this is, of course, that God did in fact make Himself the payment for our sins, which allows Him to bless us legally. Billy Graham once used the illustration of being pulled over by a policeman for speeding. When he appeared before the judge, he was fined. After pronouncing judgment, the judge himself gave him a check for the amount of the fine. Paul states this beautifully in his Epistle to the Romans, where we read: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”⁷⁵

Some commentators deduct from the fact that Joel speaks in the plural of “the years the locusts have eaten,” that the plague spread out over several years. But others take the plural to be an idiomatic expression, in the same sense as Sarah’s words at the birth of Isaac: “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”⁷⁶

There is no record in Scriptures that a miraculous restoration, such as is announced here, has ever occurred. But then, there is no record either that there ever was a general confession of sin and repentance which involved all the strata of society. God’s blessings are never automatic and His promises are not self-fulfilling. We have to meet God’s conditions in order to receive them. This explains why so many of God’s great plans or restoration are never realized. God wants us to reach out in prayer. He only fills us if we open our mouth; as Asaph sang in the psalms: “Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.”⁷⁷ God’s eagerness to bless is seldom matched by our desire to be blessed. We could classify some of Joel’s words as “God’s wishful thinking.” This does not mean that God is not realistic; evidently we are the ones who are not.

In this context, we find again the word *buwsh* “to be ashamed.” The same word is used in ch. 1:11, where the NIV renders it: “Despair, you farmers.” Here it is used in the same sense as in Isaiah, where God says: “For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me.”⁷⁸

The word “shame,” both in Hebrew and English, is an interesting word. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* states: “The word has overtones of being or feeling worthless.” As human beings, we derive our worth from the character of God, in whose image we are created. Sin creates in us a sense of worthlessness. This is evinced in the reaction of Adam and Eve when they sinned and felt ashamed before one another and before God. Joel’s message emphasizes that what befell the land in the locust invasion and drought was the result of their broken relationship with God. The picture of the ravaged countryside was emblematic of the condition of their sinful barren soul. As creatures who are supposed to reflect the glory of God, we have plenty of reason to be ashamed. God promises a complete deliverance from shame in the restoration of fellowship with Him. The praise that flows from the person who is physically satisfied by an abundance of food is a picture of the soul that is fed, not by bread alone, but by the Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.⁷⁹ The cause of Israel’s shame had been her idolatry. Once the supremacy of God is anew recognized in the land, the feeling of shame is gone.

B. The Ultimate Day of the Lord 2:28--3:21

1. Last Events Before the Terrible Day of the Lord 2:28-32

⁷⁴ Ex. 21:33,34

⁷⁵ Rom. 8:1-4

⁷⁶ Gen. 21:7

⁷⁷ Ps. 81:10

⁷⁸ Isa. 49:23 (NKJV)

⁷⁹ See Deut. 8:3

28` And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

30 I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke.

31 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

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, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Here all symbolism is gone and the picture changes into reality. Even if Israel did not respond to God's call for a sacred assembly and universal repentance in the days of Joel, God is not canceling His eternal plan of salvation and rehabilitation of His creation. We know from Peter's quotation of these verses on the day of Pentecost⁸⁰ that this prophecy is, at least partly, fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on this section: "In the Hebrew Bible, verses 28-32 constitute chapter 3. The word afterward looks forward far beyond the locust plague and Israel's repentance and restoration. For here the prophet turns from the physical and material to the spiritual and eternal. Through his prophetic vision, Joel rises above the religious experience of the local locust plague to a wider view of history. He dips into the future and sees spiritual revival in Israel and deliverance from all surrounding enemies. His vision thus anticipates a first fulfillment on the day of Pentecost and a final realization in the complete victory of the kingdom of the Lord Christ."

In order to understand Joel's reaching forward we have to reach back to the record of man's creation. We read in Genesis: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."⁸¹ By breathing His own Spirit into Adam, God created the human spirit. The Hebrew word, rendered "living being" is *nephesh*, which literally means "a breathing creature," or "a living soul." *Nephesh* is derived from *napash*, which means "breathing." Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish in Scripture between the soul and the spirit. We believe, however, that the spirit is meant to be the organ with which the human can fellowship with God, and the soul is that which governs his mind, emotions, and the will. What God promises in Joel's prophecy is not a restoration of the human spirit that died when Adam committed the first sin, but His own Holy Spirit to fuse with the human spirit.

Jesus was the first human being upon whom the Holy Spirit was poured out in this fashion. In Him, the prophecy of Joel was first fulfilled. We read in the record of His baptism: "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'⁸² And John the Baptist testified about Him: "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit."⁸³

As sinful human beings it is nigh to impossible for us to understand what this infusion of the Holy Spirit must have meant to the man Jesus. It made Him into the Messiah, the Christ, "the Anointed One." And it prepared Him to become "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."⁸⁴ Jesus' own infilling with the Holy Spirit qualified Him to impart the Spirit to other human beings. The Holy Spirit is identified as the Spirit of the Father, as well as the Spirit of the Son. Jesus testified that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in His Name⁸⁵, but also that *He* would send the Holy Spirit from the Father.⁸⁶ The key to the sending

⁸⁰ See Acts 2:17-21

⁸¹ Gen. 2:7

⁸² Matt. 3:16,17

⁸³ John 3:34

⁸⁴ See John 1:29

⁸⁵ See John 14:26

⁸⁶ See John 15:26

of the Holy Spirit from the throne of heaven upon men on earth is in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. We deduct this from Jesus' words to His disciples: "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."⁸⁷ Paul's words corroborate this: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."⁸⁸

Joel states that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit "on all people" will occur "afterward." Scholars have tried to pin a date on this definition of time. In the light of subsequent history, it has been determined that the people first were led into captivity. After the return from Babylon and the partial restoration of Israel as a nation, there was a period of God's silence, covering four centuries. As we have seen, the coming of the Messiah, His life, death, and resurrection are crucial features in the fulfillment of this promise. The question remains though whether the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost meant to ultimate fulfillment of the promise. It is true that, on the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted almost literally all of Joel's prophecy, including the words "I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord."⁸⁹ None of these signs occurred on that day or in the twenty centuries that have elapsed so far. We may conclude, therefore, that "afterward" refers to the end time, the day of final restoration, the day of which God said: "I am making everything new!"⁹⁰

It is an awesome thought that Joel's prophecy spans the ages and reaches into eternity. This world will come to the point in time where Israel will realize it has missed the reason for her existence and the people will mourn the death of their Son whom they pierced.⁹¹ The apostle Paul writes to the Romans: "Because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?"⁹²

The immediate result of the coming of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost was God's revelation of Himself to the human mind in various forms. Joel mentions prophecy, dreams, and visions. These are mentioned in connection with sons and daughters, old men and young men. This does not necessarily mean that only old men dream and young men see visions, or that parents of the sons and daughters would not prophesy. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "In this coming manifestation of the Spirit, no distinction will be made on grounds of sex, age, or position; but a distinction will be made in the different methods by which the revelation is received and the prophetic gift exercised. That is, their sons, daughters, old persons, and youths will receive the Spirit of the Lord with all his various gifts... They will become 'organs of Divine revelation' to all nations!"

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Sons and daughters without distinction of sex; old men and young men without reference to age; servants and handmaids without regard to social position. Thus it is with the Spirit of God as with the Son of God, of whom the apostle says, 'There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all.' The blessing of salvation through the Son of God and by the Spirit of God is wide as the world in its offer, and free to all who accept it – without national distinction, for there is neither Jew nor Greek; without social distinction, for there is neither bond nor free; without sexual distinction, for there is neither male nor female; without ceremonial distinction, for there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision; without intellectual or education distinction, for the barbarian and even the Scythian, the lowest type of barbarian, are free to share

⁸⁷ John 16:7

⁸⁸ Gal. 3:13,14

⁸⁹ Acts 2:19,20

⁹⁰ Rev. 21:5

⁹¹ See Rev. 1:7

⁹² Rom. 11:11,12,15

the blessing. ... The mode in which spiritual communication is (1) according to some is that of visions to the young, whose fancy is more vigorous; that of dreams to the old, in the decadence of their mental powers; while to the sons and daughters the gift is prophesying. Other more correctly (2) understand prophecy as the general term for speaking under the Spirit's influence or instructing by Divine inspiration; while the two forms of prophetic revelation are dreams when the mental 'faculties are suspended by natural causes,' and visions or trances when 'suspended by supernatural causes,' the communication in either case being supernatural. This prediction began to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost."

The definition of prophecy has caused some confusion in the minds of believers, as if prophecy would only consists in the prediction of the future. Some prophetic utterances in Scripture pertained to the past or the present. In the story of the healing of the Syrian army general Naaman by the prophet Elisha, we read how Elisha's servant thought he could take advantage of the situation and collect the gifts of Naaman that Elisha had refused to accept. Upon Gehazi's return home with the boot, we read the following dialogue: " 'Where have you been, Gehazi?' Elisha asked. 'Your servant didn't go anywhere,' Gehazi answered. But Elisha said to him, 'Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants?' "⁹³ A sample of prophecy pertaining to a present condition is found in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. Paul writes to this church: "If an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!' "⁹⁴ In the same chapter of this letter Paul gives the classic definition of prophecy, saying: "Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort."⁹⁵ This has led many people to believe that preaching is a form of prophecy.

Joel's prediction, however, goes well beyond the concept of the preaching of a sermon. Dreams and visions certainly do not fall into this limited scope of interpretation. The fact that the promise emphatically states that God's Spirit will be poured out upon all people, indicates that the fulfillment of this prophecy at the day of Pentecost was only partial. The whole nation of Israel certainly did not receive the gift of the Spirit and it took centuries for the Roman Empire to feel the impact of it. In our present day, Christians are not even a majority among the population of the world and not everyone who calls himself a Christian is filled with the Holy Spirit. The complete realization of the promise is, evidently, still to come. We may assume that this will happen on the day of which the prophets Habakkuk and Isaiah speak, saying: "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."⁹⁶ Yet, we understand that God's ultimate goal with man is to have him share His glory to the point of total identification, not merely by means of dreams and visions. This mode of revelation can, therefore, be considered to be part of the process of maturing.

Joel has spoken of "the day of the LORD" in terms of fear and trembling. In this promise, however, he speaks of the day of the LORD as something to look forward to. In Peter's quote, he calls it: "the great and glorious day of the Lord." The word "glorious" is the rendering of the NIV. The KJV reads: "notable." The Greek word is *epiphanies*, which is derived from *epiphaino*, meaning "to shine upon," or "to become visible." It is the word, used in the New Testament to refer to the Second Coming of Christ.

Some commentators interpret the eclipse of the sun and the change in the color of the moon symbolically. But the context in Peter's Second epistle does not bear this out. Peter links the end of the world to the flood of Noah, which definitely was not a symbol of any kind. People perished in that water. We read: "But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and

⁹³ II Kings 5:25,26

⁹⁴ I Cor. 14:24,25

⁹⁵ I Cor. 14:3

⁹⁶ Hab. 2:14; Isa. 11:9^b

destruction of ungodly men.”⁹⁷ Jesus refers to Joel’s prophecy in His prediction of the end of the world. We read in Matthew’s Gospel: “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.’ ”⁹⁸ And John’s vision of the end of the world in Revelation hardly calls for a symbolic interpretation. We read: “I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.”⁹⁹

The concluding verse of this chapter stands out as one of the peaks of Old Testament Gospel. The apostle Paul quotes Joel in his Epistle to the Romans, where we read: “As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ ”¹⁰⁰ In this quotation, the emphasis is on “everyone,” erasing any distinction between Jew and gentile.

For us, the simplicity of the promise, calling upon the Name of the Lord, is the greatest thrust. The single word “Help!” is sufficient to save one’s soul. The classic example of the effectiveness of this cry is demonstrated during Jesus’ crucifixion. One of the two robbers who was crucified with Christ said: “‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’ ”¹⁰¹

Some commentators try to soften the blow of Joel’s statement by adding to the word “call” the meaning of worship. It is true that our salvation must lead us to a life of worship and fellowship with God, but the story of the robber shows us that there are circumstances in which a human being is not even given the chance to worship. The full power of Joel’s statement is evinced in conditions of spiritual emergency that call for an immediate solution. It is not a life of fellowship with God that saves our soul; it is our cry for help. People who were dying in car accidents have been advised to make this call with their last breath, giving them the assurance which they needed to pass into eternity. On our mission station in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, I once told a dying witchdoctor to make this call for help. A few hours before his death, he said: “Jesus, help me!” I fully expect to see him in glory, in spite of the fact that he did not have a life of faith in Christ to back up his emergency call.

The mention of Mount Zion seems to indicate that the passage particularly refers to the return of Christ. Speaking about the Second Coming, the prophet Zechariah says: “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.”¹⁰² It is true that topographically, Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives are not identical, but they are only a few hundred yards from each other and both have acquired a spiritual significance in other parts of Scripture.

Zion and Jerusalem are historically the sites of God’s revelation. There the temple was built in which the Shekinah dwelt. It was the center of Israel as a kingdom of priests, who were called to draw all of mankind into fellowship with God. Israel has suffered immensely throughout the ages because she has not lived up to the high calling which is part of being the guardians of this divine revelation.

Those who survived the waves of judgment are called *sariyd*, “survivor,” or “remnant.” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “All prophecy echoes the words of Joel; all history exemplifies them. Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, all foretell with one voice, that a remnant, and a ‘remnant’ only,

⁹⁷ II Peter 3:5-7

⁹⁸ Matt. 24:29

⁹⁹ Rev. 6:12-14

¹⁰⁰ Rom. 10:11-13

¹⁰¹ Luke 23:42,43

¹⁰² Zech. 14:4,5

shall be left. In those earlier dispensations of God, in the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; in His dealings with Israel himself at the entrance into the promised land, the return from the captivity, the first preaching of the Gospel, the destruction of Jerusalem, 'a remnant' only was saved. It is said in tones of compassion and mercy, that 'a remnant should be saved.' "

The big picture is of the end of times, in which Israel is restored to what God intended it to be from eternity: "a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of [their] God."¹⁰³ All people on earth will then acknowledge the truth of Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman: "salvation is from the Jews."¹⁰⁴ The mention of Jerusalem and Mount Zion as the source of salvation does not necessarily mean a topographic reference. Even if Israel is restored and is conformed to the image of what God intends it to be, what matters is not the location or the people, but the spiritual antitype. The book of Revelation reveals that the real Jerusalem is the New Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven to earth and Mount Zion is the place where the Lamb of God is standing with the saints in heaven.¹⁰⁵

2. Events of the Terrible Day of the Lord ch. 3

a. Judgment on the Gentiles 3:1-17

*1 In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,
2 I will gather all 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 my land.
3 They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine that they might drink.
4 Now what have you against me, O Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done.
5 For you took my silver and my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples.
6 You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland.
7 See, I am going to rouse them out of the places to which you sold them, and I will return on your own heads what you have done.
8 I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away. The LORD has spoken.
9 Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack.
10 Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, I am strong!
11 Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there. Bring down your warriors, O LORD!
12 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 sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.*

¹⁰³ Isa. 62:3

¹⁰⁴ John 4:22

¹⁰⁵ See Rev. 22:1; 14:1

17 `Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her.

The first point to be determined is the meaning of the words: “In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem...” The KJV reads here: “For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem...” The Hebrew word *shebuwth* means literally: “exile,” or figuratively: “a former state of prosperity.” The same word is used in one of the Psalms of Ascent: “When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.”¹⁰⁶

Whether the reference is to the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity or to some other event is hotly debated among scholars. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes rather wryly: “It may refer to those times in which the Jews shall be brought in with the fullness of the Gentiles, and be re-established in their own land. Or there may be portions in this prophecy that refer to all the events; and to others that have not fallen yet within the range of human conjecture, and will be only known when the time of fulfillment shall take place. In this painful uncertainty, rendered still more so by the discordant opinions of many wise and learned men, it appears to be my province, as I have nothing in the form of a new conjecture to offer, to confine myself to an explanation of the phraseology of the chapter; and then leave the reader to apply it as may seem best to his own judgment.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states more specifically: “The Jews restrict this to the return from Babylon. Christians refer it to the coming of Christ. But the prophet comprises the whole redemption, beginning from the return out of Babylon, then continued from the first advent of Christ down to the last day (His second advent), when God will restore His Church to perfect felicity (Calvin).”

It is true that the word *shebuwth* is used sometimes in a wider sense, which excludes transportation to a foreign country. We read, for instance, about Job: “After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.”¹⁰⁷ The KJV reads: “And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends.”

There is no place in Palestine that is presently called “Valley of Jehoshaphat.” The allusion to the king who bore that name seems to make it a reference to the place where Jehoshaphat won the battle against the Moabites and Ammonites.¹⁰⁸ It was the battle of which the Lord had said: “The battle is not yours, but God’s.”¹⁰⁹ After this battle, the place came to be known as the Valley of Beracah.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states that: “The ‘mount of Olives’ answers to the ‘valley of Jehoshaphat’ here. The latter is called ‘the valley of blessing’ (Berachah) (2 Chron 20:26). It lies between Jerusalem and the mount of Olives and has the Kedron flowing through it. As Jehoshaphat overthrew the confederate foes of Judah, namely, Ammon, Moab, etc. (Ps 83:6-8), in this valley (which was therefore called the valley of blessing, for there they blessed the Lord previous to the victory, 2 Chron 20:21-22,26), so God was to overthrow the Tyrians, Zidonians, Philistines, Edom, and Egypt, with a similar utter overthrow (Joel 3:4,19). This has been long ago fulfilled: but the ultimate event shadowed forth herein is still future, when God shall specially interpose to destroy Jerusalem’s last foes, of whom Tyre, Zidon, Edom, Egypt, and Philistia are the types. Since ‘Jehoshaphat’ means ‘the judgment of Yahweh,’ the valley of Jehoshaphat may be used as a general term for the theater of God’s final judgments on Israel’s foes, with an allusion to the judgment inflicted on them by Jehoshaphat. The definite mention of the mount of Olives in Zech, and the fact that this was the scene of the ascension, makes it likely the same shall be the scene of Christ’s coming again: cf. ‘This same Jesus ... shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven’ (Acts 1:11).”

Again, Joel seems to reach far beyond the boundaries of his own time when he proclaims God’s judgment to come. It is true that only Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia are mentioned in this chapter, but the judgment, obviously, is meant to be universal.

The choice of words in this context is amazing. The Hebrew uses the word *shaphat*, which means literally: “to pronounce sentence” in the widest sense of the word; it can be either guilty or not guilty. The

¹⁰⁶ Ps. 126:1

¹⁰⁷ Job 42:10

¹⁰⁸ See II Chr. 20:1-26

¹⁰⁹ II Chr. 20:15

context strongly suggests a negative meaning. The NIV, therefore, reads: "There I will enter into judgment against them," but the KJV has: "I... will plead with them." I do like the KJV here since it implies that God appeals to the conscience of those who are guilty and it opens a door of repentance and restoration. Abraham uses the word *shaphat* when he says to God: "Far be it from you to do such a thing--to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"¹¹⁰

For the second time in his prophecy, Joel, speaking about Israel, uses the word "inheritance."¹¹¹ Israel is God's inheritance on earth and all the other nations will be judged in regard to how they treated God's property. The main reason for God's special consideration of the people of Israel is the fact that from among them the Savior of the world would come. Paul states about Israel as God's inheritance: "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."¹¹²

The criterion of judgment, therefore, is what people do with Christ and with those who belong to Him. When Jesus caught up with Paul on his way to Damascus, He said: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"¹¹³ And on judgment day, the King will say to some who are standing before Him: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me," and to others: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."¹¹⁴

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary observes about these verses: "In vv. 2 and 3 Joel is speaking not of events belonging to his own time, or to the most recent past, but of that dispersion of the whole of the ancient covenant nation among the heathen, which was only completely effected on the conquest of Palestine and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and which continues to this day; though we cannot agree with Hengstenberg, that this furnishes an argument in favor of the allegorical interpretation of the army of locusts in ch. 1 and 2. For since Moses had already foretold that Israel would one day be driven out among the heathen (Lev 26:33ff.; Deut 28:36ff.), Joel might assume that this judgment was a truth well known in Israel, even though he had not expressed it in his threatening of punishment in ch. 1 and 2. V. 3 depicts the ignominious treatment of Israel in connection with this catastrophe. The prisoners of war are distributed by lot among the conquerors, and disposed of by them to slave-dealers at most ridiculous prices—a boy for a harlot, a girl for a drink of wine. Even in Joel's time, many Israelites may no doubt have been scattered about in distant heathen lands (cf. v. 5); but the heathen nations had not yet cast lots upon the nation as a whole, to dispose of the inhabitants as slaves, and divide the land among themselves. This was not done till the time of the Romans."

Of all the crimes Israel's foes committed against God's people, God chooses those that exemplify their utter disdain for the value of a human being. "They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine that they might drink." Evidently, the Israelites who had been captured were sold into slavery, or rather, they were given away as payment for a gambling debt, as payment for prostitutes, or alcoholic drinks. God had warned His people that such things would happen to them as punishment if they indulged in their idolatrous practices. In their idolatry they would lower themselves to the point where their life became worthless.

But the fact that their guilt would be on their own heads, did not mean that those who executed God's punishment would not be guilty. As in Jesus' parable of the goats and the sheep, God always identifies Himself with the oppressed.¹¹⁵ God says to Israel's enemies: "Now what have you against me, O Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done?" Those who do not recognize the image of God in their fellowmen and act accordingly, will stand guilty before the throne of

¹¹⁰ Gen. 18:25

¹¹¹ See ch. 2:17

¹¹² Rom. 9:4,5

¹¹³ Acts 9:4

¹¹⁴ Matt. 25:40,45

¹¹⁵ See Matt. 25:45

judgment. Because of God's image in man, the human soul has greater worth than all the treasures of the world. In Jesus' words: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"¹¹⁶

The Pulpit Commentary quotes Josephus, who records instances of Israel's foes acting in accordance with Joel's prophecy: "Ninety-seven thousand prisoners were disposed of as follows: those under seventeen years of age were publicly sold; some exiled to work in Egyptian mines; others reserved to fight with wild beasts in the amphitheatre. Also in the time of Hadrian four Jewish captives were sold for a measure of barley. Nay, more, the Syrian commander, Nicanor, bargained by anticipation for the sale of such Jews as should be taken captive in the Maccabean war."

However, there is no record in Scripture, except for maybe one,¹¹⁷ of an invasion by Tyre, Sidon, or Philistia in which temple treasures were carried off. We may, therefore, assume that, even if such things did happen in Joel's day, the main thrust of this prophecy is for the Day of Judgment, when all of God's enemies will have to account for their crimes against humanity, including the perpetrators of the holocaust. That there is also a payback in this life is obvious from the statement that God will do to the enemies' sons and daughters what they did to His people. Part of this prophecy, evidently, refers to the Babylonian captivity and Israel's return, as well as to the Diaspora and the proclamation of Israel as an independent state, which we saw happen in our lifetime.

In vs. 6, we find the first reference to the Greeks in the Bible. In Joel's day they had, evidently, already become the center of civilization for which they became renown. The fact that even the civilized Greeks bought Jewish slaves indicates how rotten to the core all human civilization is without God. God's promise to bring back Jewish captives to their homeland found its main fulfillment in the return from Babylonian captivity and in the proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948. There is no record of a massive return of slaves from Greece during the time of this prophecy or even shortly after.

The Pulpit Commentary introduces the following section, verses 9-17 with: "After a parenthesis of five verses, viz. 4-8, detailing the injurious treatment of the Jews by some of the surrounding nations, and the righteous retribution visited on those nations, the prophet resumes the subject broached at the beginning of the chapter, especially in ver. 2, about the judgment to be visited on the nations in general. The verses now before us describe very graphically the execution of that judgment."

The challenge to prepare for war is, obviously, addressed not to Israel but to the surrounding nations. The Hebrew word rendered "prepare" is *qadash*, which literally means: "sanctify, or consecrate," giving the confrontation a religious connotation. The implication may be that the actual struggle is not between one group of human beings and another, or even between men and God, but between God and idols, or rather God and Satan. Paul's admonition can be applied here: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."¹¹⁸ People on either side of the camp are only involved in as far as they have a relationship to one of the two opposing parties: God and Satan.

God's challenge to man is not without irony. How can puny creatures oppose the Omnipotent? In one of the psalms, David addresses people who oppose God: "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. 'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters.' The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them."¹¹⁹

The provocation, "Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war!" finds its counterpart in Isaiah's prophecy: "The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: 'Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.'"¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Matt. 16:26

¹¹⁷ See II Chron. 21:16,17

¹¹⁸ Eph. 6:11,12

¹¹⁹ Ps. 2:1-4

¹²⁰ Isa. 62:11

The New Jerusalem Bible renders the sentence, "Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack," "Rouse the champions! All you troops, advance, march!"

The proposal, "Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears" is the reverse of Isaiah's prophecy: "They 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."¹²¹

God is a God of peace. War is a demonic invention. Jesus told His disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives."¹²² But He also said: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."¹²³ The peace God promises is, first of all, a peace of heart because of a restored relationship with our maker. In the words of the apostle Paul: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."¹²⁴ World peace among nations will not occur until the return of our Lord and the establishing of the Millennium. The sword Jesus speaks about in Matthew's Gospel is what divides mankind into two camps: those who accept the reconciliation God offers and those who resist Him to the end.

The illusion that man can fight God comes from a lack of understanding who He is. If Jesus Christ can defeat the Antichrist by simply breathing on him,¹²⁵ we should not have any delusion as to our power to resist the Almighty. Mere saying to oneself: "I am strong" does not make one powerful. Sin clouds the eye of the soul to the reality of our condition.

The question could be asked who is the one speaking in vs. 11? The last words: "Bring down your warriors, O LORD!" are obviously Joel's own, but it is not certain whether the call to arms is. The Bible shows that there is a relationship between the prayers of the saints and the coming of God's judgment. James states about Elijah: "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."¹²⁶ And in Revelation we read: "Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake."¹²⁷ God's judgment begins when God's children ask for it.

For the second time in this chapter, the place of judgment is called "the Valley of Jehoshaphat." This is the equivalent of "Armageddon" mentioned in the Book of Revelation.¹²⁸ The verdict pronounced over the nations of this world should not be confused with God's personal judgment of every human being. The latter is an investigation of man's moral behavior in general, the former an assessment of the nations' attitude toward the people through whom God revealed Himself to the world. It is, of course, quite possible that the two will occur simultaneously. The ultimate question will not be what our attitude is toward the Jews in general, but toward Jesus of Nazareth.

The execution of God's judgment is presented under the picture of a double harvest of grain and of grapes. John picks up this line of prophecy, combining Joel's declaration with Zechariah's in Revelation where we read: "Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, 'Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.' So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel,

¹²¹ Isa. 2:4

¹²² John 14:27

¹²³ Matt. 10:34

¹²⁴ Rom. 5:1

¹²⁵ See II Thess. 2:8

¹²⁶ James 5:17

¹²⁷ Rev. 8:3-5

¹²⁸ Rev. 16:16

who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and 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.' The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia."¹²⁹

Grain and grapes are the elements from which bread and wine are made. In His last night on earth, before His crucifixion, Jesus took these two ingredients, which were part of the Passover celebration and declared them to be symbols of His body and blood. The actual treading of the winepress was done when God poured out His wrath over His Son when He hung on the cross. For us who call on the Name of Jesus, the judgment over our sins is in the past. Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."¹³⁰ The picture Joel paints here pertains to those who have rejected God's solution for their sin. This is the day of God's wrath, the "Diès Irea."

The image of a harvest also depicts God's patience with man's rebellion. God waits till the harvest is ripe, till the measure of iniquity is full before He strikes. He did this with the inhabitants of Canaan¹³¹ and also with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.¹³² That will be the world's light night and the end of the universe, as we know it now. The darkening of the sun and moon does not describe a day of heavy overcast, as *The Pulpit Commentary* supposes. We read: "The densely packed masses are already in the valley of decision, awaiting the judgment about to be executed upon them. But before the judgment actually bursts upon them, and in preparation for it, the sky is overcast; darkness, as a portent of the approaching storm, envelops them; the lights of heaven are put out. The pitchy darkness of a night in which neither moon nor stars appear is sufficiently dismal and awful; still more terrible, if possible, is darkness in the daytime, when the light of the sun is turned into blackness." The scene is rather the one described in Revelation, where John states: "I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place."¹³³

It is also the day on which God will roar like a lion for the last time in the history of the world. Joel's words are identical to the opening statement of Amos' prophecy: "The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem."¹³⁴ Joel spares us a description of the reaction of the people who fall under God's judgment. He leaves it to our imagination to fill in the blanks. John, in Revelation states that all people, great and small, will call "to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!'"¹³⁵

It is difficult for us to understand the sequence of events at the end of time. Many Christians believe that the Rapture will occur before the day of God's wrath and that Israel will be saved after that. We may also interpret Joel's words in a way that makes the Day of Judgment a daily event. The apostle Paul states that God constantly reveals His wrath upon man's sin. We read in Romans: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."¹³⁶ It is also a daily truth that "the Lord [is] a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people

¹²⁹ Rev. 14:15-20

¹³⁰ John 5:24

¹³¹ See Gen. 15:16

¹³² See Gen. 18:20,21

¹³³ Rev. 6:12-14

¹³⁴ Amos 1:2

¹³⁵ Rev. 6:16

¹³⁶ Rom. 1:18

of Israel.” As David sang: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.”¹³⁷

It is difficult to determine if vs. 17 belongs to this section or to the following one. Our outline treats it as belonging to the part that deals with judgment and deliverance on earth. The people who fall under God’s judgment will know that God revealed Himself on earth, at a particular place. God had said to Moses regarding the cover that lay on the ark of the covenant: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”¹³⁸ This revelation of His glory became embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom the fullness of God’s glory dwells.¹³⁹ The presence of God is the essence of judgment for the sinner.

It is also true that the Israelites had become so accustomed to the presence of God’s glory that they were no longer able to see it. One of the clearest signs of depravity is that man can be in God’s presence and not know it. Jacob, while fleeing from Esau, had the shock of his life when he woke up at Bethel and realized that he had been in the presence of God. We read: “When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’ He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.’”¹⁴⁰ Only the pure in heart will see God.¹⁴¹ It was their inability to recognize the presence of God in the temple in Jerusalem that ultimately drove Israel into captivity. It was also the ground for Jesus’ crucifixion. The Sanhedrin never knew it when the Lord of glory came to the house of the Lord. It was the reason for the martyrdom of Stephen.

But God’s presence in the temple in Jerusalem was not the ultimate reality; it was a representation of a heavenly actuality. God’s throne is in heaven and the real Jerusalem, the actual Zion is not to be found on earth. Even after the days of Joel, Jerusalem was invaded and even several times completely destroyed by foreigners. John testifies about the city in heaven: “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

b. Restoration of Judah 3:18-21

18 In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD’s house and will water the valley of acacias.

19 But Egypt will be desolate, Edom a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood.

20 Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations.

21 Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon. The LORD dwells in Zion!

The glorious poetry that concludes this book, obviously, refers to conditions not found on earth. Canaan is called “a land flowing with milk and honey,”¹⁴² in Joel’s prophecy it becomes a land flowing with new wine and milk, a land covered with lush vineyards and pastures. These words could apply to the country of Israel on earth, but the fountain flowing out of the Lord’s house is a physical impossibility. Ezekiel depicts the same stream of blessing at the end of his book. In his vision, he sees water trickling out from under the threshold of the temple. This trickle grows into a river that Ezekiel is unable to cross. He testifies: “where the river flows everything will live.”¹⁴³ Zechariah states: “On that day living water will flow out

¹³⁷ Ps. 46:1,2

¹³⁸ Ex. 25:22

¹³⁹ See Col. 1:19

¹⁴⁰ Gen. 28:16^b, 17

¹⁴¹ Matt. 5:8

¹⁴² See Ex. 3:8

¹⁴³ See Ezek. 47:1-12

from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.”¹⁴⁴ In Revelation, John calls it: “the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.”¹⁴⁵ That this water would run from Jerusalem to a place beyond the Jordan River is another physical impossibility, indicating that no literal interpretation can be given to this picture.

The KJV renders “the valley of acacias” “the valley of Shittim.” *Shittim*,” or “*Shittiyim*,” means acacia in Hebrew; it is also the name of a place East of the Jordan, situated in the land of Moab. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “As Shittim may signify thorns, it may figuratively represent the most uncultivated and ferocious inhabitants of the earth receiving the Gospel of Christ, and being civilized and saved by it.” Jerome, quoted in *Barnes’ Notes*, comments on the acacia tree: “It is, a tree which grows in the desert, like a white thorn in color and leaves, not in size. For they are of such size, that very large planks, are cut out of them. The wood is very strong, and of incredible lightness and beauty. They do not grow in cultivated places, or in the Roman soil, save only in the desert of Arabia.”

It appears that there was in fact a source of water under the temple, which carried off the blood of the animals that were sacrificed on the altar. This fact gives to the image a marvelous depth of spiritual meaning.

In contrast to the verdure of the land of Israel, they depict Egypt and Edom as desert lands because of the sins committed against Israel. If we interpret Israel’s luxuriance spiritually, we must do the same here. This puts us in good company. *The Pulpit Commentary*, although applying these verses to the physical Israel, Egypt, and Edom, quotes *Keil*, who states: “This passage does not teach the earthly glorification of Palestine, and desolation of Egypt and Idumaea, but that Judah and Jerusalem are types of the kingdom of God, whilst Egypt and Edom are types of the world-powers that are at enmity against God; in other words, that this description is not to be understood literally, but spiritually.”

In the days of Joel, Egypt was the former seat of world power and Edom Israel’s main oppressor and greatest enemy. *Barnes’ Notes* states about Egypt and Edom: “‘Egypt’ and ‘Edom’ represent each a different class of enemies of the people of God, and both together exhibit the lot of all. Egypt was the powerful oppressor, who kept Israel long time in hard bondage, and tried, by the murder of their male children, to extirpate them. Edom was, by birth, the nearest allied to them, but had, from the time of their approach to the promised land, been hostile to them, and showed a malicious joy in all their calamities.” In its closing remarks about this book, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “Nothing seemed more improbable than such an event at the time when Joel wrote. Egypt’s power dated at least seven centuries before this, to about 1520 B.C., according to their ‘continuous monumental history’ ... Their empire rivaled Assyria at the time. Their system of canals and irrigation was on a vast scale, the artificial Lake Moeris on the southwest bank of the Nile, enclosing within masonry sixty-four square miles of the superfluous waters of the Nile, and supplying water for the irrigation of 1,724 square miles during six months of the year. This stupendous work was completed by Ammenemhes about 1673 B.C., so that in the time of Joel, for a thousand years, art and nature had been combining to produce an internal prosperity in Egypt seldom equaled. The soil generally yielded three harvests in the year. It was, according to Diodorus (i. 31) the most densely populated country in the world. How unlikely, then it seemed that such a country should become ‘a desolation!’ Yet such it has become: and such shall be the doom of all the present and coming anti-Christian antitypes to Egypt and Edom. God’s mighty ones shall come down and utterly destroy Antichrist’s mighty men (cf. Joel 3:9 with Joel 3:11). For no word of the Lord shall fail: all shall be accomplished.”

The reference to the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem is not exclusively to the Jews. The Bible confirms this fact. The Sons of Korah sing in one of their psalms: “He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: ... ‘I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me-- Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush-- and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’ ” Indeed, of Zion it will be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her.’ The LORD will write

¹⁴⁴ Zech. 14:8

¹⁴⁵ Rev. 22:1

in the register of the peoples: 'This one was born in Zion.' ... As they make music they will sing, 'All my fountains are in you.'¹⁴⁶

Joel's last words are a glorious confirmation of Gospel truth. "Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon. The LORD dwells in Zion!" Interpretations of this last verse vary among scholars, according to the meaning of the words "pardon" and "blood." The KJV reads: "I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed." The Hebrew word for "blood" is *dam*, which can mean either "blood" or "guilt." Modern translations tend to lean to the interpretation "guilt." We lean to the latter interpretation of the word. The desolation of Egypt and Edom does not logically fit with the pardon here.

Here, "guilt" refers, not to Egypt and Edom, but to Israel, or rather, to those who are on the Lord's side among them. God's pardon implies their guilt. One cannot receive pardon for sins that were not committed. The reason God had not pardoned Israel's sin before is explained in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The blood of the sacrificial animals had covered Israel's guilt. The writer of Hebrews states: "But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."¹⁴⁷ For centuries God had kept the sins of mankind covered with animal blood, but in the fullness of time, He wiped sin away with the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul confirms this when he writes in Romans: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." We may now dwell in the presence of Him who dwells in Zion without a burden of guilt.

Thus Joel's prophecy, which began with the announcement of judgment in the form of locusts and drought, ends with a proclamation of complete salvation through the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ.

The eternal inhabitation of Judah and Jerusalem strongly suggest that the reference is not to places on earth but to a heavenly condition. "The LORD dwells in Zion" speaks of the revelation of Himself, not merely on earth but, particularly, in heaven.

The identification of Zion with heaven originates with David, who made Zion into his place of residence. He saw the palace in which he lived as an image of eternal glory to come. People, who see life on earth as a figure of life to come, have rich and rewarding lives. Few people have this kind of vision of their life on earth. His daily experience of God's presence on earth made him realize that God had made him to experience this eternally. If we know that God is with us today, we may have confidence that we will be with Him forever.

With *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, we agree that "The bright promise of the closing verses parallels the glorious ending of Matthew's Gospel!"

Toccoa Falls, GA, 9/10/03

¹⁴⁶ Ps. 87:1-7

¹⁴⁷ Heb. 10:3,4