

THE EXECUTOR— GOD USING NATURAL AGENTS

TEXT: 2:1-11

- 1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of Jehovah cometh, for it is nigh at hand;
- 2 a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, as the dawn spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither, shall be any more after them, even to the years of many generations.
- 3 A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and none hath escaped them.
- 4 The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so do they run.
- 5 Like the noise of chariots on the tops of the mountains do they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array.
- 6 At their presence the peoples are in anguish; all faces are waxed pale.
- 7 They run like mighty men; they climb the wall like men of war; and they march every one of his ways, and they break not their ranks.
- 8 Neither doth one thrust another; they march every one in his path; and they burst through the weapons, and break not off their course.
- 9 They leap upon the city; they run upon the wall; they climb up into the houses; they enter in at the windows like a thief.
- 10 The earth quaketh before them; the heavens trembled; the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdrew their shining:
- 11 and Jehovah uttereth his voice before his army; for his camp is very great; for he is strong that executeth his word; for the day of Jehovah is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

QUERIES

- a. Could this particular locust plague be as unprecedented as Joel says in 2:2 (cf. also Joel 1:2)?
- b. Do locusts really behave as Joel describes them here?
- c. Does God really "talk" to the locusts? (2:11)

PARAPHRASE

Sound the long alarm blast on the far-sounding-horn from the midst of the Holy city and from the Holy mountain. Awaken all people from their lethargy in both Judah and Israel and cause them to tremble with fear for the day of Jehovah's judgment comes. It is, in fact, upon us. His day is a day of darkness and gloom; the darkness will be so impenetrable that no one will be able to find escape. A great and powerful people is coming and they will glimmer in the sunlight all yellow like the yellow glimmering rays of dawn upon the mountains. The likes of such an invasion has never been seen before nor shall it ever be afterward like this for many generations to come. This day of God is like a fire that destroys everything. The land before was like the garden of Eden compared to the utter desolation of it now. Nothing has escaped the devastation.

These locusts look like miniature horses as they run to the attack. They rattle like chariots driven charging over the rough mountain roads. They crackle like the fire as it devours dry stubble in the field. They come upon the countryside advancing like an army equipped for battle. When they come, all the people become distraught and grow pale with fear. These locusts, they run to the attack like warriors of valor; they assault the walls like trained soldiers marching in ordered columns without even so much as breaking their ranks. They do not jostle one another but follow in orderly ranks; there is no weapon that will stop them or detour them. They leap and crawl upon everything in the city; they run up and down the walls and climb into the houses through the windows. The earth seems to sway as they run over it and the sky seems to shake and tremble as the great sweeping clouds of these locusts darken the sky so that the sun by day and the stars by night cannot be seen.

The Lord Jehovah is the Commander of this army. His omnipotent voice thunders His orders to them and they execute His word. The Day of Jehovah is great and very terrible—who can be saved from it?

SUMMARY

Joel states unequivocally and in graphic description that the locust plague came at the direct command of Jehovah God. God commanded it to stir up the people to repentance and dependence upon Him.

COMMENT

v. 1 BLOW YE THE TRUMPET IN ZION . . . SOUND AN ALARM . . . FOR THE DAY OF JEHOVAH . . . IS NIGH AT HAND; The trumpet to be blown here is the *shopbar* which is probably a ram's horn called the

"far sounding horn." Trumpets have always been associated literally and symbolically with warning (cf. Num. 10:5ff; Ezek. 33:1ff). Hendriksen, in his book, "*More Than Conquerors*," (a commentary on the book of Revelation), interprets the Seven Trumpets of Revelation chapter 8 thusly:

"These trumpets of judgment, chapters 8:11, indicate series of happenings, that is, calamities that will occur again and again throughout this dispensation (the Christian dispensation). They do not symbolize single and separate events, but they refer to woes that may be seen any day of the year in any part of the globe. Hence, the trumpets are synchronous with the seals.

". . . these trumpets of judgment are clearly retributive in character. Terrible calamities befall the wicked in order to punish them for their opposition to the cause of Christ and for their persecution of the saints. Yet even by means of these judgments God is constantly calling the ungodly unto repentance. These woes do not symbolize God's final and complete displeasure. On the contrary, they indicate His initial judgments. They are charged with serious warning, not with final doom . . . The very function of the trumpet is to warn (Ezek. 33:3).

"Observe also that these trumpets of judgment affect the various parts of the universe: the land, the sea, etc."

Joel is making the same interpretation of the locust plague and drought which has come upon the land. These calamities are God's "trumpet" warnings to call the sinful people to repentance. God uses natural agents in every age to turn impenitent people from their rebellious ways back to dependence upon Him. If they will not turn back to Him, He sends judgments of wrath upon them. These are principles of the Divine government of the universe which are constantly in force and which God executes through secondary causes day by day, year after year, millenium by millenium. The Old Testament prophets, covering nearly a thousand years of history, give us, in their inspired pronouncements and interpretations of natural calamities as judgments and warnings of God, a *divinely revealed philosophy of history*.

At this point we take the liberty of quoting at length again from Dr. Hendriksen's "*More Than Conquerors*" in regard to God's judgments as the commentary speaks on Revelation 15-16.

"In the history of the world a definite and ever-recurring order of events is clearly evident:

"Through the preaching of the Word applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit churches are established. Again and again this happens. (With the O.T. prophets we think in terms of a faithful "remnant" being called out by the preaching of the Word—parenthesis ours). They are lightbearers—lampstands—in the midst of a world that lies in darkness . . .

"Again and again God's people are persecuted by the world. They are subjected to many trials and afflictions. (seals).

"Again and again the judgments of God are visited upon the persecuting world. These judgments again and again fail to move men to repentance (trumpets).

" . . . The question now arises: whenever in history the trumpets of judgment, the initial plagues, fail to result in penitence and conversion, what then? Does God permit such impenitence, such hardness of heart, to go unpunished until the final judgment of the last day? Must we conceive of God's wrath as being completely pent up until the second coming . . . ?

"The answer in brief is this: whenever in history the wicked fail to repent in answer to the initial and partial manifestation of God's anger in judgments, the final effusion of wrath follows. *Final*, though not *complete* until the judgment day. These plagues are the last. They leave no more opportunity for repentance. When the wicked, often warned by the trumpets of judgment, continue to harden their hearts, death finally plunges them into the hands of an angry God . . . "

"Hence, throughout the history of the world God's final wrath again and again reveals itself; now it strikes this one; then another. It is poured out upon *the impenitent*. Thus a very definite connecting-link is established between the vision of the trumpets, chapter 8-11, and that of the bowls, chapters 15, 16. Trumpets *warn*; bowls are *poured out*.

"Throughout history, especially during this entire new dispensation, God is using every department of the universe to punish the wicked and impenitent persecutors of his people. Whoever refuses to be warned by the trumpets of judgment is destroyed by the bowls of wrath. For one individual a certain calamity may be a trumpet of judgment, while for someone else that same event may be a bowl of wrath. Thus,

the disease which hurled King Herod Agrippa I into hell served as a warning to others . . . ”

So it was true in the days of Joel. The locust plague and the drought became a warning trumpet of God's wrath upon rebellion and sin and called those who were humble and penitent enough to hear back to God's word and His will. Those who heard and heeded became part of the faithful remnant. They would be the people through whom God would carry out His covenant promises and bring from them the Messiah. Some undoubtedly perished during the plague and drought. Those who died in sin and rebellion against God died under the judgment of God. In the wisdom of God they had had their last opportunity to repent. They rejected it. God's wrath fell upon them. Perhaps some who believed in God and were following His ways died also, but death did not harm them (cf. Zeph. 2:3; Nahum 1:7). Those who died in the Lord were blessed (Rev. 14:13).

v. 2 A DAY OF DARKNESS . . . A GREAT PEOPLE . . . STRONG . . . THERE HATH NOT BEEN EVER THE LIKE. The "darkness" here may be either literal or symbolic or both. When this "great people" (the locusts) came down upon them, myriads upon myriads, their coming would make the sky black. Darkness is also used to symbolize judgment or times of foreboding. The term "people" is a figurative way of describing the locusts (cf. Prov. 30:25ff). They will behave like an "army" and will go about their destruction with what seems to be a methodical intelligence beyond the native capacity of an insect. This would be one of the most unique disasters to happen to Judah so much so that it might be said, "nothing like it has ever been or ever shall be!"

v. 3 . . . THE LAND IS AS THE GARDEN OF EDEN BEFORE THEM, AND BEHIND THEM A DESOLATE WILDERNESS; Compared to what the land looked like *after* the locusts finished with it, it was like the garden of Eden *before*. The "fire" before and after them probably is a poetical description of the utter devastation that sweeps over the land, at their coming, overwhelming everything before it and leaving nothing behind it. In the *National Geographic Magazine*, 1915, from which we have quoted before, let us describe further the locust devastation. The first swarms of locusts in February, 1915, came in such thick clouds as to obscure the sun for the time being. In 1915 the sections where no eggs had been laid or where the eggs had been carefully removed by governmental orders did not suffer from the creepers, but later the full-grown locusts came and cleaned up every bit of vegetation. On a

television documentary, December 1966, sponsored by the National Geographic, one was able to see motion picture film of locust plagues in the Near East. These films substantiated Joel's graphic description in every respect! The prophet did not exaggerate!

v. 4 THE APPEARANCE OF THEM IS AS...HORSES; There is an old Arabian proverb which goes, "The locust has the form of ten of the giants of the animal world, weak as he is—face of a mare, eyes of an elephant, neck of a bull, horns of a deer, chest of a lion, stomach of a scorpion, wings of an eagle, thighs of a camel, legs of an ostrich, and tail of a serpent." Theodoret, a bishop of Syria, said, "... you will find the head of the locust exceedingly like that of a horse." In verse 4, however, Joel is concerned with their behavior which is like that of cavalry horses.

v. 5 LIKE THE NOISE OF CHARIOTS...LIKE THE NOISE OF A FLAME OF FIRE... John wrote in Revelation 9:9ff, "the sound of their wings was as the sound of many horses rushing to battle..." They are described by the National Geographic as "a loud noise, produced by the flapping of myriads of locust wings... resembling the distant rumble of waves." One who has heard them says, "their noise may be heard six miles off." Others have likened their sound to all sorts of deep, rumbling sounds of torrential rivers or water-falls. One ancient wrote, "... there is a certain sharp sound, as they chew the corn, as when the wind strongly fanneth a flame." The noise of their foraging upon the vegetation crackles like a fire as it licks up the dry stubble of a wheat field.

v. 6...PEOPLES ARE IN ANGUISH...FACES ARE WAXED PALE...; One man who witnessed just such a plague wrote of the people, "... the people become as dead, saying, 'we are lost, for the Ambadas (so they call them) are coming.'... there were men, women, children, sitting among these locusts, as stupefied... they answered that they had no courage to resist a plague which God gave them for their sins." The verb translated *anguish* is the same verb used of women in birth travail (cf. Jer. 30:5-7). Their anxiety causes the color to drain from their faces and they grow pale as the dead.

v. 7 THEY RUN LIKE MIGHTY MEN;...CLIMB THE WALL...MARCH... AND BREAK NOT THEIR RANKS. National Geographic: Once started on their course, nothing could stop them; walls were scaled, they rolled on like a mighty, unconquerable flood. Their ranks remain unbroken by obstacles. Man can mount a wall a few at a time, but locusts pour over a wall in a literal flood.

v. 8 NEITHER . . . THRUST ONE ANOTHER . . . MARCH EVERY ONE IN HIS PATH; . . . THEY BURST THROUGH THE WEAPONS . . . They travel like a well-disciplined, regimented army in close-order-drill without jostling one another. They move in one body, giving the appearance of being organized and directed by one leader. Nothing checks or retards their attack. Nothing makes any impression upon them. Men have tried to kill them with canon fire, water-filled trenches, fire-filled trenches, insecticides—sprayed from airplanes, with clubs—beating them to death by the millions—but still they come, impervious to any weapon. Like waves they roll over one another on and on, and let themselves be stopped by nothing. Bundles of straw are laid in rows and set on fire before them; they march in thick heaps into the fire, but this is often put out through the great mass of those advancing from behind who march right on over the corpses of their dead companions. The sight is utterly appalling! On the television program referred to before it was stated that man, with all his modern scientific means of dealing out death, has not yet found a way to stop the locust.

v. 9 THEY LEAP UPON THE CITY . . . RUN FOR THE WALL . . . CLIMB INTO THE HOUSES . . . ENTER IN AT THE WINDOWS. National Geographic: "Disastrous as they were in the country, equally obnoxious they became about the homes, crawling up thick upon the walls and squeezing in through cracks of closed doors or windows, entering the very dwelling rooms. Women frantically swept the walls and roofs of their homes, but to no avail. They even fell into one's shirt collar from the walls above. A lady, after being away from home for half a day, returned with 110 of them concealed within the skirts. Whenever touched, or especially when finding themselves caught within one's clothes, they exuded from their mouths a dark fluid, an irritant to the skin and soiling the garments in a most disgusting manner. Imagine the feeling with a dozen or two such creatures over an inch long, with sawlike legs and rough bodies, making a race course of your back." Another man who experienced such a calamity in 1646 wrote, "...when the door was opened, an infinite number came in, and the others went fluttering about; and it was a troublesome thing when a man went abroad, to be hit on the face by those creatures, on the nose, eyes, or cheeks, so that there was no opening one's mouth, but some would get in. Yet all this was nothing; for when we were to eat, they gave us no respite; and when we went to cut a piece of meat, we cut a locust with it, and when a man opened his mouth to put in a morsel, he was sure to chew one of them." The television report of December, 1966,

showed that airplanes flying through clouds of locusts spraying insecticides were forced to the ground because the thickness of the locusts made visibility for flying impossible!

v. 10 THE EARTH QUAKETH BEFORE THEM; THE HEAVENS TREMBLE . . . National Geographic: "When anything neared their thickened masses, it seemed as if the entire surface of the ground moved, producing a most curious effect upon one's vision and causing dizziness, which in some was so severe as to produce a sensation not unlike seasickness. The clouds of locusts caused the entire atmosphere to be in a state of commotion as if the very heavens trembled."

v. 11 JEHOVAH UTTERETH HIS VOICE BEFORE HIS ARMY... HE IS STRONG THAT EXECUTETH HIS WORD; FOR THE DAY OF JEHOVAH IS GREAT AND VERY TERRIBLE; AND WHO CAN ABIDE IT? To this day the nations of the Near East speak of the locusts as *Yaish Allah*, Allah's army. God does use natural phenomena to execute His warnings and judgments. He uses natural elements of weather, laws of "nature," wild beasts and insects, and heathen nations and leaders (Isa. 10) to execute His vengeance upon the ungodly, even now! Hendriksen in "*More Than Conquerors*" again, on chapters 4-5 of Revelation concerning the Throne of God: "These chapters do not merely give us a picture of heaven. They describe *the entire universe from the aspect of heaven*. The purpose of this vision is to show us, in beautiful symbolism, that all things are governed by the Throne-Occupant. All things; hence, also our trials and tribulations. That is the point. Hence, the description of the Throne precedes the symbolic prediction of the trials and tribulations which the church must experience here on earth . . . Behold, a Throne! The Throne is the very center of the universe. The universe of the Bible is . . . theocentric. Here, too, is the true philosophy of history. The newspapers and radio announcements give you the headlines and news-flashes. The magazines add the explanations. But these explanations are, after all in terms of secondary causes. The real mind, the real will which—while fully maintaining the responsibility and freedom of the individual instruments—controls this universe in the mind, the will of *the Almighty God!* Nothing is excluded from his dominion." And so God can use the king of Assyria as the "rod of His anger and the staff of His fury" (Isa. 10) and He can stir up the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to release the captive Jews (II Chron. 36: 22ff; Ezra 1:1ff). And so the locusts are God's mighty army. When He commands that they go forth to de-

stroy, none can stop them. If man cannot stop an army of locusts when God sends them, who can be saved from any of God's judgments? Joel will take up this question in the next section when he presents *God's Plan for Repentance*.

QUIZ

1. What does "trumpet" signify symbolically in Hebrew literature?
2. In what way is the locust plague a warning? a judgment?
3. Do locusts appear and behave with such frightening appearance as Joel describes?
4. Are they impossible to stop? Can not modern methods of insect control stop them?
5. Does God Himself control these locusts or did this plague just happen and Joel attribute its happening to God?

II PLAN FOR REPENTANCE

TEXT: 2:12-17

- 12 Yet even now, saith Jehovah, turn ye unto me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning;
- 13 and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and repenteth him of the evil.
- 14 Who knoweth whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meal-offering and a drink-offering unto Jehovah your God?
- 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly;
- 16 gather the people, sanctify the assembly, assemble the old men, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.
- 17 Let the priests, the ministers of Jehovah, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Jehovah, and give not thy heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?

QUERIES

- a. How may the people "rend" their hearts?
- b. Does God "repent"?
- c. Why were the priests called upon to weep and pray?

PARAPHRASE

But, the Lord says, there is still time, even now, to avert the full judgment predicted if you will come back to Me and do My will with all your heart and soul. Show that you are coming back to Me by the self-denial of fasting and self-abnegation of mourning for your sins. You must tear and break your hard heart until it is contrite and penitent and then return to My ways. Mere ceremonial tearing of the garments will not suffice.

Let your motive for coming back to the Lord be His grace and mercy, His longsuffering toward sinners, His immutable love and His promise to withhold judgment from those who repent.

If you persevere in your repentance you may hope for acceptance in the Lord's eyes and He shall withhold judgment and give blessing instead. You may indeed hope that He will give you so much that you can once again offer your grain and wine as offerings in the temple as before.

Sound the long alarm blast on the far-sounding horn from the midst of the Holy City; declare a time of fasting; call the people together for a serious and solemn meeting. Call the entire congregation to rededication; from the elders to the children, even the infants. Let all festivities cease in this most solemn and serious hour, even the bride and the bridegroom should forego their honeymoon to assemble to hear the word of the Lord.

Let the priests, who are ministers of the Lord for the people, come to the entrance of the Holy Place on behalf of the people and there, between the vestibule and the altar of burnt offering weep, praying, O, Lord, do not cause your peculiar people to be poverty stricken, but spare them this degradation. Do not cause those who are yours in a special way to be reproached and slandered by the heathen and to become dependent upon the heathen for sustenance. Why should they be permitted to shame your chosen ones by taunting them with "Where is this God of theirs? How weak and helpless He must be!"

SUMMARY

Jehovah now, through the prophet Joel, declares there is yet time for salvation from impending judgment through repentance. It must be a true repentance which manifests itself in self-denial, self-abnegation and prayers of dependence upon God.

COMMENT

v. 12-13 . . . TURN UNTO ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART . . . AND REND YOUR HEART . . . FOR HE IS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL . . . AND

REPENTETH HIM OF THE EVIL. This is one of the clearest statements of the Bible on the meaning of repentance. The Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament translated about 300 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt, by 70 Jewish scholars), uses the word, *epistraphets*, which is in the aorist tense. According to Vine's Expository Dictionary the aorist of this verb "indicates an immediate and decisive change, consequent upon a deliberate choice;" It is nothing less than a "conversion!" The Hebrew word is *Shoov* which means "return." Repentance means a complete turn-about, and not only so, but a turning *toward the Lord*. Reformation is not repentance! One must not only change by giving up former habits and sinful ways but one must in a positive way turn unto the Lord and do His will and walk in His way! It is *all* the heart which God demands. The heart, of course, means the dwelling place of the personality—the intellect, the will, the emotions. *All* of man's mind, all of man's will, all of man's desires are to be turned toward God's will. None of it is to be reserved for self. We remember the "Rich Young Ruler," whom Jesus loved, holding back his great riches but wanting to give the rest of himself in discipleship to Jesus.

The prophet points out that this "turning" unto the Lord involves self-denial ("fasting") and self-abnegation ("weeping and mourning"). The people of Joel's day needed to cease concentrating upon themselves and concentrate upon God and His will, and this they could best do by fasting. They had need of self-examination and self-aborrence for sinning against a gracious and merciful Father—they needed to weep and mourn over their sins. "Rend" and tear your hearts, Joel said. Their hearts were hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. They had become calloused. They were impervious to God's goodness because in their material abundance they had forgotten from whence their abundance came and said, "Mine own hand hath gotten me this." (cf. Deut. 8:11ff). They needed to have their hearts broken in contrition (cf. Psa. 51:17; Isa. 57:15, 66:2; Ezek. 36:26). They must "break up the fallow ground of hearts which have too long lain unbroken (cf. Jer. 4:3; Hosea 10:12). This must be a turning of the inner man, not merely an outward, ritualistic "rending of the garments."

The repentance of which Joel speaks implies a "conscious, moral separation, and a personal decision to forsake sin and to enter into fellowship with God." It means turning away from sin and turning unto righteousness (cf. Dt. 4:30; Neh. 1:9; Psa. 7:12; Isa. 1:16-17; Jer. 3:14; 25:5; Mk. 1:15; Acts. 2:38; II Cor. 7:9-10). Repentance is always conjoined with faith. Where there is true faith there will always be true repentance. And this is exactly the appeal Joel makes as to the motive for the people's repentance. They must have true, un-

reserved faith in the grace and mercy of God. They must trust in His lovingkindness. They must also believe that He will punish sin. In order to come to this trust in God—in both His mercy and His wrath—God has more than abundantly revealed His character in both instances. Prophets were sent to preach the call of God for repentance. Prophets were sent to prove the existence of God and declare His nature. Preaching is still the only means by which men may be called to repentance. The existence of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, the infallible authority of the Bible is the call to repentance (cf. Acts 17:22-31). The nature of God must also be preached to lead men to repentance (cf. Rom. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9).

v. 14 WHO KNOWETH WHETHER HE WILL NOT TURN AND REPENT, AND LEAVE A BLESSING BEHIND HIM . . . ? To adapt the action of God to finite understanding the Bible speaks of God "repenting." God does not change (cf. Heb. 13:8; James 1:17; Malachi 3:6; Num. 23:19). He does not even change His mind. He has spoken His will once for all. His word is immutable. His covenant is irrevocable. Man may change—man must change! God's immutable Word has said: For sin a curse and judgment; for repentance a blessing and salvation. Only because we know that this is the immutable Word of God may we have hope! If God changed, how could we repent in hope of blessing? And so this verse should be understood as we have paraphrased it, "If you persevere in your repentance you may *hope* for acceptance in the Lord's eyes and *hope* for withholding of judgment and *hope* for blessing instead." As Keil and Delitzsch put it, "On the strength of these facts (facts about God's immutable nature of mercy upon repentance of man) he hopes . . . for forgiveness on the part of God, and the removal of judgment."

v. 15-16 BLOW THE TRUMPET . . . SANCTIFY A FAST . . . CALL A SOLEMN ASSEMBLY; GATHER THE PEOPLE . . . THE OLD MEN . . . THE CHILDREN . . . THOSE THAT SUCK THE BREASTS . . . THE BRIDEGROOM . . . AND THE BRIDE." Again the "trumpet" was to be sounded to herald the solemn meeting (cf. comments on Joel 2:1). The trumpet was customarily used to call together the people for holy meetings, to usher in the beginnings of their months and their feasts with festival gladness. Now in the Holy City the trumpet is to be used for the sounding of alarm. They were to be called to rigorous self-denial. They were to fast in order that their minds might be directed away from the earthly and concentrated on the heavenly. This was a time for seriousness, for solemnity. No one was to be absent—there were no

exceptions to be made. Even the infant children nursing at the breasts of their mothers were beckoned. The bride and bridegroom must forego their honeymoon to assemble for penitent worship. When the Lord of all the earth beckons nothing is so important that it cannot be left in favor of listening to Him.

v. 17 LET THE PRIESTS . . . WEEP . . . AND . . . SAY, SPARE THY PEOPLE, O JEHOVAH, AND GIVE NOT THY HERITAGE TO REPROACH . . . A priest is a mediator between man and God. He is a "bridge," a "go-between." He receives his appointment by the grace and mercy of God. Only one priest ever merited the office by His own nature and that was Jesus Christ, High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Priests are ministers serving both God and man.

In this serious and solemn hour when God was calling man to repentance and when man was seeking the favor of God the priests of God were bidden by God to perform their ministry of intercession. They were summoned to the space between the door to the Holy Place and the altar of burnt offering. This seems to have been a place especially consecrated for intercessory prayer.

The prayer is that God might withhold further judgment and at the same time bless the devastated land with new abundance. This prayer assumes, of course, that the people have repented. This is actually the case as verses 18-19 show. Keil and Delitzsch believe that the word "rule" in this verse is an unfortunate translation. There was no immediate (or future, for that matter) prediction by Joel that the people would be subjugated by heathen. Verse 19 seems to indicate that the Lord removed what the people prayed would be removed, "reproach from the heathen." K & D translate it, "Spare, O Jehovah, Thy people, and give not up Thine inheritance to shame, so that the heathen scoff at them." Except the Lord restore, upon their repentance and calling upon Him, that which He has taken away by the locust plague and the drought, the heathen would scoff and taunt those who claimed to be the Lord's chosen with, "Where is this God of yours?" "You have repented and called upon Him, but He does not hear you!" The heathen would sneer at Jehovah, the God of the Jews, and the people plead that God should protect His own honor and glory. This is always the right attitude. We ought always to pray for the Lord's deliverance not for our sake but that the Lord might be glorified. The Lord does not save us for our own merits but in order to glorify, vindicate and exalt Himself and His Son, Jesus Christ. He saved the penitent elect of the Old Testament for the same purpose—to glorify His name (cf. Ezek. 36:21ff).

QUIZ

1. What does the word which is translated "turn" mean here?
2. What connection does "fasting" and "weeping and mourning" have to their "turning" to the Lord?
3. What motives and what means direct men to repentance?
4. Why is it important that God does *not* repent?
5. Why was everyone without exception called to the assembly?
6. What were the priests instructed to pray for?
7. Why were the Jews desirous that the heathen not be given an opportunity to scoff at Jehovah?

III THE PURPOSE OF REPENTANCE IMMEDIATE BLESSINGS

TEXT: 2:18-27

- 18 Then was Jehovah jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.
- 19 And Jehovah answered and said unto his people, Behold, I will send you grain, and new wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations;
- 20 but I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive it into a land barren and desolate, its forepart into the eastern sea, and its hinder part into the western sea; and its stench shall come up, and its ill savor shall come up, because it hath done great things.
- 21 Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice; for Jehovah hath done great things.
- 22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field; for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth its fruit, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength.
- 23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in Jehovah your God; for he giveth you the former rain in just measure, and he causeth to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain, in the first month.
- 24 And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.
- 25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm, my great army which I sent among you.

- 26 And ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and shall praise the name of Jehovah your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you; and my people shall never be put to shame.
- 27 And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am Jehovah your God, and there is none else; and my people shall never be put to shame.

QUERIES

- a. Whose "army" is this "northern army" which is to be removed?
- b. What is the "former rain and the latter rain?"
- c. Why is the phrase, "and my people shall never be put to shame," repeated so often?

PARAPHRASE

Then Jehovah burned with eagerness to vindicate His name in His land and so He had compassion upon His people in order to uphold His power and trustworthiness. Jehovah said unto His people, Pay attention now, for I am going to bless the land and send you an abundance of grain, fresh vintage from the grape, and oil from the olive tree. There will be enough to satisfy all. In blessing you so I will cause the heathen to cease their ridicule of you. I will remove far away from you the army of locusts which have swooped down upon you from the north. I will drive it into the arid desert-land putting its front part as far east as the Dead Sea and its rear part as far west as the Mediterranean Sea. The stench of its destruction shall be so putrid and vile as to be unbearable. Jehovah has done these great things.

Indeed, there is no reason for fear, O land of my people. Be glad and rejoice and praise His name for your God has done great and marvelous things. You need not be dumbfounded any longer, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness spring forth with new grass. The trees are now bearing their fruit and the fig tree and the vine yield abundance. Be glad then, you children of the covenant promises made to Zion, and rejoice in your covenant God, Jehovah. He is giving you the Teacher unto Righteousness. And He will send down to you rain, the early rain and the late rain in the first month. And the threshing floors shall be full of wheat and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. I will recompense you for the years which the locust and the licker and the stripper and the gnawer have devoured, My great army which I sent among you. You shall have plenty of food to satisfy your hunger and for this you will praise the name of Jehovah your God because He has delivered you in a wondrous

way. I will so bless you that you will not be held up to shame by your enemies any more. When this comes to pass you will know of a truth that I am dwelling in the midst of Israel, my covenant people, and that I am Jehovah, your covenant God, and that there is no other god beside Me. When this comes to pass you will not be an object of shame for your enemies any more.

SUMMARY

For the most part (with the exception only of verse 23b) the prophet predicts (future perfect—as if it had already come to pass) the immediate, material blessings with which God is going to bless His covenant people, because they repented.

COMMENTS

v. 18 THEN WAS JEHOVAH JEALOUS . . . AND HAD PITY: The word translated jealous means literally, "to be red, to glow; hence, be fiery, eager, zealous." The reason Jehovah was jealous for His land is due to the fact that it is impossible to separate in any way the covenant God from the covenant land and people. Whatever is done to the land and the people of the covenant is also done to the covenant God. Whatever is done for the covenant land and people is done by the covenant God. He is jealous for the land and the people because He is jealous of His own name and character.

He had promised centuries before to curse them for rebellious sin and to bless them upon their repentance. They had been judged and punished for their sin, by the locust plague and drought. We presume they have now followed the prophet's instructions and manifested their repentance. Now God, in order to fulfill His immutable Word, was eager to vindicate His name and so He had compassion upon them and blessed them. He said, "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:13-15). He would cease to be what this name involves if He did not fulfill His word. He must, by His very nature, show His absolute sovereignty (cf. Ex. 20:5; Deut. 29:18-20; Zeph. 1:17-18; 3:7-8). He also loves His people as the apple of His eye (Deut. 32:10; Zech. 2:8) and He is just as eager to vindicate their name when they are in harmony with His will.

v. 19-20 BEHOLD, I WILL SEND YOU GRAIN, AND NEW WINE, AND OIL . . . AND I WILL NO MORE MAKE YOU A REPROACH AMONG THE NATIONS; . . . I WILL REMOVE . . . FROM YOU THE NORTHERN ARMY . . . The Lord now promises to bless the people with prosperous crops. They will have enough to satisfy the gnawing hunger that came with

the destruction of their crops by the locusts and the drought. They will have enough now to eat and plenty left to reinstitute the offerings of grain and wine which had to be stopped earlier (cf. 1:13). In His deliverance of Israel He will prove to the heathen world that Israel is still the people of the Omnipotent God who delivers with a miraculous hand and their reproach would be removed.

We recall an instance when God, by His mighty power through one of His servants and through miraculous providence, brought an emperor to praise His name and cease reproaching the people of God (cf. Daniel 4:1-37).

God also promised to remove the "northern army" ("my army" v. 25) from the land. This army is none other than the locusts. Usually these locust plagues come from the south but they have also been known to blow in on the winds which come from the north. Facing the rising sun in Palestine, before you is east, behind you is west. God caused some to fall into the Dead Sea, some in the Mediterranean and some in the arid desert of the Negeb. Jerome says of the locusts of Palestine, when the shores of both seas were filled with heaps of dead locusts which the waters had cast up, their stench and putrefaction were so noxious as to corrupt the air, so that a pestilence was produced among men and beasts. Stench is all that is left of the great and powerful enemy of God's people. This enemy had wrecked great destruction—it had done terrible things but Jehovah God not only removed it but He also restored what had been destroyed. Yes, God even holds the creatures responsible for their devastation upon "the apple of His eye" (cf. Gen. 9:5; Ex. 21:28-32).

v. 21-22 FEAR NOT, O LAND, BE GLAD AND REJOICE . . . BE NOT AFRAID, YE BEASTS OF THE FIELD . . . It is not strange that God would call upon nature itself to praise His name (cf. also Psa. 65:13; 98:8; 148:3). Nature is also represented "groaning and travailing in pain together until now" (Rom. 8:22-23). Just as the fields and the beasts were before called upon to mourn and be confounded at the Majestic Power of God in judgment, so now they are called upon to take comfort and security in His Compassion.

v. 23-24 BE GLAD THEN, YE CHILDREN OF ZION . . . FOR HE GIVETH YOU THE FORMER RAIN . . . AND HE CAUSETH TO COME DOWN FOR YOU THE RAIN, THE FORMER AND THE LATTER RAIN . . . AND THE FLOORS SHALL BE FULL . . . AND THE VATS SHALL OVERFLOW The term "Zion" is a covenant-relation term. God speaks to them as "children of the covenant" here, (cf. Isa. 40-66; Heb. 12:22; Rom. 11:26), and this is to reach its fulfillment in Christ, King of Zion,

the church of the living God! The first phrase, "the former rain," should be translated, "he causeth to come down for you the teacher unto righteousness," according to Keil and Delitzsch. They make the blessings of the grace of God at this time not to consist merely in material things but also in spiritual (which is undoubtedly true), and both these material and spiritual blessings (especially the spiritual) were "a teacher unto righteousness." But, further, just as Moses was a type and the whole law was a type of the Messiah to come (Heb. 10:1), so these blessings at this time were also a type predicting the coming of the ultimate covenant blessing in "The Teacher unto Righteousness," the Messiah. Other commentators think this Hebrew word *isedaqah*, which has a definite article, can refer only directly (not indirectly as K & D) to the Messiah.

For the sake of the Messianic people, because they have become such by faith and repentance, and for the sake of the Messiah, God will graciously send the former rain (falling from October to December) and the latter rain (March to April). God will send them, *first of all* (and this is what is meant by the phrase translated "in the first month,") the material blessings—He will bless the temporal Israel with temporal things—but later He will bless spiritual Israel with spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3ff). These spiritual blessings are spoken of next in Joel 2:28—3:21. There will, however, be, first of all, abundance of moisture which brings in turn overflowing abundance of agricultural blessings.

v. 25-27 AND I WILL RESTORE TO YOU THE YEARS THAT THE LOCUST HATH EATEN . . . AND YE SHALL . . . BE SATISFIED, AND SHALL PRAISE THE NAME OF JEHOVAH . . . AND YE SHALL KNOW THAT I AM IN THE MIDST OF ISRAEL . . . God promises to repay or recompense the people of Israel for the years which the various stages of the locust plague took away that is the produce of their fields. See 1:4 for a description of the various names used for the locusts. This repayment will be so gracious and abundant that the people will be caused to praise the name of Jehovah. It will also be another of the many evidences that the God of all the earth dwells in their midst—that He is their God and that He is jealous for them when they repent. The mighty deeds of Jehovah are appealed to time and time again as empirical evidence for His existence and His nature (both of wrath and compassion) in the Old Testament (cf. Isa. ch. 41:45; Rom. 1:18ff; Acts 14:15-17). Ezekiel's most prominent refrain is "then shall ye know that I the Lord have done it . . . or spoken it." The Lord has never left Himself without a witness. He has constantly appealed

to man with evidence directed at the senses of man (eyesight, hearing, touching, etc). And so here Joel tells the people that when God's rich blessings of deliverance from the locusts and His miraculous, providential restoration of the grain and wine is seen and experienced they will have evidence that Jehovah is God and that He is among them, and that there is no other god besides Him. And as Joel has hinted (by the teacher unto righteousness) when the Messianic age (of which Joel will speak more fully next) comes the covenant people of God will know that God has shown even more abundantly the immutability of His purpose (Heb. 6:17-18) to keep His covenant, for all the promises of God find their "yea" in Christ (are affirmed) II Cor. 1:20.

QUIZ

1. Why is God jealous for His land? Give two reasons!
2. How would God demonstrate His pleasure at their repentance (three ways)?
3. How should the phrase "the former rain" be translated and to whom does it refer?
4. How does God prove the immutability of His purpose (what type of evidence does He give)?

III THE PURPOSE OF REPENTANCE (cont'd) FUTURE BLESSINGS (GOD PREPARING A NEW PEOPLE)

TEXT: 2:28-32

- 28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:
- 29 and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit.
- 30 And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.
- 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of Jehovah cometh.
- 32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be delivered; for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those that escape, as Jehovah hath said, and among the remnant those whom Jehovah doth call.

QUERIES

- a. How will "all flesh" have the Spirit poured out upon them?
- b. When are we to look for a fulfillment of the wonders of "blood and fire, and pillars of smoke?"
- c. What does the prophet mean by saying that only those in "mount Zion" and "Jerusalem" will escape from the "terrible day of the Lord" be possible?

PARAPHRASE

And it will come to pass in the Messianic age, that I will no longer limit the blessings of the Holy Spirit to a specific race and to certain people within that race but I will pour out the blessings of my Spirit upon all races of people who believe in Me; the Spirit will come to old and young, to man-slaves and women-slaves alike and they will all proclaim that God has revealed Himself. At the end of this Messianic age will come the great and terrible day of the Lord but before that day comes I will demonstrate its coming over and over again by showing portents of its coming through terrifying wonders in the heavens and in the earth; wars, natural disasters and fearful phenomena in nature. And then it will come to pass that God's covenant promise made to Abraham will be vindicated and fulfilled for whosoever, whether he be Jew or Gentile, shall believe and obey Jehovah will be delivered from the great and terrible day of the Lord. In the new covenant city, where the Messianic presence of God dwells, will be found those who have escaped even as Jehovah has said, and the Messianic remnant are those whom Jehovah calls.

SUMMARY

With one dramatic sweep of the brush this prophet-artist has graphically portrayed the entire scope of the Messianic age from its beginning with the pouring out of the Spirit, to the working of God during this age in fearful phenomena calling men to repent, to the conclusion of the age at the great and terrible day of Jehovah.

COMMENT

v. 28-29 . . . AFTERWARD . . . I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL FLESH . . . SONS AND DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY . . . OLD MEN . . . YOUNG MEN . . . SERVANTS AND . . . HANDMAIDS . . . Although a veil of discontinuity obscures this whole section (vs. 28-32), the *ideas* in the the prophecy are definite. It is the time element,

the near and the distant blended into one picture, which is temporarily disconcerting.

The inspired pronouncement as to the fulfillment of this prophecy is the final authority. There can be no question that Joel's prophecy began to have its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2, for the inspired apostle declares it to be so. In the Old Dispensation particular members of the covenant people received special dispensations of the Spirit, but in the New, Messianic Dispensation, the Spirit would be poured out on people of all races, as many as would call upon the name of the Lord. Calling on the name of the Lord is, of course, synonymous with believing, repenting and obeying in baptism as is shown in Acts 22:16 when Paul was exhorted to call on His name by being baptized! In other words, Joel says that all who become Christian (who call upon the name of Jehovah) will receive the Spirit of God. Peter confirms it by saying "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For unto you is the promise and unto those who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him." (Acts 2)

That this general giving of the Spirit to all believers was not to be accomplished until the establishment of the church is at once evident from the words in John 7:38 ". . . for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified . . ." Peter's words in Acts 2 also confirm the fact that this outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh was to continue even to those "afar off" (the Gentiles), even as many as God would call.

Joel specifically states that the Spirit will come without limitation as to age, sex or race. The only limitation is that those who expect to receive it must call upon the name of the Lord (v. 32). The outpouring of God's Spirit upon slaves (servants and handmaids) is something extraordinary for not a single case occurs in the entire O.T. of a slave receiving the Spirit or gift of prophecy. Even the Jewish expositors could not reconcile themselves to this announcement. The translators of the Septuagint substituted "servants of God" in place of "slaves of men" in this text.

That these who have called upon the name of the Lord and have received the Spirit of God would prophesy, dream dreams and see visions could mean either of two things or both. It undoubtedly means that some in the Messianic age would receive special gifts of the Spirit to prophesy or to receive direct, infallible revelations of God's will through dreams and visions. We know from the historical record of the New Testament that this is so. There were even some women who

prophesied (Acts 21:9). But we believe the word "prophesy" is also used in a general sense to mean that all in the Messianic age who receive the gift of the Spirit will go everywhere preaching and teaching the revealed will of God (Acts 8:4). We do know from the figurative and hyperbolic usage of language in the Bible that it is not necessary to assume that when Joel says "your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions..." thus all who receive the indwelling presence of the Spirit and become Christians will be given direct dream or vision revelations from God. All who become Christians will receive the Spirit, but only some of the sons and daughters would receive the special, miraculous gifts of prophecy, visions, dreams, etc. If we let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament we will know what Joel means.

The important point of this passage is often missed in an effort to dogmatize or theologize about miraculous gifts of the Spirit. The important point is that in the "latter days" that is, in the Messianic age the fulfillment of God's covenant promises—the pouring out of His Spirit—would come to *all* people. It would no longer be a covenant restricted to a certain nation but to men of every tongue and tribe who would call upon Him in trustful obedience. God was going to do something unique in the Messianic age (Isa. 43:19) and this would be the "pouring" out of the Spirit from on high (Isa. 32:15)—the creating of a "new Spirit and a new heart within man" (Ezek. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26ff; 37:1-28 and Zech. 12:10).

This outpouring of the Spirit of God, as Peter interprets it, ushers in the Messianic age. Furthermore, as Peter declares, all during this age, men of every race and station who call upon the name of the Lord will receive the indwelling Spirit. If we will but follow the inspired apostle's interpretation we will see that Joel's prophecy was not limited only to the special, miraculous gifts of the Spirit.

v. 30-32 AND I WILL SHOW WONDERS IN THE HEAVENS AND IN THE EARTH . . . BEFORE THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE DAY OF JEHOVAH COMETH . . . AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL ON THE NAME OF JEHOVAH SHALL BE DELIVERED; . . . In highly figurative language Joel tells both the people of his day and all generations that during this entire Messianic age God will be showing "wonders in the heavens and in the earth; blood and fire, and pillars of smoke." This, as is evident from the context, will be one of the means by which God will call men to repent in preparation for the "great and terrible day of Jehovah." It is without question that these "wonders" are to transpire *before* that "great and terrible day," so they

must be before the second and final coming of Jesus Christ who comes on that terrible day to judge all who have not called upon the name of Jehovah. These "wonders" are both natural disasters and human holocausts. God certainly sent a warning upon an impenitent Jewish nation which had rejected the Messiah when He destroyed their city and their nation in 70 A.D. (cf. Matt. 24:1-28). God has also permitted nation after nation to be destroyed in blood, fire and smoke because of ungodliness. He has permitted the forces of the heavens (nature) to carry out His warning judgments upon the earth (cf. comments on Joel 2:1ff).

Then at the end of the ages, the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come (v. 31). God will call during the entire Christian age through Spirit filled men proclaiming His word and by sending terrifying wonders in the heavens and on the earth; and then suddenly, without warning the consummation of the ages.

For those who call upon the name of the Lord (v. 32) this day of the Lord will be one of deliverance. Their faith and their works will be vindicated. They shall receive an eternal weight of glory when they are recognized and glorified by God Himself. But for those who do not call upon His name in faith and obedience shall be His perfect, divine wrath.

Keil and Delitzsch's statement here will help to clarify our interpretation:

"For the signs in heaven and earth that are mentioned in vers. 30 and 31 were to take place before the coming of the terrible day of the Lord, which would dawn after the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon all flesh, and which came, as history teaches, upon the Jewish nation that had rejected its Saviour on the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and upon the Gentile world-power in the destruction of the Roman empire, and from that time forward breaks in constant succession upon one Gentile nation after another; until all the ungodly powers of this world shall be overthrown (cf. Ch. 3:2). On account of this internal connection between the day of Jehovah and the outpouring of the Spirit upon the church of the Lord, Peter also quoted vers. 30-32 of this prophecy, for the purpose of impressing upon the hearts of all the hearers of his address the admonition, "Save yourselves from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40), and also of pointing out the way of deliverance from the threatening judgment to all who were willing to be saved."

So Joel, blending the events of the Messianic age into one picture with the near and the distant painted like mountain peaks and ranges seen from a distance, does not portray for us the valleys of centuries of time between the mountain-top-events. This is what is called the "shortened perspective" of prophetic literature. It should caution us to pay more attention to what the prophets preach of the fundamentals of faith and practice and much less to what prophecy may seem to say about "times and seasons."

In the Messianic age God intended to bless all who would answer His call in Christ Jesus with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." For it was in the New Testament dispensation that He "set forth in Christ . . . a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." It is in Christ that men of all races "have heard the word of truth, the gospel of . . . salvation, and have believed in him, and were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit . . ." Yes, Ephesians, chapter one, is the completed revelation of that which Joel wrote in long ages past!

QUIZ

1. When did the pouring out of the Spirit of God on all flesh take place? Is it still taking place?
2. Does this promise of Joel mean that all Christians should expect to prophesy, receive revelations by dreams, and have visions? Why not?
3. What and when are the "wonders in heaven and on earth?"
4. How does God "call" the remnant?
5. Why do we say it is not important that men should attempt to force these great mountain-top events into a rigid schedule of times and seasons?
6. How is Ephesians I a completed revelation of this section of Joel?

GOD'S VICTORY OVER THE ENEMIES OF HIS PEOPLE FUTURE BLESSINGS (cont'd)

TEXT: 3:1-15

- 1 For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,
- 2 I will gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will execute judgment upon them there for