

**Lo, Thorns & Thistles Flourish  
in the Land of Eden  
A Biblical-Theological Study of the Book of Joel**

**by Rev. C. R. Biggs**

A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!  
I, the LORD, am its keeper;  
every moment I water it.  
Lest any one harm it,  
I guard it night and day;  
I have no wrath.  
Would that I had thorns and thistles to battle!  
I would set out against them,  
I would burn them up together (Is. 27:1-4).

A. INTRODUCTION

B. HISTORICAL DATE AND AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

C. LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

D. THEMES IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

E. OVERARCHING PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to Timothy tells us that all of the Scriptures are inspired, or breathed out by God and are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness so that the Christian may be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Earlier in his letter to Timothy, he had instructed him to present himself as one approved by God, one who correctly handles the word of truth (as the NIV translates that phrase). Both of these Scriptures are relevant to our task of interpreting the texts before us in the Book of Joel. We must first know that the Scriptures are indeed the very words of God and therefore there is no part of Scripture that is irrelevant for the Church of Jesus Christ today. The Scriptures are given so that all the covenant people who have lived throughout God's unfolding redemptive-history, may assist in making us complete as new creations in Christ and thoroughly

equipped for the work of loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; and our neighbors as ourselves. Part of this single minded love and devotion to God and neighbor is revealed in how much we love God and neighbor in our attempts to interpret the Scriptures properly-to rightly divide (ala KJV), or correctly handle the Word of Truth. This calls for prayer, sensitivity to the text, and an absolute high regard for Scripture as inspired and inerrant. We must approach the text not as skeptics, but as children seeking to hear the loving instruction of our father (Mt. 11:25 -27). Although these are the words of Joel as author, they are ultimately the very words of God spoken through his prophet to his people then, and to his people now.

As the Church on the verge of a third millenium, we should heed the words of Paul as we begin the task of understanding the words of the Prophet Joel. Our concern with the prophet's message is not only in its historical context, but from the broader scope of earlier redemptive history up to the writing of his prophecy, and from the standpoint of saints living in the Last Days. In some respects, it is more difficult for us to understand Joel in his historical context as an ancient prophet who lived and was part of another cultural and historical milieu. On the other hand, we have the benefit and privilege of those who have the better words spoken by Christ and therefore we can interpret all of the Scriptures Christologically (Luke 24:44-49). We must remember in former times and in various ways, God spoke through the prophets; but in these Last Days, he has spoken to us through the Son whom he loves (Heb. 1:1,2). How much more clearer and relevant should the message of Joel be to us today who live in the time when the Kingdom of Christ has been historically inaugurated?

May we interpret the book of Joel faithfully and prayerfully as we begin our study. If rightly handled and interpreted, and prayerfully considered, then the LORD may be pleased to teach, reprove, correct, and train us in all righteousness. So that his Church will be thoroughly equipped for every good work in Christ. Our study will begin considering the historical context and message of the Book of Joel. We shall then broaden our perspective by looking back from that historical perspective to the hub, or foundational Scriptures in the Law, Prophets and the Writings in the Old Testament. Then we will look through the interpretive lens that Christ has graciously given to us, the New Testament. By considering the Book of Joel from these scopes, perhaps with the help and application of God's Spirit, we can see clearly God's redemptive landscape as it is progressively revealed in Christ. As we move from the ancient horizon of redemptive history to the modern horizon or context, may we be sensitive to hear the words of the prophet in light of our great salvation in Christ.

John Calvin said that the chief excellency of a Biblical commentator lies in lucid brevity (Biblical Theology, Childs, 47). In this exegesis I have tried to take Calvin's wisdom into consideration and to attempt to be as brief as possible. At the same time, with the subsequent work of Geerhardus Vos, Brevard S. Childs, and V. S. Poythress (Symphonic Theology), I have been concerned to be as

thorough with the Biblical material as possible without presumptuously thinking that I have come to close to exhausting the text which is in our purview. I have attempted to focus chiefly on the passages to be exegeted, but with a consideration of the text within the scope of all of redemptive-history which would help to bring additional clarity to the particular text (Joel 2:3-5), and also to the Scripture as a whole. In an effort for greater brevity, I have marginalized portions of my exegesis which I have narrated, so as to not take away from the thrust and force of the meaning in the passages in Joel. I have attempted to engage the reader through my narrative with the broader meaning and perspective that I think the Prophet Joel would have had, however, it is sufficient for someone who is familiar with the Scriptures to merely note the reference to the Biblical text and continue reading. In summary, I have tried to be both clear and brief while at the same time considering the great depth of the Biblical passages within the scope of redemptive-history.

Concerning my methodology, I believe that while Old Testament theology is descriptive, I also believe that it is to be prescriptive. In other words, I think that what the Prophet Joel meant in its historical context is as important to what it means to the people of God today in the wider, Christological scope. In fact, you cannot know what the Prophet Joel meant without considering God's revelation in Christ. I think that a Biblical Theology can and should be done based on the whole of the Old and New Testaments, centered and focused in Christ. My approach and methodology has been to see the unity of the two Testaments because they should not be read independently without considering the whole of God's revelation to his people. There are a number of perspectives to be considered, a diversity to be appreciated in both Testaments, but the one unifying revelation of God is found in Christ alone. Therefore, I approach the Scriptures as the one and only revelation of God, recognizing the canon of the Scriptures, the promises and the fulfillment, the typological pointing forward in the Old Testament, in order to ultimately and consummately derive the meaning of God's revelation in Christ as the grand pinnacle of salvation history (heilsgeschichte) (Luke 24:44-49; Hebrews 1:1,2).

We shall begin by considering the historical date and author of the Book of Joel. We will then proceed to understand the various literary functions, themes and structure of this book of blessings and curses. Then we will engage in an exegesis of Joel 2:3-5 in order that the prophet's words will ring with clarity as we hear in them the voice of God and as we strive to obey his commandments as his covenant people. The movement in our study will be from a close up of Joel's period to an ever-broadening wide screen presentation of the events which the prophet Joel has given to us as the very words of God. When Scripture is quoted throughout this paper, I have used my own translations and often the Revised Version (1885) because of its faithfulness to the text. Use of the New International Version will be indicated by the insertion of (NIV). I have also written the Divine Name as "LORD" (Yahweh) in distinction from "Lord" (Adonai) as it

appears in a modern translation of the Bible such as the New International Version.

As a supplementary application, the exegesis of Joel is submitted to the Church to further dialogue with Dispensationalists (Historical and Progressive). The Dispensationalists make a dichotomy between the "earthly" people of God, or Israel and the "spiritual" people of God, the Church (Understanding, Poythress, 22ff). While our brethren, the Dispensationalists have been helpful in making distinctions between the diversity of epochs in redemptive-history, often they have misunderstood the unity of God's people in Christ (Rom. 9-11; Gal. 3:26-4:7; 6:16; Eph. 2:14-18). The Book of Joel, particularly our study on the one covenant and the land that was promised, will perhaps shed Christological light on the unity of the one people of God made up of both Jews and Gentiles; all who all upon the name of the LORD (Acts 2:22-38). My prayer is that this paper will appropriately shed light on God's distinctive epochs or dispensations, while interpreting them in light of the Christological revelation of the one people of God, the one Kingdom of God, the one hope of salvation in Christ (Eph. 4:4-16). May the people of God not presume upon God the way he has chosen to reveal himself by relying on the Promises and Covenant of God without faith, nor by expecting a Kingdom other than the one he has revealed. As we begin our study of Joel 2:3-5 in light of the whole of redemptive-history, I think we will learn how the one people of God are revealed by the one Christ.

#### A. INTRODUCTION

#### B. HISTORICAL DATE AND AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

#### C. LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

#### D. THEMES IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

#### E. OVERARCHING PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

Considering the date and author of the Book of Joel, the interpreter searches in vain to find detailed information from within the book itself. The opening superscription of the book merely says: "The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethnuel." Throughout the history of the Church varying scholars have suggested different dates according to internal considerations from within the text, or the comparison of themes within the book and the other "twelve" or Latter Prophets (Minor Prophets in the Christian Canon), and other canonical considerations. Some scholars have suggested a preexilic date of the 9th century BC, during the reign of Joash of Judah ; others have suggested a pre-Exilic date in the 6th century BC ; other scholars have dated this book in the post-Exilic period ; while some scholars have dated it as one of the last prophetic books written .

The author is a person named Joel ("The LORD is God"), son of Pethuel, and scholars have suggested that if the book should be dated in the 9th century, then Joel was probably a temple prophet of the cult in Jerusalem. The arguments for each date and the person of the author are helpful, but the most important consideration of the book is its message, particularly the internal themes within the book itself. This is the important message of God to his people in a particular time of redemptive history. Apart from the concerns of a specific date, we know that Joel was a prophet who lived after the time of David and prior to the coming of Jesus Christ and the writing of the New Testament. More broadly, or eschatologically considered, the Book of Joel is located on the redemptive-historical landscape between God's creation of the earth and his progressive fulfillment of making a new creation. The themes and message of the book are sufficient to teach us about the particular passages (Joel 2:3-5) to be considered in light of God's redemptive history.

When considering the epoch in which Joel prophesied, it should be remembered that Joel is known as a Latter Prophet in the Hebrew canon. In redemptive-history, the prophet Joel is an heir and interpreter of a progressive prophetic tradition. The prophet Moses is the fountainhead as covenant mediator and intercessor: "And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel up out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved." (Hos. 12:13; cf. Ex. 32:1-34; Num. 14:13-35; cf. John 1:14-18; 21:25; Heb. 3:1-6) (Interpreting, VanGemeren, 37). The prophet Samuel bridges the epoch between Moses and Joshua to David and Solomon. Elijah is closely connected to the Prophet Joel as the first "covenant prosecutor". Elijah shaped the course of the Latter Prophets and marked the end of one redemptive-historical era. One era was characterized by divine patience and the other was the beginning of an era characterized by divine purification of his people. Unlike Moses who interceded on behalf of Israel (Ex. 31-34), Elijah accused God's people of infidelity. The days of God's patience were drawing to an end, and a new era was coming. Elijah and the Prophet Joel had prophetic ministries who charged God's people with breaking the covenant and pronounced God's judgment on them (1 Kings 18:21; cf. Joel 1-2; Micah 3:1-3; 4:-6) (Interpreting, VanGemeren, 37).

#### A. INTRODUCTION

#### B. HISTORICAL DATE AND AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

#### C. LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

#### D. THEMES IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

#### E. OVERARCHING PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

The progression of God's revelation flourishes like a vine throughout

history. The historical context and cultural milieu of Joel's prophecy must be considered, precisely because it is a particular branch that is growing upon this vine (cf. Is. 5:1-7). Part of this consideration is to understand literary devices that were used in Hebrew prophetic and poetic books of the Bible. Considering the content (prophecy) as well as the form (structure of the prophecy) can be a complimentary exegetical exercise to aid in the interpretation of the passage. In the Book of Joel, there are literary considerations to recognize in order to interpret Joel's message. Three main characteristics of Hebrew prophetic literature or poetry are imagery, parallelism, and terseness (Ryken, Longman 86). There are elements of all three in the Book of Joel. In the verses to be considered in chapter two verses 3-5, consider the following example from each of the verses. Joel 2:3 says:

[A] Before them a fire devours;  
[B] behind them a flame burns.  
[A1] Before them the land is like the garden of Eden;  
[B1] behind them a desolate wilderness.  
[Cpt] Nothing shall escape them.

In the first two cola (Hebrew lines), literary parallelism is noticed. The structure shows the author's concern for not only the content of his message, but the importance of his form to communicate the content. James Kugel has described Hebrew parallelism as "A, what's more B" and is found in many of the Psalms. C. S. Lewis has described parallelism as "saying the same thing twice in different words; the second part nuances the first part in some way" (Ryken, Longman 83).

Line A- [Before them a fire devours;]  
Line B- [behind them a flame burns.]  
Line A1- [Before them the land is like the garden of Eden;]  
Line B1- [behind them a desolate wilderness.]

The main thought of the Prophet Joel in these verses is that the powerful army that is coming is all-consuming both before and behind them. He begins lines A and A1 with the Hebrew phrase "before them", then lines B and B1 begins with "behind them". Not only does this structure give the text "movement" to describe the army that is coming, but it makes it plain that the imminent destruction at the hand of the LORD is comprehensive and devastating. The parallelism and the propositional relation of the words in this verse should be interpreted this way:

Line A- "Before this great and powerful army (v.2) a fire devours."  
Line B- "What's more, behind them a flame burns."  
Line A1- "Before this great and powerful army's destruction, the land is beautiful as the Garden of Eden."

Line B1- "What's more, after their movement through the land, it is like a desolate wilderness."

Cpt- "As a result, nothing shall escape them."

The final phrase of v. 3 is the complimentary phrase "nothing shall escape them" to additionally add to the meaning that not only is the army's destruction comprehensive, but nothing shall escape their movement through the land- - nothing shall be saved.

In verse 4 and 5, there is an example of Hebrew imagery used in prophetic and poetic literature. The Prophet Joel used imagery to stimulate the imagination by embodying multiple meanings in a concise form. This triggers thinking, but also an emotional response from the people to whom Joel preached (Ryken, Longman 83).

[v.4] Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;  
and like fast steeds they do run.

[v.5] Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains, they do skip;  
like the noise of a flame of fire devouring chaff,  
like a strong army set in battle array.

The Prophet Joel describes their appearance in verse 4 "as the appearance of horses." Then he says "what's more, like fast steeds they do run." In verse 5 he says, "like the noise of chariots, on the mountain tops they do skip; what's more, like the noise of a flame of fire...like a strong army prepared in battle gear." This parallelism using descriptive imagery of the times is effective to show the devastating horror that is expected, anticipating the mighty army that is coming into Israel as the LORD's judgment. The imagery is noticed by the way the Hebrew is written with the "like/ as" contrast, much like the "before/ behind" contrast in verse 3. For example, verse four begins literally "like the appearance of horses, is their appearance; what's more, like fast steeds they do run." In verse 5, the prophet uses the same contrast-structure to further describe the army. "Like the noise of chariots... what's more, like the noise of a flame of fire burning chaff; what's more, like a strong army (people) prepared for battle.

Immediately, the structure and form should help to interpret the serious message which the Prophet Joel read to the people of Israel. The important literary devices used by Joel give a powerful and emotional movement to the text as it was understood by the people of Israel. Consider the propositional relations of the lines in verses 1-5 to understand and feel the message of the prophet in its context with a paraphrase of the verses:

[v.1] "Blow a trumpet in Zion!

what's more, sound an alarm in my holy mountain of Jerusalem.  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble;  
Why? Because the Day of the LORD comes;  
what's more, it is near."

[v.2] "What kind of day will the Day of the LORD be like?  
A day of darkness and gloominess,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness;  
what's more as the dawn spread upon the mountains.  
Why? Because a great and strong people are coming;  
what's more, there has never been any people like them,  
neither shall there be any more after them,  
for many generations to come."

[v.3] "What are the people on the Day of the LORD like?  
Before them, a fire devours;  
what's more, behind them a flame burns.  
Before them, the land is as the Garden of Eden;  
what's more, behind them the land is a desolate wilderness.  
As a result, nothing shall escape them."

[v.4] "Like the appearance of horses is their appearance;  
what's more, like fast steeds they run."

[v.5] "Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains they skip;  
what's more, like the noise of a flame of fire devouring stubble.  
In addition, they are like a strong people (army) prepared for battle."

The context of the Book of Joel took place after a historical locust plague had devastated the land. Joel uses the imagery of the great devastation of locusts to warn the people (Joel addresses the people as "Judah," "Jerusalem," and "Israel," 2:27; 3:16) and to describe "the army of the Lord" who is coming upon Israel, which will be God's hand of judgment. The "army of the Lord" could be understood as a literal army or as archetypal language in Joel's use of the locust plague to describe the future (cf. Joel 1:4; 2:2,5,11,25). Regardless of whether the use of "army" is a figurative or a real army, the LORD sent the devastation as a judgment for covenant disobedience, and God was "head of his army", Joel 2:11,25 (the army is also referred to as a "nation", Joel 1:6). This is language and imagery used in apocalyptic literature. One of the main characteristics of apocalyptic literature is "symbolism" which is found in much of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. The use of apocalyptic language in prophecy concerning eschatology, is to draw a sharp contrast between the characteristics of Joel's age with the age that is to come (cf. Zeph. 1:2; 3:9-20) (Ladd, 153). The language of Joel's locusts and the army which is to come, could be understood as an "epiphor," a characteristic of metaphor which is a

transference or movement from something well-known (locust plague/ army of the LORD) to something lesser known (the Day of God's judgment) (Ricoeur, 9-43). Joel warns the people of Israel as the covenant prosecutor (VanGemeren 42ff), of the coming devastation upon the land and pleads with the people to "return to their God" so that God may be gracious and restore the land from its devastation.

The apocalyptic language of the locusts and the army of the LORD's judgment against the land, ultimately is God's accommodation to teach his people the consequences of breaking his covenant, sinful, cosmic rebellion against their King, and the results of a true and contrite repentance (a "turning back" to God) [v.12], that will restore God's blessings on the people and the land (P. 51:6,16,17; cf. Is. 57:15; 65:2-7). The graciousness and patience of God toward his people is a dominant theme throughout the whole of Scripture and particularly in these prophetic utterances (cf. Hos. 6:1; 12:6; 14:1; Joel 2:12; Zech. 1:3; 10:9; 2 Peter 3:9).

The Book of Joel uses similar imagery and metaphors as found in the other books of the Minor Prophets, particularly the Book of Amos: (e.g. Fire - Amos 1:10-14; 2:5; 7:4; Locusts - 4:10; 7:1-3; Call for repentance -5:4,6,14-17; Day of the LORD - Amos 4:12,13; 5:4-20; 8:9-11; Restoration - 9:11-15). There are also several verbal parallels in Joel's prophecy that are used in other prophetic literature: (1:15; cf. Ezek. 30:2ff; Is. 13:6; 2:2; Zeph. 1:15; 2:3; reverses Is. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35; 2:6; cf. Nahum 2:10; 2:28; cf. Ezek. 39:29; 2:32; cf. Ob. 17; 3:18; cf. Amos 9:13). These literary forms shall be considered further at length in order to carefully attend to and interpret the message of Joel's prophecy.

#### A. INTRODUCTION

#### B. HISTORICAL DATE AND AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

#### C. LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

#### D. THEMES IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

#### E. OVERARCHING PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

The central message or overarching theme of the Book of Joel is the Day of the LORD - the Day of the LORD's righteous judgment is near-- and the need of repentance from the people (Joel 1:15; 2:1,11,15,31; 3:14; cf. Ez. 30:2,3; Is. 13:6). The Day of the LORD is an "archetype" or "recurring image" (Frye, 99) of literary elements in different books and in various redemptive-historical contexts of Scripture. Odendaal says that "every historical coming of this day [the Day of the LORD] is always a type and promise of its final coming and forms an intrusion of the consummation (Interpreting, VanGemeren, 45). Underlying the central message of the Day of the LORD in the Book of Joel are several

important themes. The thematic content of the Book of Joel is needful as an introductory, internal overview to set the scene of the book and the specific location of the verses to be considered in Joel's prophecy (2:3-5). This internal overview will provide a proper context for the verses in Joel's great prophetic drama, like the consideration of particular acts in the whole of a play; like one historical event in light of all of God's historical deeds; like the consideration of a chapter in light of the whole epic.

The book begins with the historical occasion of the land of Israel being devastated by a great plague of locusts (1:2-10). The prophet Joel "with the word of the LORD" (1:1), says "hear this" and "take account of" God's judgment (cf. Hos. 6:5-7). The prophet consecutively uses the imperative form of the verb at the beginning of his prophecy to emphasize to the people the seriousness of the word of the LORD: "Awake"; "Cry"; "Wail"; "Lament"; "Be Ashamed" ; "Howl" ; "Gird yourselves"; "Consecrate a fast"; "Call a sacred assembly"; "Gather the elders" ; Cry out to the LORD", in response to God's judgment upon the land (1:5,8,10,13,14). This prophecy is directed to all the people of the land: to the young and the old (1:3), the common people (drunkards, virgins, vinedressers or farmers, 1:5,8,11), and the priests of Israel (1:11-14). The reason why the people must repent in light of the devastation of the covenantal land is that the Day of the LORD is at hand; a day of destruction and wrath. The prophet Joel says, "Alas, for the Day, because the Day of the LORD is near, with the same language of "alas!" found in Isaiah 13:6 and Ezekiel 30:2ff (1:15-18; cf. other Minor Prophets: Amos 3:14; 5:20; Obadiah 15; Zeph. 1:14; Zech. 14:1). In verses, 1:19-20, the prophet Joel laments on behalf of the people when he says: "O LORD, to thee do I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. Yea, the beasts of the field pant unto thee: for the water brooks are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness," (all the inhabitants of the land, including the animals experience the anguish of God's judgment).

At the beginning of chapter two, Joel proclaims and warns the people of God's wrath to come in the Day of the LORD using apocalyptic imagery of the devastation of locusts. The prophet Joel is telling the people "if you thought the locust plague was comprehensively devastating (1:4,16,17), how much greater will be the comprehensive wrath and devastation of God's justice that is to come; if you thought the devastation of the land was great, how much greater will be the eschatological and devastating wrath of God upon the people of the land, and the entire creation" (2:1-11; specifically 2:10; cf. 2:30, 31; 3:15,16). The army of the Lord is the imagery that Joel uses to describe this wrath to come-the Day of the LORD (2:3-5). This army is like the locusts that have devastated the land, but the devastation will be greater when the army changes the land from an Edenic garden to a desolate wilderness (2:3).

In the latter half of chapter two, Joel calls the people to repentance (2:12-17: From infants and children, to the elders (2:16); from those to be wed, even to

the priests 2:16,17). A central verse within the Book of Joel, which should be recognized as the turning point of the prophecy, is the LORD's call for a "return to the LORD your God" -"Return to me", which is exceedingly common in Old Testament prophetic literature (Is. 55:7; cf. Is. 44:22 ; Jer. 3:12; 18:11; Ezek. 33:11; Hosea 14:1). The prophet Joel says in 2:13, "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repenteth him of the evil"; ("and he relents from sending calamity," NIV). If the people will repent of their sins ("turn" from their sins to the LORD), the gracious God of the covenant people, promises to refresh the devastated land, return the covenantal blessings to his people, and even to the animals of the land. Ultimately, God promises to restore all creation as before the plagues (2:19-27; cf. Romans 8: 19-22).

The prophecy of Joel concludes with great promises. God will save his people: He will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh (2:28); whoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered (2:32); He will gather the remnant, those the LORD has called (2:32b); He will subdue the nations and separate them from his people, permanently sending them out of the land (3:4-15); The LORD will be the ultimate and permanent refuge of his people (3:16; cf. Ps. 23:6b); He will bring restoration to the land and the people of the land, and the LORD will dwell with his people permanently in Zion (3:17-21). These are great promises and truths that this prophecy communicates in Scripture for all of God's people and his creation: "The LORD dwells in Zion" (Joel 3:21b).

A summary outline of the Book of Joel (using the Christian canon as a division into three chapters; the Hebrew Masoretic Text has four chapters): (1) Superscription/ Introduction to the book (1:1); (2) Plague on the land/ Mourning for sins (1:2-12); (3) Joel's call of repentance to God's people (1:13-18); (4) Joel's lament to God for his people (1:19-20); (5) The greater and more destructive Day of the Lord as warrior of his wrathful army (2:1-11); (6) God as merciful judge of his people (2:12-17); (7) God's response to his people's repentance/ God's refreshing of the land (2:18-27); (8) The eschatological day of God's judgment and the salvation of his people (2:28-32); (9) God's judgment of the wicked/ Separation of the wicked from the land (3:1-16a); (10) God's dwelling with his people in the land permanently (3:16b-21).

Having considered the internal context of the Book of Joel, the next focus should be on the structure or overarching perspective of the prophecy. There are many facets or perspectives for approaching this book, but the overarching, redemptive-historical structure is God's covenant people intimately related to the covenant promise of the land (Gen. 1:26,27; 2:7; cf. Gen. 3:17-19; Gen. 12:1; 15:7; cf. Dt. 9:6; 28:45-48,63; Josh. 1:13; Is. 14:1; Jer. 16:15; Ezek. 28:25; Amos 9:15).

## A. INTRODUCTION

## B. HISTORICAL DATE AND AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

## C. LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

## D. THEMES IN THE BOOK OF JOEL

## E. OVERARCHING PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

The overall redemptive-historical structure of the Book of Joel, and of the particular verses to be considered (2:3-5) is founded upon the covenantal land and what is to be expected on the Day of the LORD. The land's fruitfulness or barrenness are the direct results of the inhabitant's (God's covenant inhabitants) obedience or disobedience to God's covenant. For example, the prophecy of Joel begins with the land being cursed because the people of God have broken his covenant (God has sent pestilence and plague because of disobedience- 1:4; cf. Dt. 28:15-68, particularly vss. 18,24,30b,33,38,39,40,42,48; Gen. 17-19). The land in Joel's prophecy is given human qualities as it reacts to God's judgment. The reaction of the land is described when the prophet says, "the land mourns" (1:10 cf. Hos.4:3); the beasts groan (or pant) (1:18 cf. Job 38:41; Ps.104:21; Rom. 8:20-22); "the earth quakes and the heavens tremble" (the whole creation reacts! The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw from shining- 2:10b; 3:15; cf. Is. 13:10; 34:4). Because of the LORD's jealousy for his land (1:6) and his pity for the inhabitants of the land, the LORD withholds his judgment (2:18-24). In his grace, God refreshes the land (God refreshes his people and creation- 2:19-22), and restores the land to its Edenic beauty (2:25-27; cf. Joel 2:3; also see Gen. 1:1,11,12,31; 2:15). The Book of Joel ends with great eschatological promises and blessings. Concerning the land, God will drive the wicked out (3:2-8), and he will dwell in the land with his people eternally (3:17-21). These great promises and blessings will happen on the Day of the LORD. On the Day of the LORD, there will be both blessings and curses; covenantal blessings for God's people, and curses of wrathful judgment for the wicked (Blessings: Is. 35:8-10; Obad. 19-21; Zeph. 3:18-20; Zech. 14:10,11; curses: Is. 10:3; 63:4-6; Jer. 51:2; Ezek. 7:7; Hos. 1:9; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 2:2).

To summarize the overarching structure of the Book of Joel:

Covenant Land Rebuked (Creation Cursed)

Covenant Land Reacts (Creation Cries)

Covenant Land Repents (Creation Corrects)

Covenant Land Refreshed (Creation Cleaned)

Covenant Land Restored (Creation Consummated).

Having considered the Book of Joel in terms of the date and author, the central themes, and the overarching perspective or structure, the next and most important consideration is the specific passages, located in Joel 2:3-5. Having considered the basic content, form and thematic structure, it is necessary to consider these passages not merely from the internal context of the Book of Joel, but within the wider context of redemptive history; to view the flourishing growth of the vine as it has progressively been revealed up to the time of the Prophet Joel.

## I. HISTORY OF GOD'S REDEMPTION TO THE PROPHET JOEL

- A. JOEL'S MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL
- B. LOCUSTS ON THE LAND
- C. LOCUSTS ON THE LAND OF EGYPT: JOEL'S EXODUS LAND-REVERSAL MOTIF
- D. A FIRE DEVOURS BEFORE THEM; AFTER THEM A FLAME BURNS UPON THE LAND
- E. THE LAND IS LIKE THE GARDEN OF EDEN BEFORE THEM: JOEL'S CREATION AND EXODUS REVERSALS

## II. THE APPEARANCE OF THE STRONG ARMY UPON THE LAND

- A. THE THEOPHANIC INVASION OF THE LORD UPON THE LAND

## III. THE BOOK OF JOEL IN CHRIST

- A. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND IN THE LAND
- B. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DAY OF THE LORD IN THE LAND
- C. THE WICKED IN THE LAND ON THE DAY OF THE LORD
- D. THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE LAND ON THE DAY OF THE LORD
- E. RESTING AND AT EASE IN THE LAND OF ZION

## EXEGESIS: JOEL 2:3-5

[v.3] Before them a fire devours;  
behind them a flame burns.  
Before them the land is like the garden of Eden;  
behind them a desolate wilderness.  
nothing escapes them.

[v.4] Their appearance is as the appearance of horses;  
and like fast steeds they do run.

[v.5] Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains, they do skip;  
like the noise of a flame of fire devouring chaff,  
like a strong army set in battle array (my translation).

## I. THE HISTORY OF GOD'S REDEMPTION TO THE PROPHET JOEL

### A. JOEL'S MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Things looked exceedingly bleak and hopeless for the people of Israel. Not only had locusts devoured their crops, but greater trouble and anguish awaited them on the horizon. With their fields laid bare, the people of Israel looked to the Prophet Joel for answers to explain this recent devastating event. How could the covenant people be without the plentiful provision which the LORD had promised them according to the Deuteronomic blessings? Had the God who surrounded Jerusalem as the mountains (Ps. 125), forgotten his promise to Abraham and his descendants? The prophet Joel did not have encouraging news. Instead, he confronted them with a message of devastating calamity. Based upon the recent event of the locust plague that had materially and psychologically devastated the people and the land, the heart of the burning prophet interpreted this event as convicting evidence that the Day of the LORD was near.

The people of Israel were dwelling at ease in Zion (cf. Amos 6:1-3). They should have heeded the words of Moses and rested under the shelter of the Almighty, their covenantal God (Ps. 91). Israel thought that since they were the covenant people, they ought to be receiving covenantal blessings upon their land (Dt. 28). The land was promised to the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to their descendants (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18-21; 17:8, to Abraham; Gen. 26:3, to Isaac; Gen. 28:4,13; 35:12; 48:4, to Jacob) (Progress, VanGemeren 105). God was going to come and set up his earthly kingdom and overthrow the nations because they were the covenantal people. Despite Israel's misguided hopes they had disregarded the stipulations and demands of the covenant. The people and the priests gathered to hear the prophet Joel tell the word of the LORD-they expected to receive hope in his words-instead, they are warned of a judgment to come on covenant-breaking Israel. This judgment is to be followed by a time of refreshing and restoration for the land and the people, but first the judgment was going to come.

Rather than hearing words of comfort from the Prophet Joel, God's covenantal prosecutor reads to them their sentence of condemnation and guiltiness as a disobedient people. Only God can intervene and bring his people back to himself. As the prophecy of Joel unfolds, the Sovereign God of hope, whose anger lasts shortly, must first come and separate true Israel from those shrugging his commandments and those who hate the path of righteousness. Then God's favor will rest on his people eternally, as he dwells with them in the land of Zion. The aim of Israel's covenantal God was twofold: to preserve the true

Israel, his people the remnant, and to separate the wicked from the land. This was to be a trial and a persecution by fire that would cleanse Israel from her impurities and burn away the dross of those who did not know the LORD. On that day, the prophet comes before the assembly. The crowd's noise before the prophet turns from an uproar of gathered people to a silence as the prophet lifts his eyes up, and reads an oracle of judgment from his scroll. "Hear this!"... "Listen!"

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm upon my holy mountain [yvid>q' rh;B. W[yrlh'w> !AYciB. rp'Av W[q.T] ; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand..." (2:1). The blowing of the trumpet in Biblical literature is to sound an apocalyptic wake up call from spiritual slumber and disobedience, to announce woes, or a great event to the people (Ex. 19:13; Numbers 10:1-10), particularly the coming day of the LORD (Ps. 81:3; cf. Is. 27:13; Ezek. 7:14; Hosea 5:8; Zeph. 1:16; Zech. 9:14). The Israelites also would have associated the trumpet blast on the infamous day in their history, when Moses their mediator met God face to face to bring the Law of God to the people (Ex. 19:16,19)

In Joel's time, guards on wall-towers would blow the ram's horn to alert the people of an enemy attack (cf. Ezek. 33:2-4; Amos 3:6) (Allen, 67). The prophet says, "Hear this": "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain!" (Hos. 5:8; 8:1; Zeph. 1:16; Zech. 9:14). The prophet then describes the day of the LORD that is close at hand with very somber and sobering theophanic language as "a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness..." (2:2; cf. Amos 5:8; 8:9; Micah 2:6; Zeph. 1:15; cf. with Mt. Sinai imagery, Ex. 19:16-19). The prophet Zephaniah describes the Day of the LORD with a similar theophany: "The great Day of the LORD is near, it is near and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD; the mighty man crieth there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. A day of the trumpet and alarm, against the fenced cities, and against the battlements" (Zeph. 1:14-16).

## B. LOCUSTS UPON THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Prior to this portion of the text, Joel had spoken of the devastating destruction of the ravenous locusts upon the land as all-encompassing and comprehensive: "that which the palmerworm ("locust swarm," NIV) hath left the locust ("great locusts," NIV) eaten; and that which the locust ("great locusts," NIV) hath left the cankerworm ("young locusts," NIV) eaten; and that which the cankerworm ("young locusts," NIV) hath left hath the caterpillar ("other locusts," NIV) eaten" (1:4). This "soundplay" as a Hebrew literary device highlights and emphasizes Joel's description of the locusts; from the least to the greatest of the locusts their destruction has been comprehensive upon the land (cf. Is. 24:17-18a; Amos 5:5). After the locust devastation, there is not so much as a green

sprout of life; the destruction of the locusts was so great upon the land that even the slightest potential of a plant to thrive had been eliminated by the swarm. The locusts in Biblical times and even to the present day have been regarded as an ultimate threat to any land, bringing the failure of crops, destroying the richness of the soil, and the causing of famine in an agrarian society. Locusts are voracious at all three stages of their development—a larval stage in which wingless locusts hop like fleas, a pupal stage in which the wings are encased in a sack and the locusts walk like ordinary insects, and the adult stage in which they fly (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman; 516).

The prophet Joel as covenant prosecutor uses the destruction of the locusts as metaphorical imagery to describe the greater destruction to come: "a great and strong people the likes of which neither the past or future will ever see" (2:2b). Although Joel does not make clear whether the "strong people," or army of the LORD to come is figurative or literal (see above sec. I.C), the important point of his imagery was for the people to anticipate and grasp the great and awesome hand of God's judgment, because the people had broken God's covenant (2:2-11).

Joel gives details of this great and strong army of the LORD's judgment which is to come. He describes the great and strong people as being all-encompassing and comprehensive, voracious in their destruction, just as the locusts: "A fire dovoareth 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" (2:3; cf. Nahum 3:15-17). If the people wept and cried out to God because of the locusts who devoured the land (earthly famine, or earthly need), how much more should they weep, cry out, and fear the coming of God's judgement in this great and strong people who will make Zion like the wilderness (spiritual famine, or spiritual need, cf. Amos 8:11,12). Concerning the land, this should be understood as the inauguration of the eschatological justice of God in his wrath. The prophet Joel, as the Divine Covenant Prosecutor, describes the inauguration of God's wrath upon the land and his people as a prophetic plea for repentance. Not only is there a warning from God in Joel's prophetic utterances, but a demonstration of God's gracious and patience character toward his sinful creatures (Joel 2:12-14; cf. Ex. 34:6,7). Joel's prophetic utterances not only reminded the people of God's covenant, but stimulated their affections, raising them to see God as a merciful judge who uses chastisement toward the goal of bringing his people back into fellowship with him and perfecting them in his sight. The LORD had solemnly declared to the Israelites, prior to their entering Zion, the importance of observing God's commandments and keeping his covenant:

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendents may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey his voice, and that you may cling to him, for he is your life and the

length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them (*italics mine*) (Dt. 30:19,20; 31:17-18,29; cf. Hos. 10:10; Mic. 2:12).

The LORD had told the Israelites of the locusts that were to come as a result of covenant disobedience: "[Because of covenant disobedience] I will heap disasters on them; I will spend my arrows on them. They shall be wasted with hunger, devoured by pestilence and bitter destruction..." (Dt. 32:23,24) (NIV).

### C. THE PLAGUE ON THE LAND OF EGYPT: JOEL'S EXODUS LAND-REVERSAL

All of Scripture is for teaching and instructing, to lead us to a better understanding of God, but in addition, the priority of the prophets was to explain the significance of redemptive-historical events for the people of God. The purpose of Joel's prophecy is historical, but also prophetic; he interprets the past redemptive-historical events to the people of his time, but he also points ahead to the further unfolding of God's progressive revelation. The prophet Joel, when speaking of locusts would have remembered the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. The Exodus was the central, great redemptive-historical event for the people of God, because God had delivered them from four hundred years of bondage and brought them into the land he promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:7); the Exodus was the foretaste, the first-fruits of God's covenantal blessings upon his people. The prophet Joel, by the word of the LORD, interprets the Book of Exodus for the people, to reveal God's clear message of the destruction to come and the need for repentance. Although the importance of the covenant land will be discussed more in detail, at this point of the exegesis it is important to emphasize the Pentateuch, and particularly the Books of Exodus and Deuteronomy as the foundation for Joel's prophetic prosecution to the people. Consider the following Scriptures to understand what God had revealed to his people concerning the land he was to give them, and the covenant he had made with them which they were commanded to observe:

Exodus- 2:24; 3:8,17; 5:1; 6:2-8; 7:17; 8:25; 9:26; 12:25; 15:16,17; 19:12; 23:20,27-33; 32:13,14; 33:1-3; 34:10-27

Deuteronomy- 1:8,23-25,35-38; 2:1-3:29; 4:1,5,22,26,32-40,47-49; 5:32,33; 6:3,10-15, 20-25; 7-9; 10:11; 11:8-32; 12:8-12,28-32; 19:1-3; 26:1-3; 28; 29:1,23-29; 30:1-10,19,20; 31:16-29; 32:8-12,43,52; 34:4

At the end of the book of Genesis, the children of Israel are in the land of Egypt because there was a famine in the land. Many years passed and "God remembered the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he purposed to deliver them from bondage in Egypt by the hand of Moses (Ex. 2:24,25; 6:3-5; cf. Gen. 12:3).

God calls Moses and his brother Aaron and tells them to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the Israelites go in order that they may hold a feast unto God in the wilderness (Ex. 5:1). Pharaoh is fully determined not to let the Israelite slaves go and he increases their workload (Ex. 5:2-11). Moses returns to God and asks him to tell him what he should do. The LORD says to Moses that he will punish Pharaoh and his people and that Moses will go to Pharaoh as a god and Aaron as prophet to demand the immediate release of the Israelites (Ex. 7:2).

The LORD says he will multiply his signs and wonders in the land of Egypt but Pharaoh will not listen. Therefore, God would bring his people out of Egypt by great judgments (Ex. 7:4). Pharaoh was fully determined not to allow the Israelites to be released from slavery because his heart was hardened and he did not listen to the words of God (Ex. 7:13). Therefore, God sent plagues on the land of Egypt in order that Pharaoh would eventually give in and allow God's people to be released. God turned the Nile to blood; He sent frogs to overrun the borders of the land; He sent lice upon the land; He sent swarms of flies into Pharaoh's house and upon the land; He sent death to

Pharaoh's cattle in the land of Egypt, but Pharaoh continued to harden his heart. Then God sent thunder, fire and hail upon the land of Egypt and it frightened Pharaoh and he told Moses that he would allow the people to be released from bondage. As soon as the thunder, hail and fire stopped, Pharaoh hardened his heart again (Ex. 9:33-35). Finally, the LORD told Moses to stretch his hand over the land of Egypt and locusts would come upon the land and devour everything that the other plagues had not destroyed (Ex. 10:12). This destruction, as in the prophecy of Joel (1:4; 2:3-5) was all-comprehensive and all-encompassing. In Exodus, the locusts are described as going all over the land of Egypt, all the way to the borders throughout the morning and the night (Ex. 10:14). The Book of Exodus describes the locusts as covering the face of the earth so that the whole land was darkened; they ate every herb of the land, all the fruit of the trees, and there remained not one green thing in all the land of Egypt (Ex. 10:15).

The destruction of locusts in the great redemptive event of the Exodus would have been preeminent in the mind of the prophet Joel, as well as the people to whom he preached. The memory of God's great salvation event in the Exodus, by means of the plagues in Egypt, was remembered throughout Israel's redemptive-history. In the historical Psalm 105:34-35, the psalmist writes: "He spoke, and the locusts came, grasshoppers without number; they ate up every green thing in their land, ate up the produce of the soil" (Amos 4:8-11; Nahum 3:15-17). The context and message of this psalm is the goodness of God and the remembrance of his covenant forever (Ps. 105:8-11- "the covenant he made with Abraham... 'to you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit.' "). It should be recognized that the land was given to Abraham's seed Israel as an inheritance, and the psalmist interprets the Exodus plagues as the means to the fulfillment of the covenantal promises (Gen. 12:7; 15:18-21; 17:6-9).

The imagery of the locusts and the greater army that God was going to send would have reminded the people to whom Joel preached of the great redemptive-historical event of the Exodus. In contrast to the Exodus and based on Deuteronomic curses (Dt. 28:15-68; Hos. 4:6), the prophecy of Joel warned the people of Israel that this plague of locusts would not be sent on their enemies as with the Egyptians, but upon Israel herself. Joel's prophecy is like a reversal of the Exodus (cf. Is. 1:2ff; 28:21). The people are invaded by a locust plague and the great army of the LORD's judgment; they are driven out of the land through the sea of devastating destruction leading to famine, to be given a portion with the wicked. As the LORD, through his prophet Moses, "reasoned" with Pharaoh to let his people go by using various plagues including locusts; the LORD, through his prophet Joel, reasoned before his people to lead them to repentance and covenantal blessing (cf. Amos 4:9,10). As the LORD used Moses as Pharaoh's prosecuting attorney in the Exodus, so the LORD is his people's covenantal, prosecuting attorney through Joel.

Various other books of the Bible speak of locusts as the epitome of devastating destruction upon the land. This destruction is God's inaugurated judgment upon his people who have broken the covenant, in order that they might repent, return to the LORD, so that the land and the people would be refreshed (Joel 1:4; 2:2-11,25b; cf. Joel 2:12, 18-27; Amos 4:9,12,13; 7:1-3; Obadiah 17; Micah 4:1,2).

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people of Israel that if they keep the covenant of God and obey his commandments, then they will receive great blessings (Dt. 28:1-14). However, if they fail to keep his commandments thereby breaking the covenant the results will be bodily afflictions (Dt. 28:20-22; 27-29); curses on the land to become as a wilderness (Dt. 28:23-24); military defeat and conquest (Dt. 28:25,26); curses on Israel's posterity (Dt. 28:30-35); and locusts will consume their land (Dt. 28:38). The last curse on the people is the one most pertinent to Joel's prophecy, although all of the curses are in the context of inheriting and possessing the land (Dt. 28:38; cf. Joel 1:4; 2:2-11). The prophet Joel, as well as the people to whom he prophesied, would have had intimate knowledge of these curses which were the results of disobedience to God. The curses of locusts in the Bible should be interpreted as the imagery of one of the greatest curses upon the land (Dt. 28:38,42; cf. Amos 4:9,10; Micah 6:13-16; Haggai 1:6), particularly if the ten Exodus plagues are interpreted as gradually increasing in judgment and destruction (from the plague of blood, to frogs, to gnats, to flies, to the plague on the livestock, to the boils, to the hail, to the locusts, to the darkness, ultimately to the firstborn of Pharaoh). The devastating and voracious destruction of the locusts upon the land was not just the concern of the agrarian farmer but all the people of Israel, from the infants and drunkards, to the priests and kings. As an earthly concern, the locusts that destroyed the land, left Israel without bread or provision; as a spiritual concern, Israel would have remembered the warnings of Moses and Joshua concerning the land, and their covenantal relationship to God that was vitally connected to the land.

## D. A FIRE DEVOURS BEFORE THEM; AND BEHIND THEM A FLAME BURNS UPON THE LAND

The unfolding mind of the prophet Joel uses not only the imagery of locusts in his proclamation, but he describes the apocalyptic army of the LORD's wrath that will come on the Day of the LORD. He says that "before them, a fire devours; and behind them a flame burns" (Joel 2:3; cf. Ps. 50:3; Hab. 3:5; Nahum 1:6,10; 3:15; Zeph. 1:18). To consider Joel's description of "fire before them and behind them a flame burns," it is helpful to look at various Old Testament Scriptures, particularly scriptures of Mosaic authorship, to understand the usage of particular concepts that the prophet Joel proclaims to the people. The prophet Joel would have affirmed the unity of God's Scripture and interpreted Mosaic writings (particularly the Law) to the people of Israel, in an effort to "bring the past into the present" (Kugel, Greer, 27ff). In the Song of Moses found in Deuteronomy 32:22, the LORD speaks through Moses his prophet before the whole assembly of Israel. Moses recounts some of the disobedient acts of God's people who have worshipped strange gods; who have forgotten the one who gave them birth (Dt. 32:16-18). In response to this, God says he will hide his face because he has been provoked to anger (Dt. 32:20,21). Moses recites God's just wrath and anger with his people: "For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and burneth unto the lowest pit, and devoureth the earth with her increase, and setteth on fire the foundations of the mountains" (Dt. 32:22). It is clear from this passage and others within the Scriptures, that the prophet Joel was using the imagery of the fire that devours before and behind the army, to speak ultimately of God's anger toward his people because of their disobedience to his commands, and their need of repentance (Dt. 32:19-43; cf. Joshua 23:2-16). Moses concluded this recitation before the people with these words concerning their obedience:

Take to heart all the words I solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you-they are your life (In Joel, Israel's earthly and spiritual life had been threatened by the locust plague). By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess (NIV) (Dt. 32:46,47).

Joel is proclaiming to the people that the fire of God's anger would comprehensively consume God's people in the land as a result of their disobedience if they did not repent of their sins (cf. Joel 2:12-18). In other Scriptures, such as Psalm 21:9, David speaks concerning God's enemies: Thou shalt make them as a fiery furnace in the time of thine anger. The LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them.

This psalm of David uses the imagery of fire to describe the all-consuming wrath of God (cf. Exodus 24:16,17; Jeremiah 15:14; 17:4). In redemptive history,

one generation after the Exodus, Moses tells the Israelites who were about to cross the Jordan River into the land of Canaan,  
Know therefore this day, that the LORD thy God is he which goeth over before thee as a devouring fire; he shall destroy them [Anakim], and he shall bring them down before thee (Dt. 9:4).

This passage in Deuteronomy is revealing God, the stereotypical Divine Warrior (Longman) , who goes before his people as a devouring fire against Israel's enemies, in order that his people may possess the land he promised to Abraham. By contrast, Joel's prophecy is referring to the all-consuming fire of God's wrath on his people for disobedience. This is another reversal which the prophet Joel proclaims to the people. God went before his people as a fire to consume their enemies so that they could possess the land; in Joel's prophecy the people of God will be consumed and driven out of the land with the fire of God's judgment if they do not repent.

Just as Joel had described the locusts at the beginning of his prophecy (1:4), so he compares the all-consuming and comprehensive wrath of God as a fire that devours the people and the land (2:2-11). Just as the locusts devour the land comprehensively from the least locust, to the greatest, to the combination of them in a swarm, so God's wrath is like a devouring fire before and following the people. This devouring wrath makes a beautiful and fruitful land, one that is like the Garden of Eden, into a desolate wilderness and nothing shall escape their comprehensive destruction (2:3b). Joel has described this strong "people" as like no other people before them, neither any who will live after them throughout history (2:2).

In summary, the army of the LORD that brings destruction like the locusts, are described by Joel as a "large and mighty army" (NIV) (2:2,5); comprehensive in destruction (2:3); like the "appearance of horses," (NIV); an army with order and strength like a calvary (2:4); the noise of the army is great "like that of chariots" (NIV) which can wage war in the valley and upon the mountains (2:5); the appearance of such strength makes nations anguish and faces turn pale (2:6); the army are warriors and the scale walls with the skill and precision of soldiers (2:7a); they march in a very ordered and deliberate charge and break through every defense (2:7b,8); they attack civilians like thieves entering houses (2:9); their great strength and power causes the earth to shake and the sky to tremble; all of creation is affected by their great fire and power sent from the LORD (2:10); "the LORD thunders at the head of his army" (NIV) (2:11a); the LORD's forces in this army are "beyond number" (NIV) and mighty (2:11b). So great and terrible is the LORD's army; so intentional and destructive is the LORD's wrath against the earth; who can stand?

**E. THE LAND IS LIKE THE GARDEN OF EDEN BEFORE THEM: JOEL'S CREATION AND EXODUS REVERSALS- FROM GARDEN TO WILDERNESS**

Joel's interpretation of the locusts in Israel's history, and the even greater apocalyptic army whom God was sending, is a result of the Israelites' covenant disobedience. The consequences of this disobedience is intimately tied to the land promises and warnings in Deuteronomy 28 (cf. Ex. 19:5,6: "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among the peoples: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation"). The land that was like the Garden of Eden would become a desolate wilderness after the army's march through the land. What was once a beautiful, lush, green land (Gen. 1:31; 2:6; cf. Ex. 10:15- "every green thing in Egypt was destroyed in the plagues") like the Garden of Eden, would become a wilderness, a place of briars and thorns (Gen. 3:18; cf. Hos. 10:8- "thorns and thistles"); fiery serpents, scorpions; a desert, a parched land of drought where there would be no water (Dt. 8:15, KJV); a waste, howling wilderness (Dt. 32:10); the haunt of jackals and owls; and a place of wild beasts (Mt. 4:1-11; cf. with other scriptural descriptions of the wilderness, Ex. 15:22-17:7; Job 1:19; Is. 14:16,17; Mt. 3:1-4).

The prophet Joel, as well as the people to whom he preached, would have remembered the great forty years of wandering by the Israelites in the wilderness prior to receiving the land promised to Abraham. The wilderness was the antithesis of the great land promise made by God to Abraham and his descendants. To the people of Israel, the experience of the wilderness wanderings was one of the central redemptive-historical examples of suffering because of disobedience and unfaithfulness to their God (Job 12:24; Ps. 106:24-26; Ezek. 2:3-8; 20:6-29; John 6:31,32,49; Acts 7:36-45; Heb. 3:8-19). Joel purposely used the imagery of the Garden of Eden to communicate to the people that the pre-Fall paradise of Eden which Moses had written about, the land which they had inherited and enjoyed as covenant people (Abraham's descendants), would become the most dreaded place they could imagine (the "anti-Eden"/cursed land): the place of the wandering of their forefathers; the place that was intended to serve as an example of unfaithfulness, disobedience, and the "tempting" of God (the prophet Hosea uses the wilderness imagery to describe the unfaithfulness and spiritual adultery of Israel, Hosea 13:15; cf. Ezek. 20:13,21). Joel's reference to the Garden of Eden becoming like the wilderness would have reminded the Israelites of the fall of Adam and his being cast out of the Garden, shut out from the presence of God and the land which he was to subdue and have dominion over (Gen. 2:28; 3:23,24).

In the beginning of history, God had created Eden out of the "formless void" ("waste and void"; cf. Gen. 1:2 with the verbal allusion in Jer. 4:23), and placed Adam in the garden to subdue and till the land (Gen. 1:1,31; 2:7,8). But Adam sinned against the LORD's commandments and he subjected himself and all creation to the fall (Gen. 3:11,15-17). Because of the fall, there was a gradual increase of wickedness in the land that preceded God's clear proclamation and establishment of covenant from Noah and creation, to Abraham and his people, which turned the earth into an increasing wilderness of sin (Gen. 6:5-8; cf. Prov.

29:16). When the Israelites heard of the great and devastating destruction to come, they would have immediately thought of these Scriptures and some would have realized that they had not learned from the lessons which God had given to them (Is. 51:2; cf. Roman 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:1-13). The land was evidence to the Israelites of God's blessings (Dt. 1:8; 28:1-68) and the prophet Joel is telling them that the curses are coming, the great and terrible, strong apocalyptic army whom the LORD was sending to devastate (Joel 2:3).

The destructive judgment which Joel described to the people will be the opposite of what they would expect. Rather than God going before and behind the Israelites in protection of his people as a father to a son, as in Egypt as well as the wilderness (Ex. 14:19,20; cf. Dt. 1:30,31), God would be a consuming fire destroying the beautiful land and making it as the dreaded wilderness. Rather than be a father to Israel (Dt. 1:31), God was to be their judge. God was not to be the Divine Warrior who destroys Israel's enemies, but the Divine Warrior of wrath who brings judgment upon the land and the people unless they repent. The Divine Warrior was taking his people from Zion (Garden of Eden), back to Sinai (Wilderness) for judgment.

The prophet Ezekiel proclaimed this to God's people in another time of redemptive-history: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I will rule over you with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered-with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you into the desert of nations and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you. As I judged your fathers in the desert of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign LORD...Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD (NIV) (Ezek. 20:33-38).

However, for those who are repentant, the true Israel who are of a contrite heart, the LORD will allow them to remain in Zion, the land of promise. There the faithful will dwell in the land of Zion, the land sworn to their fathers (Ezek. 20:39-42). Ezekiel concludes with God's promise of the land to his faithful people just as the prophet Joel proclaims the blessed expectations as the fruits of a repentant people:

There you will remember your conduct and all the actions by which you have defiled yourselves, and you will loathe yourselves for all the evil you have done. You will know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name's sake and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices (NIV) (Ezek. 20:43,44; cf. Joel 2:12-18; Amos 5:14,15).

The contrast between the Garden of Eden prior to the judgment of God and the wilderness as the result of his judgment becomes clearer by looking through the window of other Scriptures on the redemptive-historical landscape.

The Book of Genesis introduces us to the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8,15) and throughout Israel's history the Garden serves as the ultimate place of fellowship with God, thanksgiving, and joy in the land. In Isaiah 51:3, the prophet Isaiah says,

The LORD hath comforted Zion: he hath comforted all her waste places, and hath made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the Garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

The Garden of Eden is also used as a description of beauty and prosperity as in the prophecy of Ezekiel when he describes the King of Tyre and his judgment (Ezek. 28:13-19; cf. Ezek. 31:3-9 concerning Pharaoh, King of Egypt and his judgment, 31:16-18).

The prophet Ezekiel speaks concerning the land of Israel to the people and to the creation in Exile (Ezek. 36:1-6). Concerning the land (creation), the mountains will shoot forth their branches and provide fruit for Israel (36:8); the land will be tilled and sown, the cities shall be inhabited and the waste places shall be built up (36:9,10). God promises to multiply man and beast and cause them to be fruitful and multiply (36:11; cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1; 15:5; 17:1-9). God promises his people that although they had been brought into a wilderness in the Exile, for the sake of his holy name (36:22), he will gather them back again and sprinkle clean water on them, making them clean (36:24,26). In addition, God will give to them a new heart and a new spirit, taking away their hearts of stone (hardened hearts) and giving them hearts of flesh (obedient hearts). God will ultimately restore his people as the fulfiller of the covenant by placing his spirit within them, causing them to walk in his statutes and commands (36:26,27). Because of this, God will return them to the land he had given to their fathers. God says, "Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God" (36:28,29).

The prophet Ezekiel describes the great blessing of God that he has promised to fulfill on behalf of his people with eschatological hyperbole: God will multiply the fruit of the trees and the fields and there shall not be any famine (36:30); the desolate land will be tilled and be fruitful (all of creation will be restored!). The prophet Ezekiel speaks of the great promise using the same contrast between the Garden of Eden and the wilderness as found in the prophet Joel: "This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are fenced and inhabited" (36:35). The difference between the two prophecies however is that in Ezekiel, the promise is to restore the wilderness to the Garden of Eden; in the prophecy of Joel the coming wrath will make the Garden of Eden like the wilderness (cf. Zech. 7:13,14). The Book of Joel reverses several redemptive-historical stories such as the Exodus and the Wilderness Wanderings to poignantly proclaim the unfaithfulness of God's people, and to sound a clarion trumpet call of repentance

and returning to the LORD their God (cf. Joel 3:1- "For take note in those days, at the time when I reverse the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem").

Joel's prophecy, particularly in 2:3 is clearly contrasting the beautiful bounty and provision of the LORD to his people as a result of covenant obedience, to the destructive judgment of his fiery wrath as a result of covenant disobedience. In the history of redemption God has shown by example how no man can endure his wrath and that it indeed turns the Garden of Eden into a wilderness. If the people thought the locusts were destructive (a type of the wrath); how much more should they fear for the wrath and just judgment in the apocalyptic invasion of God on the Day of the LORD (anti-type/fulfillment) (cf. Amos 4:12,13). There is a "garden to wilderness" motif in the judgment of God upon the earth after the fall of Adam (Gen. 1:31; 2:8-15; cf. 3:15-17); after the flood (Gen. 9:1-16; cf. 9:20-27; 11:1-8); prior to the judgment of God upon Sodom and Gomorrah: "Lot lifted up his eyes, and behold all the Plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt...then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; and he overthrew the cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (Gen. 13:10; 19:24,25; cf. Amos 4:11). Thus, the prophecy of Joel, using the contrast between Garden of Eden (garden of the LORD) and the wilderness would have immediately impacted the people of the wrath and destruction that God was to bring upon the land and the people because of their covenant disobedience. The wilderness would have not only made the Israelites think of the wilderness in terms of the great wilderness wanderings, but it would have also spoken very clearly to them that this strong and mighty "army" or people to come from the hand of God.

To summarize, the prophecy of Joel in 2:3 would have taught the people from the devastating example of the locusts upon their land; God's wrath and destruction as a consuming fire before them and behind the wrath nothing but wilderness; using the imagery of the Garden of Eden before the "army" and the wilderness behind the "army" would taught the Israelites the consequences of sinful covenant breaking and the expectation upon their sins as God's just judgment. God had brought the people out of bondage, out of the land of Egypt. They had wandered in the wilderness for forty years and God was now going to send them back into ultimate wandering with curses which resulted from covenant disobedience (Dt. 28:15-68). The prophet Joel had spoken oracles of judgment against Israel in the "spirit of Elijah" as the great prosecutor of the Covenant (1 Kings 18:21; cf. Mal. 4:1-5; Mt. 11:14; 17:10-13), now he turns from his prosecution as God's prophet to plea with the Israelites to admit their guilt. The message was clear: Repent! Turn from your wickedness so that the LORD might have mercy on you and relent from his judgment (Joel 2:11b-14; cf. Jer. 4:1; Ezek. 33:11; Hos. 12:6).

II. THE APPEARANCE OF THEM [THE GREAT AND STRONG PEOPLE] IS AS THE APPEARANCE OF HORSES; AND AS HORSEMEN, SO DO THEY RUN. LIKE THE NOISE OF CHARIOTS ON THE TOPS OF MOUNTAINS DO THEY LEAP, LIKE THE NOISE OF A FLAME OF FIRE THAT DEVOURETH THE STUBBLE, AS A STRONG PEOPLE SET IN BATTLE ARRAY- JOEL 2:4,5

#### A. THE THEOPHANIC INVASION OF THE LORD UPON THE LAND

In the Scriptures, the use of horses and chariots describe the strength of an army or of a people. Joel's apocalyptic army that is used by the hand of the LORD, to be sent upon the land of Zion, is a "strong people set in battle array," who have horses and chariots that tell of their great strength. The prophet Joel prophesies of the coming judgment by using these specific descriptions of the army that will come (Judges 1:19; Ps. 20:7; 68:17, cf. 2 Kings 2:11; 6:17; 104:3; 147:10; Habakkuk 1:8; 3:15; Haggai 2:22; Zech. 1:8). Joel's theophanic invasion of the LORD's army was understood by the people in two strands: the coming of the LORD from his residence, terrestrial or as here celestial, and the reaction of nature, which cringes and crumples at his coming. Traditionally it had a ring of assurance about it: the great God has come or can be expected to come to aid his people against their foes (cf. Joel 2:10,11; Micah 1:3,4) (Allen, 270). "Like the appearance of horses" was an allusion to the supernatural in the minds of the people (cf. Judges 13:6; Ezek. 1:13- celestial horses; 2 Kings 2:11; Zech. 1:8) (Allen, 64ff).

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses gives the Israelites encouragement and strength by assuring the people of God's faithfulness and presence with them as they possess the land promised to Abraham and his descendants:

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt...Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you (Dt. 20:1-4).

In contrast, Joel is proclaiming to the people that they should be frightened when they see and hear the horses and chariots and the people more numerous than them. Because of their covenant unfaithfulness, God is not going with them, but against them, to judge His people (Dt. 32:36).

In 2 Kings 2, at the prophetic peak of redemptive-history between the Golden Age of King David and the Exile, Elijah the prophet was delivered at the closing of his prophetic ministry. God delivers his great prophet and faithful servant with a chariot of fire: "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2:11).

When Elijah was taken to heaven to typologically and prophetically intercede for Israel, his mantle was given to his servant Elisha. When Elisha faced the army of the King of Syria he prayed to the LORD for deliverance and help against the great army. The LORD as Divine Warrior comforted and reassured the man of God by opening his eyes to see that the mountains were full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha (2 Kings 6:18). The LORD showed the strength of his might through this vision, but in Joel's prophecy, he is describing these chariots not as vehicles of deliverance but as the strong arm of God's wrath in the Day of the LORD (cf. Ezek. 1; Nahum 2:3,4 ; 3:1-3; Haggai 2:22).

The sound of the chariots have great apocalyptic voices: "like the noise of chariots on the tops of the mountains they skip" (or leap), and "like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array" (2:5). The vast number of the great army is here described in prophetic imagery. In Isaiah 13:4, the prophet proclaims: "The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people! The noise of a tumult of the kingdoms of the nations gathered together! The LORD of hosts mustereth the host for the battle." The prophet Joel is describing a great multitude of hosts for battle. This great sound of strength in this multitude was the sound of not only great strength but a noise the likes of which the children of Israel heard during the Exodus from Egypt when Pharaoh and his army were advancing toward them while they were cut off and cornered, defenseless at the Red Sea.

In the unfolding mind of the prophet Joel and the people of Zion, the imagery of the horses and chariots had a profound redemptive-historical significance in the Exodus. In the Book of Exodus chapter 14, upon the release of the Israelites from 400 years of bondage, Pharaoh takes his mighty men and chariots and horses to chase after Moses and children of Israel (Ex. 14:6). Pharaoh has allowed the children of Israel to go ultimately because God the Divine Warrior has displayed superior strength over Pharaoh's gods and magicians (cf. 1 Kings 18:17-39). Now, Pharaoh attempted one more rebellion against the LORD and against his people. In an attempt to show his superior strength over the LORD God by subjugating the children of Israel back to bondage, Pharaoh took six hundred of his "chosen chariots," and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over all of them (Ex. 14:7). This was a mighty army pursuing the helpless, defenseless Israelites.

In Exodus 14:9, Moses writes: "And the Egyptians pursued after them [the children of Israel], all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon. And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD" (Ex. 14:9,10). The Israelites had been a people in bondage in Egypt for over four hundred years, not only did they not know how to wage war, they did not have the army nor the chariots and

horses as did the Egyptians. Now the Israelites were cornered; backed into a defenseless position where they could not fight, nor could they retreat. With Pharaoh's army marching toward them on one side and the rushing waters of the Red Sea on the other side, the Israelites faced what appeared to be ultimate destruction. Now their dead bodies would be scattered and strewn on the land of Pi-hahiroth and before Baal-zephon-a land not their own; surely this was to be the end: to die in the wilderness.

The children of Israel cried to Moses and sarcastically, unfaithfully, and fearfully asked him: "Was this your plan? To bring us out into the wilderness to die at the hand of the Egyptians? We could have stayed in Egypt for that; we could have at least continued to eat well" (paraphrase of Exodus 14:11,12). And Moses responded with the great and godly words of comfort: "Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see them no more forever" (Ex. 14:13). Moses followed these great and faithful words with a promise: "The LORD shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Ex. 14:14).

This was to be a great act of God's goodness and delivering mercy to his people. The LORD as Divine Warrior had not only delivered his people from slavery and bondage in Egypt, but he would fight for them against their greatest enemies. The God of Israel was to be an example to the whole world of the great deeds which he wrought in the Exodus, when he brought his people out of Egypt and into the land. Not only was this incident keeping the Israelites from going into the land God had promised, but it seemed that their very lives were at stake. Was the promise of God to Abraham to be destroyed by the chariots and horses of Pharaoh? Was the seed of Abraham, the covenant people of God, not going to inherit the promised land? Even more so, was the seed of the promise going to be destroyed forever by Pharaoh's great might? God remembered the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and had sent Moses to deliver the people out of bondage (Ex. 2:24), had he now forgotten the covenant he had made?

No! The LORD told Moses to lift up his rod and stretch his hand over the sea, and divide it, and the children of Israel shall go into the midst of the sea on dry ground (Ex. 14:16). However, God would harden Pharaoh's heart and the Egyptian army would follow the Israelites into the sea upon his chariots and horses (Ex. 14:17). Then in Exodus 14:18 the LORD says, "Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me glory because of Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen" (NIV).

Then the LORD went before Israel through the Red Sea and the cloud moved from in front of them, to behind them for protection (Ex. 14:19). Moses was obedient to God's instructions concerning the crossing of the children of Israel through the sea, and the LORD caused the sea to divide (Ex. 14:21). Then the Israelites went through the sea upon dry ground and the waters formed a wall on their right hand, and upon their left hand (Ex. 14:22). Then the Egyptians, the

wicked who sought the life of God's people, pursued them; all of Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen. The LORD even caused the Egyptian army's chariot wheels to come off to display his great strength and glory. Then Moses did as the LORD had instructed and he lifted his hands and the waters came down upon the Egyptians, upon the chariots, and upon their horsemen (Ex. 14:23-28). Not one of the Egyptians remained.

Such a great event and epic such as the Exodus must end with a great work of God, and there is no greater or more central covenantal event than what is repeated from Ex. 14:22, and what is said in Exodus 14:29-31: "But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved (delivered) Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw the great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD: and they believed in the LORD, and in his servant Moses" (NIV).

This is not the case in the prophecy of Joel. In Joel 2:4 and 5 Joel describes the apocalyptic army to come upon the land with imagery from the Exodus. The Israelites who heard the prophecy would immediately think about the great Egyptian army which their forefathers had described to them when recounting the event yearly at the Passover Supper. The Exodus story was a story of God's deliverance of his people from bondage and into the land which he promised to Abraham. It was a story to be told to every generation and at least yearly at the Passover supper. The appearance of this army was great and terrible, it had horses and chariots: mighty strength.

God delivered the children of Israel from the Pharaoh's chariots and horses and great army, but in the Book of Joel he would send an army upon his people with chariots and horses to humble and chastise his people. This army was not to be a display of God's grace and merciful deliverance, but an army which would display God's terrible wrath and anger with his people (cf. Dt. 32). This apocalyptic army with chariots and horses speaks not only of strength but great numbers as with the imagery of locusts. The apocalyptic army would march through the land in great numbers and destroy the Garden of Eden-like land and make it into a desolate wilderness; a haunt of jackals and owls. "Woe be unto Israel," warned Joel. For God's wrath is coming and it is sure. He says to the people: "Remember the Exodus; how great the devastation of Pharaoh's army, his chariots and horses? Well, the LORD is sending an even greater devastation upon the land. Whereas in the Exodus, God was bringing the children of Israel out of bondage into the promised land (Garden of God), he was now sending the Israel back into bondage through the sea of a great army into a desolate wilderness ruled by people like the Egyptians.

Having considered the passages from Joel (Joel 2:3-5) from the perspective of the book's historical context and the overall redemptive-historical

context which Joel would have interpreted to the people of Israel, it is necessary to consider the passages in Joel using a Christological interpretation. The simple historical meaning and significance of Joel's passage is found in the immediate context in which Joel prophesied, but those living in the last days of redemptive-history can interpret the great events which Joel describes in light of the whole of God's revelation, particularly as God has revealed himself with ultimate clarity of revelation in Christ (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 2:16-36; Rom. 15:4; Heb. 1:1,2; cf. 1 Peter 1:10,11).

### III. THE BOOK OF JOEL IN CHRIST

Just as the historical occasion of the locusts gave the prophet Joel apocalyptic imagery to describe what is to come, so the historical occasion of the wrath of God upon Christ gives the New Testament writers apocalyptic imagery of what is to come. Just as Joel's apocalyptic imagery was two-fold; so is the apocalyptic imagery Jesus describes of what is to come: the wrath of God upon the wicked and the great salvation to the repentant people of the LORD who will be restored to the land eternally. Just as the army of the LORD's judgment was to come upon the land and the people in the Book of Joel, so the army of God and his Christ will restore the land and the people when the Kingdom of God dwells with men. Just as in the Book of Joel, the locusts were a type of the wrath to come—a shadow, the proleptic mighty army of the LORD which was the inauguration of God's wrath when he separates his people from the wicked; so in the New Testament, Jesus inaugurates the proleptic Kingdom of God which will eternally separate his people from the wicked. The Kingdom of God is not a new concept found in the last days of redemptive history, but one which was described in types and shadows to the Old Testament church which had not yet come of age. The Kingdom of God was to come into the land of Israel and permanently bring peace and prosperity to the people of Zion. The Kingdom of God was a promise which the children of Israel anticipated for the future. A time when God would invade history, overthrow the nations who had subjected Israel to bondage, and set up his Kingdom in the land. However, it would not be as they expected.

#### A. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR IN THE LAND

The Kingdom of God was the central message and eschatological focus of Jesus' ministry. It was the inauguration or the beginning of the consummate fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Abraham and to his seed. Both John the Baptist and Jesus began their preaching with the announcement of the imminence of the kingdom (Mt. 3:2; 4:17); Mark 1:14-15). According to Daniel Chapter 4:44, when he interprets King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the kingdom that was coming: "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-17). The children of Israel placed great importance and significance upon the land God

had given to them. It was in this land the Kingdom of God would finally crush all of God's enemies and he would rule the Israelites with a mighty hand.

At the beginning of redemptive history Adam is formed from the ground and given dominion over the land, specifically the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28-31; 2:15-17). Because of his disobedience to the LORD's commands, Adam subjects all men and the creation (land) to the fall (Gen.3:17-19). God drives Adam and his wife from the garden because of the sin that has corrupted the creation (Gen. 3:23). However, God purposed to save a people before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and he soon called out a man named Abraham whom he found in a desert land (cf. Dt. 32:9,10). God promised to be his God and to give to him a fruitful, green, land, flowing with milk and honey (Gen. 15:7; Heb. 11:8-10). Abraham's people, the Israelites were to obey the commandments that God was to give to them so that they may dwell peacefully and with prosperity in the land (Dt. 28:1-3). The Israelites were commanded to drive out the inhabitants of the land and begin to rule and have dominion over the land as God's chosen people, as Adam was told to do (cf. Book of Joshua; Judges). However, the Israelites failed in keeping God's covenant.

Israel failed to keep God's commandments and ultimately is subjected for a season by other nations as a result of their disobedience. The suffering of the Israelites is directly related to the blessings and curses upon the land and themselves found in Deuteronomy 28:1-68 (cf. Dt. 32). God in his mercy saved a remnant from out of this people. Out of this remnant would come one who would fulfill all righteousness and return the people to the land eternally. In the Book of Deuteronomy, after God had predicted Israel's covenant disobedience and the just punishment they would receive, he proclaimed hope through Moses: "Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people" (NIV) (Dt. 32:43).

When Christ came born of a woman, born under law (Gal. 4:4), he came as the true Israel who would obey the commandments of God by keeping the covenant (Mt. 2:14-21). Although Christ kept the commandments of God perfectly and fulfilled all righteousness, he was cursed on a tree (Gal. 3:13,14) as a substitute for his people. As a reward, God has made the earth his footstool and he rules over the land at the right hand of God (Ps. 2:6-8, 12; Ps. 110; cf. Eph. 1:20,21; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:13). Christ's work was not complete upon his work in his humiliation of suffering and death however. At the right hand of God, ruling and subduing the people, Christ delivers his people out of bondage, rescues them from their enemies, and brings them into his kingdom (Eph. 2:12-22; Col. 1:12-15; Heb. 2:14,15). The great work of Christ will continue until he restores the whole creation (land) and brings his people into his presence where he will dwell with them in the land for eternity. The people of God (and the creation) wait in anticipation of this great event when the curse will be removed and God's people will eternally dwell with God in the land he has promised them

(Rom. 8:25; Rev. 21:1-5,7; 22:35). This is God's great epic, saga, story, or work which he has accomplished in his great mercy and grace. The promises he made to Abraham have been fulfilled in Christ, the true Israel who inhabits the land. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt. 5:5).

The Kingdom of God was promised to rule over the land. As God ruled over the land of the Israelites, so he was to once more reign with his people eternally. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Matthew records the beginning of Christ's subduing the land, the enemies of God, and the inauguration of Christ's reign over the land.

In Matthew Chap. 1, there is the account of Jesus' birth and the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that the Son of Mary will be "Immanuel, God with us." In Chap. 3, John the Baptist is preparing the way as the voice in the wilderness preaching "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." Jesus is tempted in Chap. 4 by Satan, he overcomes as the second Adam, the true Israel who is obedient to God and fulfills the Law and the prophets (cf. Heb. 2:14-18; Rom. 5:12-21); this is the beginning of the overthrow of Satan's kingdom and dominion...but not completely...yet. In Chapters 5-7, Jesus explains the Kingdom of God through the beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven...Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In Chap. 6, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come." There is the separation between the righteous and unrighteous, those who enter and those who are kept out of the Kingdom of heaven in Chap. 7. Chapters 8-10 explain the miracles and continual overthrow of Jesus' authority: God has invaded time and space, real history, to show before the world that he has overcome the dominion of Satan and his works (cf. Matthew 12:25-29: the essential theology of the Kingdom of God in the NT). Through Christ's authority (cf. Matthew 28: 18-20) he sends out his twelve in Chap. 10, the new Israel, the refashioned Israel according to the New Covenant. These are Christ's new called out people, that are found "in Christ" and show by their actions Christ's authority and the grace in which they now stand. The Gospel of St. Matthew (as well as the other gospels) constantly pointed the people of Israel to a better understanding of Jesus and the Kingdom.

This summary of St. Matthew's Gospel teaches us that God's plan to dwell with his people in the land began with Christ the True Israel, who has come and fulfilled all righteousness; all the stipulations and demands of the covenant. Christ is the only faithful Israelite and he fulfills the covenant on behalf of his people. However, to those who do not know God, the wicked, the gospel teaches what is to be expected on the day when Christ defeats all his enemies. St. Matthew's gospel gives promise to God's people and points to wrathful expectation for the enemies of God.

The Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ was the beginning or inauguration of the end of God's judgment, as the historical locust plague in the Book of Joel was a type the inauguration of the end of God's judgment. As the prophet Joel had spoken, the people of the earth should take heed. For there will be another and greater Day of the LORD that is to come upon the earth. If the judgment of God was shown in the Book of Joel as locusts coming upon the fields; if the judgment was shown throughout Israel's history upon their disobedience in a variety of horrendous forms; if the wrath to come upon the people in Joel was a great apocalyptic army which would devastate the people and the land; how much more should we fear the great coming of God himself with his army to judge the earth! (Mt. 25:31-46; Romans 2:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 12:18-21, 25-29; Rev.1:7; 19:11-16).

In the prophecy of Joel, a great and destructive army will be used by the hand of the LORD to bring destruction to the land and its inhabitants. But the eschatological army of the LORD will bring ultimate and consummate destruction. Christ's judgment with the "army of the LORD" is described in detail in the Gospel of St. Matthew. In Matthew 25:31-46, St. Matthew records Jesus' description of the great and final judgment:

But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats...the King will say unto them on the right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'...Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels'...And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life" (Mt. 25:31-34,41,46; cf, 2 Thess. 1:9-12; Rev. 1:7).

## B. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DAY OF THE LORD IN THE LAND

To interpret Joel's prophecy in light of the whole of redemptive-history, it must be remembered that the New Testament was written by "Old Testament men" inspired by the Spirit of God whom Joel prophesied would be poured out on God's people (Joel 2:28ff; Acts 2:37ff). Therefore, being intimate with the Old Testament apocalyptic language, the New Testament writers, living in the last days were excellent interpreters of such Old Testament themes as the "Day of the LORD."

The Day of the LORD's wrath is described in New Testament passages such as 1 Thessalonians 1:10 as "the wrath to come"; Romans 2:5 as "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"; 1 Thessalonians 4:15 as "the coming of the Lord; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:7 as "the day of judgment"; 2 Peter 3:10 as "the day of the LORD"; 2 Peter 3:12 as "the coming day of God".

Ultimately, the fire that devours before the LORD's wrath shall consume the earth, destroying ungodly men, and melting the elements with fervent heat (2 Peter 3:7,12). The flaming fire of God's wrath will render vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus; they shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might (2 Thess. 1:8,9). On this great and terrible day of the LORD's wrath, the land will be cleansed of the wicked, and the righteous will inherit the land eternally because of Jesus Christ, when his Kingdom shall be set up eternally (Mt. 5:3-12; cf. Hosea 2:19-23; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:14,15; Obadiah 17-21; Micah 7:18-20; Habakkuk 3:18; Zeph. 3:17-20; Zech. 14:20,21). Outside of the land, the kingdom of God and his Christ, shall be the wicked and unbelieving (Mt. 22:11-14; 1 Cor. 9,10; Eph. 5:3-5; Rev. 19:21; 21:8; 22:15).

Another portion of St. Matthew's Gospel to be considered in light of Joel's prophecy of God's consuming wrath is found in chapter 24:3-51. Scholars refer to these passages as the Olivet Discourse, and parallel accounts can be found in St. Mark 13:1-37 and St. Luke 21:5-36. These passages use very similar language as the Book of Joel in describing what is to come, preceding the day of God's great judgment. The disciples of Jesus asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Mt. 24:3).

Jesus describes the signs and the "beginning of the end" as a time when false-Christ's will try to deceive (24:5); wars and rumors of wars (24:6); there will be famines and earthquakes (24:7- just as the locust plague prior to God's judgment in Joel 2:3-5); great tribulations, false prophets, increase of wickedness and the decrease of love toward God (24:9-12); the abomination of desolation described in the Book of Daniel (24:15); false-Christ's and prophets shall show great signs and wonders to lead astray unbelievers and confuse the believers (24:24; cf. Eph. 5:6; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:3-7; 1 John 4:1-3); the false-Christ's and prophets will tell men that Christ has come in the wilderness (24:26- not the place where Christ's presence is, rather, his presence is in the Garden of God). Christ was in the wilderness, but only for a season when he was led there to be tempted of the Devil to destroy wickedness and overcome on behalf of his people, (cf. Mt. 4:1-4; Heb. 2:14-18). These descriptions of the days prior to God's judgment only tell us that things were happening normally-- "business as usual"-- in a fallen world, albeit increasing in sinfulness (Gen. 4:8; cf. 6:5; cf. Gen. 11:1-9; Rom. 3:9-18; 2 Tim. 3:1-7), as the generations of men increase upon the land, so the increase of sin because of man. As in the days of Noah, so shall the coming of the Son of man be (Mt. 24:37,38; 2 Tim. 3:1-7,13): things are going on normally so his people should not sleep but be sober and alert (Mt. 25:1-30; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Thess. 5:2-42; 2 Tim. 4:5; Titus 2:5,6,12; 1 Peter 4:7; 5:8; Rev. 3:2,3; cf. Joel 2:1: "Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy hill).

Joel's prophecy begins with warnings and commands of sobriety, but how much more should the people of God be sober in light of what is to come when Jesus Christ and his mighty army come to earth!

The ultimate and consummate Day of the LORD is described in the Book of the Revelation of St. John, the final disclosure in God's redemptive-history. In God's last judgment upon the land and its sinful inhabitants, locusts come from the abyss, or "out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth" (Rev. 9:7), after the fifth trumpet of divine judgment (Rev. 9:1-12). Similar images from the Book of Joel should be immediately recognized. In Revelation, the locusts are described as having the shape of horses (Joel 2:4); the smoke from which the locust came darkened the sun (Joel 2:2,10); the sound of the locusts' wings were like chariots (Joel 2:5-7). The locusts did not consume the land-but men without Christ (Rev. 9:4) and the leader of the locusts is named Abaddon and Apollyon, nothing shall escape their fury. The metaphorical destruction of the locusts, to the great and mighty army in the Book of Joel, are types of the ultimate destruction on the Day of the LORD; the wrath that is to come upon the earth.

### C. THE WICKED IN THE LAND ON THE DAY OF THE LORD

Hear this! Awake! Wail! Mourn! for the Day of the LORD is at hand! Regarding the unbelievers or wicked, those who do not know God, they will be permanently removed from the land of God's people (Mt. 25:31-46). The wicked, unrepentant unbelievers must come to a mountain that cannot be touched, that burns with fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest (Ex. 19:16-19; Dt. 4:11,12; 4:24; 5:4,23-25). The wicked will not strut with chins held high (Ps. 12:8) as they approach the Mountain of Sinai: the mountain of thunder and lightning, thick clouds of smoke, trumpet blasts, and fire, to hear the terrible voice of the holy God say, "Depart from me you iniquity; I never knew you," because they will have no mediator to save them. So fearful will be the appearance of this mountain that they will quake with fear and trembling and they will not be able to endure his just judgement; the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor in the congregation of the righteous (Ex. 19; Ps. 1:5). The wicked will no longer plot against the LORD and against his anointed one (Ps. 2:1); they will no longer prosper but will be brought low, cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb, both the fool and the workers of iniquity in the fiery furnace of God's wrath (Ps. 37:1,2; 73:3). This is because salvation is far from the wicked (Ps. 119:155) who are like ships on the tossing sea; the breath of God's lips will slay them (Is. 11:4; 57:20). The wicked will die for their sins (Ezek. 3:18) although they have been warned by the clear revelation of God's wrath, they will continue to be wicked (Dan. 12:10; Rom. 1:18; 1 Cor. 6:9; cf. Rev. 22:11). The wicked will be judged by the Law of Moses that will condemn them eternally to the place of the wicked in the wilderness of hell (Luke 24:44-49; cf. John 5:38-47), not to be separated from the presence of God, but to experience the devastating, all-encompassing, comprehensive and deliberate presence of God in his wrath; weep you wicked, mourn for the judgment of God is coming upon the earth!

### D. THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE LAND ON THE DAY OF THE LORD

The judgment of God is just and it is according to the truth against the wicked and those who despise the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering (Rom. 2:2-4; cf. Acts 2:38-42; 2Peter 3:9). God's graciousness and goodness leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4b). It is not surprising then that in the latter part of Joel's sermon, after God warns of the wrath and judgement, he promises a refreshing to the land to lead the people to repentance. One of the most important themes of the Book of Joel concerning God's character and his relationship to his people is found in Joel 2:12,14. God says,

Yet even now, saith the LORD, turn ye unto me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meal offering unto the LORD your God (cf. Jer. 4:1; Ezek. 33:11; Hos. 12:6).

The wrath to come upon the earth and the wicked will be greater than any the world has every seen. However, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the wicked (Rom. 5:8). In God's great mercy and grace he has saved us and delivered us from the wrath to come through Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 1:10; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16-18: "the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God...and there we will be with the Lord forever"). Because of the fall, Christ came as the true Israel (Mt. 2:15) to fulfill all righteousness, the demands of the law and to keep the covenant with God perfectly. Israel was given the land as a promise if they would keep the covenant they had made with the LORD their God, however they forsook the LORD and broke his covenant. God hid his face from them and devoured them just as he had promised, just as he did in the Book of Joel. The people of Israel rightly asked, "Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:16-18). God did indeed hide his face because of the evil that Israel had done. However, God kept his promises to his people; God was faithful to the covenant in Christ. God punished Israel and used her history to teach not only his great mercy and sovereignty but the need for a great Mediator who was both God and man; a Mediator who was the True Israel and able to keep the covenant God had made.

Therefore Christ, the True Israel (Hos. 11:1; cf. Mt. 2:15) came to reconcile men to God (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Christ, the obedient servant (Is. 52:13-53:12) was cursed upon a tree (Gal. 3:13) for our transgression of the covenant (Is. 53:5; cf. 1 Peter 2:24). The first Adam sinned and subjected the whole world to sin bringing death as the result of sin (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:23; 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21; 47-49). As a result of his sin, he was sent out of the Garden of God to a place of briars and thorns (Gen. 3:23). The second Adam, Christ came as a true man to represent as High Priest his people and set us free from our bondage to sin (Rom. 5:15,19-21; 6:8-14); to sacrifice himself as a once and for all sacrifice for

sin on behalf of his people (1 Peter 3:18; Heb. 2:14-18; 9:28; 10:14); to propitiate God's wrath (1 John 2:2; 4:9,10), taking upon himself and drinking the cup of the devastating and all-comprehensive wrath of God upon himself for his people, whereby God turned his back upon his faithful son and servant (Mt. 27:46-53). The punishment of Christ upon the cross was so that God could be just in his punishment and also the justifier of those who believe upon Jesus (Romans 3:24-26; 1 John 4:9,10). God was pleased with the work of his son (Mt. 17:5) and justified him by raising him from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20-23; 2 Tim. 8-13). Christ ascended into the heavens and is seated at the right hand of God and God has made the earth his footstool (Ps.2; Ps. 110; Acts 2:9-11; Heb. 4:16), giving Christ all authority in the heavens and upon the earth (Mt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-23). Because we are in union with Christ in his death, resurrection and ascension (Rom. 6-8; Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1), we are included in his glorious inheritance and have been passed from death to life so that we might be brought back into fellowship with God in the land.

God has justified his people by faith in Christ's work and we now have peace with God (Rom. 5:1); we have been reconciled to God because God himself was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19), redeemed (Mt. 20:28), bought with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:19; cf. Acts 20:28; Rev. 5:9), justified by his blood and saved from the wrath of God through him (Rom. 5:9,10; cf. John 3:18). God has truly made he who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him! (2 Cor. 5:21). God truly loved us while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! (Rom. 5:8). Therefore God's people, because of God's promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness (2 Peter 3:13). St. Peter says,

Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:9-11).

This people of God which the Lord has redeemed and brought into fellowship with himself (1 John 1:6,7) looks forward to receiving the Garden of God, the land promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:5-7). Christ came as the Seed of Abraham and God had promised to Abraham that he and his seed would inherit the land (Gen. 15:7). St. Paul teaches in Galatians 3:15-22 that the promises were to Abraham and his seed, and the ultimate fulfillment of his seed is Christ, the True Israel (Gal. 3:16). Christ redeemed his people from the curse of the law and received them as adopted sons (Gal. 4:5). Because of the fulfillment of the law (cf. Mt. 5:17-20) and Christ's completed work, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts so that we now call God "Father" (Gal. 4:6; cf. Acts 2:4, and the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in Joel 2: 28: Acts 2:16-21; cf. "father" reference to Dt. 1:31 concerning the wilderness wanderings). Because we have been united with Christ by faith we are no longer separate from Christ, alienated

from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus we that were once far off are brought close by the blood of Christ; he came and preached peace to us who were far off, and peace to them that were close; we who were once strangers and sojourners are now fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. This is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the chief cornerstone, and this building grows into a temple in the Lord for the habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:12,13,17,19-22; cf. the "household/temple" description to Heb. 3:3-6). Because of this, God's people will inherit Zion, the land of promise: the Garden of God in which God lives.

The eschatological expectation and inheritance of God's people is immeasurable and great (1 Peter 1:4-4,5)! The Book of Revelation of St. John, which uses the same language as the Book of Joel, is the ultimate consummation and conclusion of God's epic, saga, and story of redemption. From Revelation we see the consummate wrath of God upon the land and the people of the land who are strangers and foreigners to the covenant. We see God's fiery wrath and the great plagues he brings on the land and upon the people. God will consume the earth with fire and make a new heavens and new earth where only righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:10-13). He will restore his people to fellowship with him and bring them into the land promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:7; cf. Joel 3:17-21; Rev. 21:3). "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates of the city (the Garden of the LORD)" (Rev. 22:14).

In the Book of the Revelation of St. John we see the prophecy of Joel fulfilled. Joel's inspired and inerrant prophecy from God was for the people of his time, however even Joel would not have understood all of what he said (1 Peter 10,11). From the perspective of the whole of God's redemptive history, we may be encouraged as the people of God for what is to come. Jesus Christ is the firstborn among the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth. He has loved us and loosed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom to be priests unto his God and Father (Rev. 1:5,6).

In the Book of the Revelation, St. John records the promises of Christ that are awaiting his people which all have intimate connections to the promise of dwelling in the new land with God (those who "overcome" and "he who keeps my works to the end"): To him that overcomes, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7); To him that overcomes, the second death shall not hurt him (Rev. 2:11); To him that overcomes, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it (Rev. 2:17); To him that overcomes, I will give authority over the nations (Rev. 2:26); To him who overcomes, he shall be dressed in white garments; and I will not in any way blot his name out of the Book of Life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels (Rev. 3:5); To him that overcomes, I will make him a pillar

in the temple of my God, and he shall go out of here no more. I will also write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name (Rev. 3:12); To him who overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father on his throne (Rev. 3:21).

These promises are for the people of God who have believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and has been united with him in his death, resurrection, and ascension by faith. For the unbelieving, all that is ahead is the greatest, most awesome display of God's wrath the world has ever seen or imagined. If you thought the prophecy of Joel was awesome and frightening, how much more will be the wrath of God spoken of by his Son. Just as no one has seen, no ear has heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the great riches and inheritance God has stored up for his people who believe; so no one has seen (even in the prophecy of Joel), no ear has heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the great awesome, all-encompassing, comprehensive, devastating wrath which God has stored up for the people who do not believe (cf. Romans 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 2:9; Heb. 12:29; Rev. 8-15, bowls of wrath). The great news for the people of God, the people who shall truly inherit the land, is that "God did not appoint us to wrath, but obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1 Thess. 5:9).

As the people of God who have a High Priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. Our High Priest sympathizes with our weakness and has been tempted just like us, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need (Heb. 4:16-18). As God's holy and dearly beloved, we have come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable host of angels. We have come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. We have come to Jesus the Mediator of a New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better than that of Abel (Heb. 12:22-24).

The eschatological trumpets that shall sound at God's final judgment will alert the wicked to the ultimate Day of the LORD's wrath (Rev. 8-15), but also the trumpet for God's people will sound, and the dead in Christ will rise (1 Thess. 4). Just as with Joel's prophetic trumpet in Zion; the sounding of the last trumpet will sound the final destruction of the wicked and unrepentant from the land, it will also be the last trumpet for the repentant people of God to receive his great blessings and fulfilled promises of land and prosperity which he made to Abraham. Then the LORD will dwell with his people in Zion forever!

## E. RESTING AND AT EASE IN THE LAND OF ZION

The LORD's people in the Book of Joel were resting in the land of Zion. Resting upon the laurels of the covenant made with Abraham while surrounded by the mountains that gave security to them. As God's covenant people, they dwelt in the land "at ease," but they had not obeyed the covenant made with their God. They had turned from him and turned toward ways of their own. Rather than being a people called forth for the praises of God, a light on a hill, and counter-kingdom to the kingdoms of the world, they had imitated the sins and the ways of these kingdoms.

We should heed the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 9-11 when he reminds us of the faithfulness of God to his people, but also the unfaithfulness of his people. As the people of God, we by faith trust in Christ the ultimate promise of God to his people, not looking to our own works to save us. The covenant of grace and promise was given to Israel, but ultimately Israel disregarded the stipulations of the covenant, even the commands of God. We should be alert and aware that as the people of God we do not do the same, and that we truly appreciate the sovereignty of God's mercy in election (Eph. 1:1-14). In conclusion, let us regard the words of warning and promise from the Apostle Paul who was intimately and comprehensively sympathetic to the prophecy of Joel 2:3-5:

[The Israelites] 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. It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel (cf. Gal. 3:15-4:7). Nor because they are his descendants are they Abraham's children... It is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring... 'I have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy... 'I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one'... What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it? Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works (excerpts from chapter 9).

Since they [the Israelites] did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes... 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.' (excerpts from chapter 10).

Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham... God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew (cf.

Rom. 8:28-39)...I ask, did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, 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! I am talking to you Gentiles...For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?...Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches [the Israelites], he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off...As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable...

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!  
Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?  
For from him and through him and to him  
are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen. (excerpts from chapter 11).

God was not pleased with his people's disobedience, but he is infinitely gracious. The prophet Joel spoke to the Israelites in a particular historical context, but these preserved and sacred writings still speak to us today. As his Church, his bride, his people, we can heed the message and warnings of the prophet as those living in the Last Days. Be encouraged! God has promised to bring his people into the land and ultimately dwell with them eternally (Rev. 21:3). He indeed will bring his people from the wilderness back to the Garden-albeit superabundantly! God has been faithful throughout our history in his revelation, because all of his promises are "yes" and "amen" in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20-22).

As a pilgrim people of God, may we walk according to his commandments in light of his faithfulness; in light of our substitute and Great High Priest; in light of our identity of being in Christ and being conformed to his image. May we have the faith of Abraham who looked and lived with eyes fixed on a Kingdom and a Land that was not of this world (Heb. 11:8-10). In light of our study in the Prophecy of Joel, and throughout the Scriptures which God has given to us, may we take heed and hear what the prophet says to the people, and what he says in Christ today.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, L. C., *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

Archer, G. L., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody, 1974.

Bromiley, G. W., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* in four volumes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982. Volume two: article on "Eschatology" by G. E. Ladd.

Calvin, J., *Joel, Amos and Obadiah: A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986.

Childs, B. S., *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.

*Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.

Chisholm, R., *From Exegesis to Exposition*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

Frye, N. *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Guthrie, D. and J. A. Motyer, *The New Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970.

Hoekema, A. A., *The Bible and the Future*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

Kugel, J. L. and R. A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986.

Poythress, V. S. *Symphonic Theology*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987.

*Understanding Dispensationalists, Second Edition*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987.

Puckett, D. L. *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995.

Ricoeur, P., *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Caerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Castello. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

Robertson, O. P., *Understanding the Land of the Bible: A Biblical-Theological Guide*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996.

Ryken, L. and T. Longman, III, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.

Ryken, L., J. C. Wilhoit, T. Longman, III, Dictionary of Biblical Imagery. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998.

VanGemeren, W. A., Interpreting the Prophetic Word. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.

The Progress of Redemption. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

Vos, G. Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948.

Wenham, G. J., J. A. Motyer, and D. A. Carson, R. T. France, New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994.

Young, E. J., An Introduction to the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.

---

*Adapted for Thirdmill.org from [www.aplacefortruth.org](http://www.aplacefortruth.org) by permission. Hebrew words in the original version were omitted for this edition.*