

James Philip Bible Readings

This resource is free to use for personal study. For quotations, all we ask is that the source is quoted in full. Multiple copying should not be undertaken without permission from info@thetron.org

Copyright is reserved by William Philip. See <http://www.thetron.org/resources/bible-readings> for more information, and updates.

THE BOOK of JOEL

- 1) 1:1-4
- 2) 1:5-7
- 3) 1:8-13
- 4) 1:13-20
- 5) 2:1-6
- 6) 2:7-11
- 7) 2:12-14
- 8) 2:15-17
- 9) 2:18-20
- 10) 2:21-27
- 11) 2:21-27
- 12) 2:28-32
- 13) 2:28-32
- 14) 2:28-32
- 15) 3:1-3
- 16) 3:1-3
- 17) 3:4-8
- 18) 3:9-12
- 19) 3:13-17
- 20) 3:18-20

THE BOOK of JOEL

The date of Joel's prophecy is problematical, and scholars have assigned it variously to before 800 B.C. and after 500 B.C. that is, either before any of the writing prophets, or after the exile. There is no mention of either Assyria or Babylonia, and this probably means that Joel must have written before they arose, or after they were destroyed. Tradition seems to have assumed the early, rather than the later, date, in having placed the book in the O.T. canon between Hosea and Amos. The question, however, does not affect interpretation to any great extent; the message of Joel is relevant and indeed timeless, and this is the important thing for us.

The prophecy divides naturally into two sections, 1:1 - 2:17, and 2:18 - 3:21, the one in the main historical, the other in the main prophetic and apocalyptic. A cursory glance through the prophecy, or at least the first chapter, should help to give the atmosphere of Joel's message, for it is clear that he is intent on pointing a lesson in the spiritual realm from a disaster in the natural, which had overtaken the land in the shape of a plague of locusts. It is the genius of the prophetic insight, as we have seen in earlier studies, that it can see the hand of God at work in natural events, and interpret these as a word or discipline from the Lord. "This is that" Joel says in effect, as Peter, quoting him centuries later, also said on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16).

1) 1:1-4

Joel begins his prophecy with the description of a plague of locusts that has descended on the land. It is a grievous and terrible disaster, and, as 4 indicates, the successive swarms (the words used all refer to locusts, in fact) have utterly devastated the country, leaving desolate and bare grain fields, trees and other vegetation alike. There are sufficiently authentic accounts of locust-swarms and the damage they cause given in modern geographical books to assure us that Joel's description is in no way an exaggeration. The following passage from a well-known work, Thomson's "The Land and the Book" is worth recording: "Their number was astounding; the whole face of the mountain was black with them. On they came, like a living deluge. We dug trenches and kindled fires, and beat and burned to death 'heaps and heaps'; but the effort was utterly useless - they destroyed every green leaf. I saw large fig orchards 'clean bare', not a leaf remaining....They rolled up the mountainside and poured over rocks, walls, ditches and hedges, those behind covering up and passing over the masses already killed. For some days they continued to pass. The noise made by them in marching and foraging was like that of a heavy shower falling upon a distant forest" (1845). Joel, then, is emphasising the magnitude of the disaster that has overtaken the country, and is appealing to the sense of desolation in the experience of the people in order to interpret to them the word of the Lord in it. What the precise nature of that word is has been differently interpreted, and we shall turn to a discussion of this in the next note.

2) 1:5-7

It is clear that at the least what Joel is saying is that the locust plague has been sent by God as a judgment upon the nation and a warning summons to repent. This is the same kind of lesson we have already seen Amos proclaiming in his ministry; "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6), and one which it is much to be desired that our modern world should learn. Nothing is more striking than our modern inability to discern the judgments of God abroad in our time. But we must also consider whether in fact Joel means something other than locusts in references such as that in 6 to 'a nation', and repeated in 2:2, 4, 5. A careful reading of the first part of the prophecy makes one wonder whether a real army of soldiers is envisaged, and foreshadowed by the locusts. Scholars are divided about this, some thinking that it is still the locust-swarm that is being described in 2:1ff now, however, coming into the city, while others maintain that Joel is using the picture of the present devastation by the locusts as an indication of what was about to come upon the nation from the north. There is also a third consideration: Joel's message merges into apocalyptic, and the "day of the Lord" is also foreshadowed by the more immediate events. Here, then, are three distinct ideas: the locust invasion, an invasion of the land by enemy hordes from the north, and either or both being emblems of world-forces appearing in the last days. We do not require deciding in our minds which of the three is the correct interpretation; why should not the message of Joel be about all three? The locusts had already invaded the land, in a judgment from God; could not this be an adumbration of a coming nemesis from the north (say, Assyria), and also in a wider sense a foretelling of the events of the last days? Why not, indeed? Is the Holy Spirit straitened?

3) 1:8-13

The failure of the meat and drink offerings (9) could be attributed with equal force to the plague of locusts or to the advent of a marauding army. Some incline to refer it to the locust devastation, but enemy invasion had certainly at times been known to disrupt the daily Temple worship, and it is not possible to say for certain what Joel has in mind. What is more important than the cause is the effect of the disaster. For the daily Temple sacrifice was the perpetual sign and evidence of God's communion with His people. For this to be stopped by something that God had sent - whether locust plague or enemy host - was surely the symbol of His withdrawal from His people because of their sin. This was the terrible thing for Joel, and it was this he was intent on emphasising to the people. This puts a new construction upon distress and misfortune; to have these come at all is bad enough, but at least all is not dark if in them we may enjoy the comforts and graces of fellowship with the Lord. But if He sends them, and in sending, withdraws from us in His displeasure with us, then they are serious indeed and it is time for sackcloth and weeping. Men are not always conscious of this withdrawal, however, and one can understand Joel's emphasis upon it. It is astonishing how blind we can be to spiritual realities. We should remember, however, that sin blinds our minds to the truth about ourselves. It is only in His light that we see light, and when light is withdrawn, all is dark.

4) 1:13-20

The priests are exhorted to begin preparations for a national humiliation, starting with themselves. There are two points of importance here. The first is that judgment must begin at the house of God. The Church has its responsibility to the nation, and often it is the Church's failure in faithfulness that lowers the moral and spiritual temperature of the nation, bringing inevitable judgment upon it. Where there is no vision (mediated by the Church) the people (in the nation as a whole) perish. The second point is that we must be careful to understand aright what is being advocated here, in view of the modern practice of holding national or local or world days of prayer. What we need to grasp is that prayer of this kind will have no sort of relevance or significance apart from a true repentance and turning to God. The supposition that God will be bound to hear mere volume of prayer unrelated to moral seriousness is an altogether too facile one, and is moreover contradicted by the testimony of the prophets throughout the Old Testament. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me", says God to a people whose forte was religious observance unrelated to moral character. What is needed is not days of prayer, but national repentance; where this is lacking, all else, be it ever so prayerful, will be in vain.

The "day of the Lord" in 15 is the immediate devastation before the prophet's eyes - every such judgment is the "day of the Lord", but it is not difficult to sense even here a further and deeper reference to the ultimate "Day" in whose clear shining light all wrong shall stand revealed. It is the abiding characteristic of apocalyptic literature that the near and far mingle in the same utterance.

5) 2:1-6

If the final "day of the Lord" is suggested in 1:15, it is even clearer in the opening verses of the second chapter. Indeed, locusts, invading armies and the last days are mingled together inextricably. For example, 2a conveys all the mystery and dread of final judgment, and matches other notable passages elsewhere in prophetic literature. But then, almost immediately in 2b, we become aware of an invading army; this could be the locusts, which are certainly described in some of the phrases, yet we cannot avoid the conviction that behind them, and exemplified by them, there is a still more terrible visitation, and that the prophet sees on the horizon a mustering of the nations hostile to God's people and intent on destroying them. It is remarkable how clearly the word of the Lord emerges unmistakably from this ambiguous pattern of prophecy, and it does not therefore surprise us that John in the book of Revelation should employ the figure of the locust invasion to depict the terrors of the final judgment (Rev 9:1-11). To interpret Joel in the light of Revelation is to show how authentic was his vision, and indeed how essentially related any and every 'interim' day of the Lord is to the final Day of Judgment. One other point should be noted: whether locust plague, invading army, or final day of doom, one thing is common to all - the appointed judgment does its work, and there is no escaping it. This is the tremendous reality that should fill evildoers with dread. God always gets His man.

6) 2:7-11

The comparisons in 7 - "Like mighty men, like men of war" seem to suggest that here it is the locusts themselves that Joel is describing, and that they are now overrunning the city itself. It does not require much imagination to realise what a disruption of life and communications this would cause, as the waves of insects rolled inexorably onward in their march of destruction (9). This is not a contra-indication against the idea of an invasion by a real army; it belongs to the nature of prophecy that this kind of ambiguity should appear, as in fact it does also in 10 and 11, where we find ourselves asking whether the cosmic disturbances mentioned are mere poetic descriptions of the blotting out of the natural light of day by the very numbers of the insects filling the air in great clouds, or apocalyptic accompaniments of the final day of the Lord. The context of the prophecy requires, in fact, that both be valid as interpretations. This is the point, so far as Joel is concerned. But the most important thing of all is that in this disaster the Lord is speaking (11). He is "executing His word". This is what modern thought will not allow Him to do, He is firmly put in His place as (their idea of) a God of love and told to stay there. The idea that He should act in righteous judgment (or that this should be an expression of holy love) is repugnant and intolerable to it. Which is so much the worse for modern thought; for God acts thus in history notwithstanding, and all that happens is that having refused the one right explanation, men remain in perplexity and darkness concerning such disasters.

7) 2:12-14

These verses constitute the focal point of the prophecy. It is an appeal for thorough heart repentance, for a humbling of hearts before God, and a true turning to Him. Joel's words here stand in the true prophetic tradition, that is to say, he presses beyond the outward expressions of religion which the Israelites of his day so dearly loved, to the inward heart. We may compare the exhortation in 13 with Isaiah 1:11, where Isaiah exposes the emptiness and meaningless mess of sacrifices made by the people when their hearts were far from God. It is interesting that Joel, like Amos (Amos 6:15) confines himself to the possibility, not the assurance, that the Lord will be gracious (14). This is a realism that we would do well to consider in our own day, when we so glibly assume, as Israel did in Hosea's day (Hos 6:1ff) that the merest inclination of our hearts towards God is enough to make Him turn to us (as if the Almighty were there simply to dance attendance on our every whim and caprice!) Bunyan has a far truer estimate of the situation in his Holy War, when he makes the inhabitants of Mansoul petition Emmanuel with continuing and sustained earnestness and concern before He finally consents to return to the city that had grieved Him away by their sin (cf 2 Cor 7:11). The blessing in 14 would seem to refer to the restoration of the temple worship, which (see Note on 1:9) symbolised the communion God had with His people. The return Joel envisages is a return to fellowship with Him, to an ethical and spiritual relationship which is the essence of true religion. Nothing less, and nothing else, will suffice.

8) 2:15-17

Again the call to summon the people to solemn assembly, as in 1:14, but now it is elaborated, and emphasis is laid on the priests, the ministers of the Lord. This is significant, and underlines afresh that in times of national declension and disaster God's first and most urgent word is not to the nation but to the Church. As Peter puts it in his epistle (1 Pet 4:17), "judgment must begin at the house of God". And when we remember the function of the Church as being to act as a restraint upon evil ("ye are the salt of the earth"), it is clear that when evil erupts in the body politic of the nation, responsibility at least to some extent must be laid at the Church's door for its failure to exercise that restraint. It is true of course that however faithful and true to God the Church may be, the nation may still turn to evil ways, the restraint can only be partial at best. But it is often far from best because of carelessness and sin, as in our own day, and it is for this reason that the Church must set its own house in order in a spirit of penitence and new obedience. It is for this that God is waiting, and it is idle to suppose that renewal or betterment will ever come nation-wise until the Church led by its ministers fulfils the spirit and intention of this word in 17, and until they weep before the Lord and cry for His mercy.

9) **2:18-20**

The Revised Version renders the verb in 18 in the past tense, not the future as in the A.V. To read it thus - and this is how most scholars take it - is to make it mean that Joel's call to repentance was heeded by ministers and people alike, the fast sanctified, and the repentant weeping heard by a merciful God. These verses therefore record something that happened, and stand as a tremendous challenge and encouragement for what God has done once He can do again. The promises in 19ff are as heartening as Joel's earlier utterances are menacing. They can be taken poetically, as descriptive of the general wellbeing and prosperity that God's grace will bring upon the people, or literally in relation to the repair of the devastation wrought by the locusts. It is very likely that the locust-plague is in mind in 20; there are accounts in ancient history of strong winds blowing locusts in their swarms into the sea, leaving their carcasses to rot on the shore infecting the air to a great distance. Whether it is only the locusts that are envisaged here or not, we should remember that God can disperse living armies of men with just the same ease (cf Isa 37:7, 36, 37). If it is the Lord Who sends the invading armies from the north using the Assyrian as the rod of His anger, He can just as decisively turn them back, when the cause of His displeasure, namely the sin of His people, has been removed. What encouragement God gives us to take His summons to repentance seriously. Would that Church and nation alike were to heed it!

10) 2:21-27

Joel continues with his assurance and promises of Divine blessing. What he says is still couched in terms of material prosperity - pastures are to be renewed for the cattle, fig tree and vine bear fruit again (22), and early and latter rain given in measure that is fit (23), harvests plentiful (24), and full restoration of the havoc caused by the locusts (25) - but there are good reasons for supposing that there is more than material blessing in the prophet's mind. We have already seen how the corn, wine and oil constituted the daily offerings in the Temple, and signified and symbolised the fellowship between God and His people which had been broken and violated by their sin, so that the restoration of material blessings was but the symbol and sacrament of a new spiritual relationship that had been restored. Furthermore, it is one of the characteristics of prophecy in general that it associates the renewal of nature with the moral and spiritual renewal of man. Inanimate nature and the brute creation both alike share in the goodness of man's regeneration (see Isa 35, Rom 8:19-22). G.A. Smith comments, "To Joel the physical blessings are a token that God has returned to His people. The drought and famine produced by the locusts were signs of His anger and His divorce of the land. The proofs that He has relented, and taken Israel back into a spiritual relation to Himself can, therefore, from Joel's point of view, only be given by the healing of the people's wounds. In plenteous rains and full harvests God sets His seal to man's penitence. Rain and harvest are not merely physical benefits, but sacraments, signs that God has returned to His people, and that His zeal is again stirred on their behalf".

11) 2:21-27

To see that Joel gives a religious meaning to the material blessings of rain and harvest is to recognise the true spiritual nature of the situation. This is not the same thing as spiritualising the text and giving a plainly material connotation a spiritual application, and the two ideas should be distinguished. But there is a legitimate spiritualising of what Joel says here, particularly in 25. This is a word, which in its spiritualised application has meant so much to so many Christians down the ages, for it speaks to us of a God Who can restore the years of life that have been lost through sin, that can repair the past and make up for the wasted years in new opportunities for service that will cancel out the very memory of old failures and sins. It does not of course mean that a restored backslider will be given an equivalent number of years to those he has wasted; time is relative, and we should be misunderstanding the nature of life itself if we sought to estimate it quantitatively rather than qualitatively. It is the restoration of lost opportunities that is important; this is the promise of God. How wonderful! Think of Samson's experience (Judges 16:30). Here is a fruitful illustration of Joel's words. One thinks of his wasted opportunities, and what might have been if he had not had his fatal weakness for women. But in the end, God restored to Him the privilege of power and service again, and "the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life". It is never too late if true heart repentance is there to fulfil our true destiny. Samson did, albeit he died in doing so. But how much better to die in doing God's will than to live and leave it undone. It is His will, not this life that is important!

12) 2:28-32

What was said and discussed in a previous note about the relation of the material to the spiritual blessing has relevance for what follows in these verses, for here, the specifically spiritual blessing is quite explicit. The important and operative word here seems to be "afterward" in 28. It is after the relationship between God and His people is restored that the Spirit is to be poured upon all flesh. Looked at this way, it is clear that the outpouring of the Spirit is not upon the people (surely that is assumed and included in their restoration to fellowship, for Who else but the Spirit can bring us back into fellowship with Him?) but upon the world of men around them. This is the fulfilment of Israel's true destiny, to be a light to lighten the Gentiles. This is what being right with God means. And this contains a principle of permanent validity, underlined by our Lord Himself in the Upper Room discourse (John 16:7, 8) "When He (the Holy Spirit) is come, He will reprove the world of sin". It is through a renewed Church that the Spirit works in bringing blessing to the world, and it is in this respect that Peter's quotation of Joel's words on the Day of Pentecost is so important. There are a number of lessons we must gather from this passage, but this is the first of them, and one urgently needed today in the Church. What, historically speaking, led to Peter's personal Pentecost? Fellowship restored with a risen Christ - nothing more or less than this, and it is still the answer for us in our time.

13) 2:28-32

The prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit speaks of its taking place in "the last days". This raises some questions. Peter quotes Joel's words as being fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, but clearly this does not exhaust their meaning, for the apocalyptic imagery of 30, 31, belongs to the events of Christ's second coming at the end of time rather than to the initiation of the New Testament Church. If then, as it would seem, Joel also speaks of an outpouring of the Spirit in the days immediately preceding Christ's coming, how are we to reconcile this with Paul's teaching that that coming will be preceded by a falling away (2 Thess 2:3)? In fact, the two pictures are not necessarily contradictory; both are true, and depending on how one looks at the situation, both can be seen to exist at the same time. From one viewpoint it is true that in our own time we have seen a great falling away from the faith once delivered to the saints, in our land and in others, with the love of many growing cold: but from another viewpoint there are evidences of spiritual awakening and quickening in many places throughout the world, as great perhaps as in any period since the Reformation, in South America, Borneo, Korea. Such outpourings of the Spirit are taking place in a world which has witnessed a substantial declension in spiritual values and a falling away from the faith. There is no real contradiction, therefore, in these two seemingly opposed conceptions, both being possible at one and the same time.

14) 2:28-32

The familiar combination of the near and the far is seen again in these verses, as indeed throughout the remainder of the prophecy, and this makes for difficulty in precise interpretation. The 'whosoever' in 32 for example might seem properly to belong to Pentecost and the gospel dispensation in the New Testament, and yet it is hedged in both before and after by statements which refer to the last days. Joel's words in 32 about Zion and Jerusalem might, it is true, be taken literally in the sense that Pentecost did in fact take place in Jerusalem, but their close juxtaposition with what is said in 3:1 almost obliges us to look beyond the inception of the Christian era to the events which will herald its close. The suggestion that Jerusalem will have a central significance in the last days is not to be explained in terms of a spiritualisation which makes it refer to the Church. Peter, it is true, applies to the Church promises that were originally made to the ancient people of God (see 1 Pet 2:9,10), but if we make this an absolute transfer of rights and privileges, what are we to make of Paul's magnificent protestations in Romans 11? We shall have to say more about this when we study the next chapter. It may be that Paul's teaching holds the key to much that is apparently mysterious and perplexing in prophetic unfolding. At all events, no attempt at unravelling the knotty problems can be satisfactory which fails to do justice in some way to the position of the Jews in the economy of God.

15) 3:1-3

This is the first mention of the heathen nations in the prophecy, Joel having been concerned up to this point entirely with Israel. But it is surely a necessary corollary of judgment and apocalypse that all nations should be involved in the final reckoning, and if the prophet has had in mind the final 'Day of the Lord' it is natural for him to turn now to Israel's enemies. This judgment of the nations is not merely for their wickedness, but particularly for their wickedness against God's people. The fierce, protective love God has for His people is seen throughout the entire range of prophetic literature, and indeed of history itself. It has never gone well for those who have done despite to the Jews. It is this fact that must qualify and condition any interpretation of the Jews' position in the economy of God. Since the Crucifixion and their rejection by God, this extraordinary people have passed through afflictions and oppressions as great as any in their ancient experience as recorded in the Old Testament, and yet no power or might has been able to destroy those whom God has willed to remain in existence as the instrument of His purposes, however unwilling to be this they may have been.

16) 3:1-3

To continue the thought in the previous reading, Israel has indeed become in her rejection of the gospel a 'vessel of wrath' (Rom 9:22,23), but in the sovereignty of God that bitter experience has been used by Him (as He always intended to use Israel) as a means of grace and mercy to the world. As Paul says later in Rom 11:12, 15, their 'diminishing' and 'fall' have proved to be the enrichment of the world. Thus, in the strange, mysterious working of the Divine purposes, their rebellion against the good and the perfect will of God has proved to be necessary for the furtherance of His plan of redemption. It is for this reason that Paul can speak with such assurance of the restoration of Israel at the end. For, when salvation is fully accomplished in the world, their continued rejection will no longer be 'necessary'. How mysterious and wonderful! Well might Paul burst out at the end of Romans 11, "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

17) 3:4-8

These verses underline what was said in the previous Note about the protective care the Lord has for His people. In their plundering of Israel the heathen nations had attacked Him. "My silver and My gold, My goodly pleasant things" says the Lord, thus identifying himself with His poor, oppressed people. The Rev. W. Still comments in this connection, "What a comfortable thought it is that even when God is using wicked men as a rod to chasten His people, He is looking on with anxious parent's eye, suffering every stroke, and watching eagerly for the first sign of turning that He may end the punishment. We may truly say that when God inflicts punishment upon His own it hurts Him more than them. Let us not doubt His tender love, for there are times when we feel the grimness of the Christian life in such wise that we need nothing so much as to know that behind the rigour stands a loving Father Whose heart is consumed with love for us. We just cannot know how much He loves us, but it will be such a help to us to realise it. How wonderful to have such a God watching over us, and to know that even His strokes are full of love."

18) 3:9-12

The force of these words is that the heathen nations are challenged and summoned to a trial of strength with the Lord, and as such it is an enactment of the final 'Armageddon' in which the powers of evil amass for their final onslaught against the Lord of Hosts (see Zech 14:2, Rev 16:14, 19:19). What is of highest importance for us to see is that God is not on the defensive here, but on the offensive. It is He Who calls the nations to this decisive 'show-down'. In the last analysis this brings us right to the central reality in the Christian faith, the passion and victory of the Son of God. This and every other Old Testament reference owes its validity to the once-for-all victory He won against the powers of darkness. It is because He intervened for our sakes in history that evil does not, and cannot, have the initiative in the world. We recall how, when He was on earth, no man could touch Him because "His hour was not yet come". He chose the moment of His crucifixion - "That thou doest, do quickly" - and invaded enemy territory, on the offensive against the powers of darkness. The authentic picture of the New Testament is that of the King going forth into battle, and we do not understand it aright unless we see this to be so. In 10 the reversal of the usual order of the prophetic vision is striking; what Joel writes comes before the battle, whereas Micah's vision (Micah 4:3) follows it. This serves to remind us that there can be no lasting peace except on the basis of righteous victory over evil. Rest through travail and suffering, and never without it, that is the principle on which the moral structure of the world is founded.

19) 3:13-17

From the picture of battle we are suddenly turned to that of harvest and of vintage. This exuberance of metaphor serves to intensify the prophet's graphic description of the coming day of the Lord. Judgment seat, harvest scene, and vintage - one is reminded of our Lord's own pictures in the parables (cf. Matt 25:31ff, Matt 13:36ff) and sees how saturated with Scriptural imagery His teaching was. The harvest time, which is the end of the world (13) is come, let the angel-reapers thrust in their sickle; in the wine press the grapes are gathered in, let the labourers hasten to press the juice out with their feet. Then the prophet's gaze is turned to the valley to which the nations have gathered, and he sees multitudes assembled (14) for judgment. The place is well-named "the valley of decision", but judgment, not grace, is the keynote of the prophecy. As C.S. Lewis says, "When the Author walks on to the stage, the play is over", and there is no opportunity then for men to make up their minds about the gospel; it is too late then, and the die is cast, finally and irrevocably. One of the most wonderful and moving pictorial representations of this scene of judgment we have ever read is contained in a children's book (one of a series) by C.S. Lewis, entitled "The Last Battle". Few pieces of writing could capture more dramatically or more meaningfully the final separation of the sheep and the goats. The contrast in 16 reminds us of our Lord's own words in Matt 25:23,30, "Well done, good and faithful servant.... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" and "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness". That 'day of the Lord' which will be confusion and doom for the enemies of the Lord will be a source of hope and strength to His people (compare 16a with 1 Thess 3:16).

20) 3:18-20

The final picture Joel gives us is one of peace and prosperity and we can surely interpret it in the widest terms, including personal applications. It is interesting to see how, in the apocalyptic flavour of the verses, there are echoes of other Scriptures. We think of Ezekiel's vision (47:1-12) of the waters issuing from under the threshold of the house of the Lord (compare also Zech 14:8, and also Rev 22:1ff, which for very beauty and longing make us cry out, "Even so, come Lord Jesus"). Doubtless there is poetic imagery employed here by the prophet, but from what we have already seen (cf Notes on 2:7-11 and 2:21-27) in Joel's thought it would be misleading to confine our understanding of these verses to a mere poetic flight. The establishment of the kingdom of God in its fulness will bring unimagined glories in all realms, the material, the natural, the cosmic, as well as the moral and spiritual. As we saw in an earlier reference, the restoration of material prosperity signified the renewal of fellowship between God and His people, and this is the heart of it all - the Lord dwelleth in Zion (20). John brings the same thought out in Rev 22:3, 4 where the ultimate beatitude is described with elemental simplicity - "They shall see His face". Ah, in the light of this, we may well hold on grimly as the day of doom approaches, knowing that the noise of battle, and the fierce agony of the wounds sustained in the fight of faith will one day yield to the victor's song and the glowing welcome and glad consummation when we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). It will be infinitely worth all the trials and tears and the taking up of the cross, to have that Face turned to us in love and commendation. God help us, how should we have ever thought otherwise?