

## SESSION TWENTY-TWO

### JOEL

#### *A Warning of the Day of the LORD*

#### I. INTRODUCTION

##### A. Date

Unfortunately, no information is provided in the opening verses of the book to establish the time limits of Joel's prophetic ministry. Three primary dates are usually debated among conservative scholars: (1) an early preexilic date (9th century BC);<sup>1</sup> (2) a late preexilic date (either the late Assyrian period or between 597 and 586 BC; and (3) a postexilic date.<sup>2</sup> The scattering of "My people" among the nations (3:2) might tend to favor the 3rd alternative, but this is not conclusive since this could be in anticipation of the event rather than a report of what had already taken place. Allusions to the Temple (e.g., 1:14,16; 2:17) might suggest a date before 586 BC or after 516 BC (when the Temple had been rebuilt). If Amos is making allusions to Joel (cf. Amos 1:2 and Joel 3:16; also Amos 9:13 and Joel 3:18), then Joel would be dated early. Amos can be dated accurately at 762 BC. Admittedly, however, Joel could be reliant on Amos. Perhaps it is best to leave the matter of dating as an open question.

##### B. Setting

The occasion of the book is a devastating locust plague and drought that has come upon the land (ch 1). Joel sees this as an indication of the LORD's displeasure with His people and a preliminary "curse" judgment (cf. Deut 28). Using this historic situation as the backdrop (date unknown), Joel goes on to warn the people of an imminent coming invasion of a foreign army from the north (ch 2). In keeping with the principles of Deut 30, he urges the nation to repent and turn back to the LORD. By doing so, the nation can possibly escape the threat of judgment and find restoration of God's blessings.

#### II. STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 147-49; and Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 304-5. Richard D. Patterson prefers an early eighth century BC date ("Joel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 7 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1985], 231-33).

<sup>2</sup>Advocates of a post-exilic date include John Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 365-66; Leslie C. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 19-25; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 876-79; and Robert Chisholm, "Joel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Old Testament)*, ed. by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1409-10. The problem with the third alternative is that it seems unlikely that an announcement like "the day of the LORD is coming" would be made after Jerusalem had already been destroyed.

Repent: "The Day of the Lord" is Near			Future Blessings (for repentance)	
Current Crisis: The Locust Plague	Coming Crisis: An Invading Army	A Renewed Call to Repentance	Forgiveness and Restoration (based on repentance)	Promises of a Glorious Future
1:2-20	2:1-11	2:12-17	2:18-27	2:28-3:21

### III. THE "DAY OF THE LORD" CONCEPT

By virtue of repetition, one of the primary themes of the book is "The Day of the LORD" (cf. 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14). This theme is not only pertinent to this book, but becomes a leading theme in many of the prophets (cf. Isa 63:4; Jer 30:7; Zeph 1:14) and on into the New Testament. It receives particular attention in the book of Revelation (e.g., 6:17; 16:14). A few observations should be made. First, it should be acknowledged that the "Day of the LORD" was potentially realizable by Joel's generation, for Joel warns them that the "Day" is near (1:15). Second, its basic characteristic is being a time of judgment, which the threat of an invasion from the north represented (2:1). Third, whatever meaning it had for Joel's day, it will have an ultimate realization in the eschatological age when God pours out His Spirit (2:28ff) and the enemy nations of Israel are judged (3:14).

In one sense, this "Day" was potentially near for Joel's generation and subsequent generations. Furthermore, this seems to be what John the Baptist warned of when he spoke of the "wrath to come" (Matt 3:7). As will be shown later in this paper, it was also potentially near for Peter's generation in the early part of Acts. However, the ultimate realization of this unique time is still future, for the Apostle Paul clearly indicates that the "Day of the LORD" has not yet come:

*"Now we request you . . . that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed . . . to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction" (2 Thess 2:1-3).*

When Paul writes about the ultimate realization of this "Day," he connects it to the revealing of the Antichrist ("the man of lawlessness"). In light of other Scripture from Daniel and Revelation, then, the "Day" will begin at the middle of Daniel's 70th week when the Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel (Dan 9:27), display himself as God, and ignite the great "apostasy." This will involve a time of great suffering for Israel (Zech 14:1-3; Rev 12:13). This "Day" will also extend past the Great Tribulation (the time of distress—Dan 12:1) to the period of ultimate earthly blessing in the Millennium (cf. Obad 15, 21). Finally, it will include the destruction of the present heavens and earth and the making of new heavens and a new earth (2 Pet 3:10,12-13).

In conclusion, the eschatological aspect of the "Day of the LORD" will commence with the Great Tribulation (the latter 3 ½ years of Daniel's 70th "Week" preceding the Lord's return). It will extend past the return of Christ and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom until the creation of the new heavens and new earth.

It seems best to think of the concept of the "Day of the LORD" as a *generic* one, potentially realizable in several generations, with the ultimate fulfillment in the eschaton.

## IV. EXPOSITIONAL SURVEY

### A. The Locust Plague (1:2-20)

The book opens with the focus on a devastating locust plague that has fallen upon the land. The agricultural elements have been ruined. In 1:10, the loss of grain, new wine and oil is mentioned. Since these were specifically listed in the Deuteronomic curses (Deut 28:51), this is a clear indication that the hardship upon the land was an indication of initial "curses" from the LORD for disobedience. Thus, the present distress was a judgment of the LORD upon His people for covenant unfaithfulness.

In light of this, the people are called upon to repent so that the curses may be lifted and blessings may be restored. This is in keeping with the restoration principles of Deut 30. The leadership especially is called upon to respond in repentance, notably the priests and elders (1:13-14). The emphasis on sackcloth and fasting reflects the need for repentance.

Joel sees the significance of these events as a warning of possible further judgment from God . . . the coming of the "Day of the LORD" (Joel 1:15):

*"Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty."*

The essential characteristic of this event is severe judgment, which Joel terms "destruction."

### B. The Coming Day of the LORD (2:1-11)

It is true that the locust plague of ch 1 was apparently a past actual event, but the author employs it to depict a more severe judgment upon the land . . . the coming of a mighty nation from the *north*. Some scholars understand 2:1-11 to be the same judgment as in ch 1, in which the locusts are depicted as an army (hence, not an actual army invasion). A more likely interpretation is that a literal foreign army is in view. The locust plague of ch 1 was a past event, whereas the invading army of ch 2 is equated with "the Day of the LORD" (notice the inclusio of the terms in 2:1 and 2:11) . . . a definite future event that had not yet taken place. They are yet to come! There is a continuity between these two chapters in that both are judgments, the army of locusts (ch 1) being a portrayal of a real invading army (if and when the "day of the LORD" arrives). The first judgment was past, and could not be undone, although its devastating effects could be reversed (cf. 2:25).

Just who this threatening nation is that brings judgment cannot be ascertained from the text. The fact that they are a *northern army* (2:20) may mean nothing more than that their approach to the land was by the way of the northern entrances to the land (e.g., Hazor and the Galilee region). This was often the direction of approach by invading armies from the east, such as Babylon and Assyria.<sup>3</sup> The main point about the invasion is that it is from the LORD . . . they are His army (2:11). The rhetorical question underscores the devastating potential: "The Day of the LORD is indeed great and awesome, and who can endure it?"

### C. A Renewed Call to Repentance (2:12-17)

The rhetorical question of 2:11 indicating certain and awesome devastation, is followed by an indication of hope in God's mercy. "'Yet even now,' declares the LORD, 'Return to Me with all

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<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of the term "north" in reference to eastern countries such as Babylon and Assyria, see J. Paul Tanner, "Daniel's 'King of the North': Do We Owe Russia an Apology?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35:3 (Sept 1992): 323-24.

your heart" (2:12). This is in keeping with the restoration principle of Deut 30:1ff. The basis for it is found in the character of God Himself, for He has no desire to punish for punishment's sake alone: "For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil" (2:13). All the people are to gather for repentance (2:16), but especially essential is the response of the religious leadership:

*"Let the priests, the LORD's ministers, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, 'Spare Thy people, O LORD, and do not make Thine inheritance a reproach'" (2:17).*

The right response of the religious leadership is an element that must not be overlooked. In the earthly ministry of Jesus, many of the populace turned to the LORD, but the Kingdom (i.e., the kingdom in all its fullness) was withheld primarily because of the negative response of the religious leadership. This is seen in Matt 23:13,

*"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men, for you do not enter in yourselves; nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."*

From a premillennial perspective, the *Kingdom* Jesus spoke of was the same as that depicted in the Old Testament in which the Messiah would rule from the midst of Zion, bringing peace, righteousness, and prosperity to the earth. Jesus was offering this opportunity of the kingdom to that generation of His day. Their refusal to repent and recognize Him as Messiah prevented the establishment of *the fullness of the kingdom*.<sup>4</sup> In Matt 23:13, those "who are entering" are those who had turned to Him in faith. As a result, they became "sons of the kingdom," i.e., qualified to participate in Messiah's kingdom. By virtue of their faith, had the kingdom been fully established at Jesus' first coming, they would have been able to enter (rebellious and unbelieving Jews will always be excluded). Since the religious leadership refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, the full kingdom promise was not realized at that time, and the believing remnant of that day were not able to enjoy all the kingdom blessings. In this sense, the religious leadership did not "allow those who are entering [i.e., the believing remnant] to go in." However, this believing remnant did become sons of the kingdom, and will participate in the Millennial Kingdom that Christ will establish at His Second Coming. Although they would have to wait until then for the kingdom in all its fullness, they could participate in the *interim form of the kingdom*.<sup>5</sup> One day in the future (in the midst of the Great Tribulation), the Jews and their religious leadership will turn to Messiah Jesus in faith and welcome Him:

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<sup>4</sup>By "the fullness of the kingdom," I have in mind the promises of Scripture (especially the Old Testament) in which the Messiah will literally rule from Jerusalem over a restored world order. Upon Jesus' return, the earth is going to undergo a wonderful restoration. Peter spoke of this time in Acts 3:21 as "the period of restoration of all things." Jesus will reign as the universal king over the earth in fulfillment of Ps 72, all war will cease (Isa 2), and He will ensure that righteousness and justice is enacted. Furthermore, "believing" Israel will be regathered to the land.

<sup>5</sup>By "the interim form of the kingdom," I am referring to the present kingdom realization (between the two advents of Christ). Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father as the Davidic king (note how, in Acts 13:32-33, the coronation promise of Psalm 2 finds fulfillment in the resurrection-ascension event). Those who have received Him as Savior have already become "priests" of His kingdom (Rev 1:6). Although the world does not perceive Jesus as king, those of us in Christ are presently experiencing a limited form of the kingdom which might be called the "interim kingdom." This form of the kingdom is the subject of the kingdom parables in Matthew 13. With this distinction in mind, we can say that Jesus' words were fulfilled when he preached "the kingdom of God is near."

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate. For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD'" (Matt 23:37-39).

The last phrase was the Messianic greeting mentioned in Ps 118:26! This will be fulfilled just prior to the Second Coming of Christ. Until the Jewish nation (but not necessarily every single Israelite) turns to Jesus in faith and cries out to Him for deliverance, He will not return and establish the kingdom on earth. A similar principle was at work in Joel's day, whereby a successful repentance had to include the religious leadership before Deuteronomic "blessings" could be reinstated.

#### D. Forgiveness and Restoration (2:18-27)

Apparently, Joel 2:18 is a pivotal verse to the book. The *KJV*, *NASB*, and *NIV* all translate the verse as a future event. "Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, and will have pity on His people" (2:18 from the *NASB*). Kaiser, however, calls attention to the fact that the Hebrew verbs should properly be rendered as past tense, indicating that Joel's generation had indeed repented in response to his prophetic message: "Thus when Joel 2:18 suddenly announced in the past tense that the LORD 'was jealous,' 'had pity,' 'answered,' and 'said,' we may be sure that the people did repent."<sup>6</sup> Chisholm concurs,

The forms seem better translated with the past tense (cf. *NIV* marg., *NASB* marg., *RSV*) and the text understood as a description of the Lord's turning to His people in Joel's time. This would, of course, imply they had responded positively to the appeal of verses 12-17.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, the following verses (2:19b-27) depict the restoration of blessing to Joel's generation. These are primarily to be found in the agricultural realm, although this included the removal of the threat of the northern army (2:20) and a reversal of the devastation that had been brought by the locusts. If Kaiser is correct that vv 2:18-19a are indeed a realized event in Joel's day, some of the outworking of the following verses may not have been fulfilled with Joel's generation. This idea of a *limited fulfillment* needs to be pointed out, because of the difficulty that arises with the promise, "And I will never again make you a reproach among the nations" (2:19d). Chisholm responds,

Perhaps the best solution to this difficulty is to understand that at least this aspect of the promise is eschatological in its ultimate fulfillment. Joel's prophecy deals with Israel's future apart from the chronological gaps which one sees so readily in retrospect. Consequently prophecies pertaining to his own generation are merged here with those that await future realization. This is common in Old Testament prophecies (e.g., Isa 9:6-7; 61:1-2; Zech 9:9-10).<sup>8</sup>

#### E. Promises of a Glorious Future (2:28–3:21)

<sup>6</sup>Walter Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 91.

<sup>7</sup>Chisholm, 1418.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 1418-19.

Whatever may be said about 2:18-27, it is clear that the remainder of the book finds its fulfillment beyond Joel's day . . . in the eschatological day of the LORD. Perhaps we could say that the deliverance experienced by Joel's generation foreshadowed that of the end times.

<b>PROMISES OF A GLORIOUS FUTURE (2:28–3:21)</b>					
<i>Spiritual Renewal and Deliverance</i>		<i>The Judgment of the Nations</i>		<i>Israel's Ultimate Restoration</i>	
		Judgment is Announced	A Call to War: Judgment Described		
		3:1-8	3:9-16		
2:28	2:32	3:1	3:16	3:17	3:21

1. Spiritual Renewal and Deliverance (2:28-32)

Comments on these verses will be reserved for later in this paper, when they will be examined in light of Acts 2:17ff. Their ultimate fulfillment will be in conjunction with the eschatological "day of the LORD."

2. The Judgment of the Nations (3:1-16)

Joel 3:1 speaks of the time "when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem." This will be the period of restoration that fulfills Deut 30:1ff. In conjunction with these events, the LORD will punish those nations that had come against His covenant people (cf. Zech 12—14). This is in keeping with the promise of retribution in Gen 12:1-3 for those who curse Israel.

Judgment for these hostile nations is announced in 3:1-8 and there is a call to war in 3:9-16 in which the judgment will take place. Jehoshaphat may or may not indicate an actual place, since the name means "the LORD judges." The ultimate fulfillment of these verses will take place at Armageddon in the Great Tribulation (not the judgment of Gentiles in Matt 25:31-46).

3. Israel's Ultimate Restoration (3:17-21)

This divine deliverance will be marked by the divine presence of the Lord, as He will dwell in Zion his holy mountain (3:17). This correlates with Zech 14:1ff, in which "His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" (Zech 14:4). Zech 14:9 goes on to say, "And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one." This involves the literal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth at His Second Coming and in the Millennial Kingdom. His blessings on Judah depicted as mountains dripping sweet wine will be abundant in that day (cf. Amos 9:13). Joel's book ends with this glorious message: "The LORD dwells in Zion."

## V. THE USE OF JOEL 2:28-32 IN ACTS 2:17-21

### A. Orientation

### The Historical Context

The phrase "after this" in Joel 2:28 is "intended to show that the promises of verses 28-32 would come after those immediate and material blessings promised in verses 19-27."<sup>9</sup> The verses 2:28-32 find their ultimate fulfillment in the end times as Kaiser notes:

One might fairly conclude that the second blessing (vvs. 28-32) was more intimately tied to God's distant future work, because verses 29 and 31 used the formulae of the Day of the Lord and the passage was so closely joined to the eschatological events of the last chapter of Joel where God would regather Judah and judge all the nations of the earth for scattering Israel and partitioning her land (3:1-8).<sup>10</sup>

### Structure and Comments on the Original Text

The structure of the passage is established by the Hebrew verbs, and falls into three subunits: 28-29, 30-31, and 32.

1. Joel 2:28-29

The unique event of these verses is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The *NASB* translates 28b as "on all mankind." Literally, this is "on all flesh." Chisholm contends that the following context indicates that this refers more specifically to all inhabitants of Judah.<sup>11</sup> Kaiser, however, argues that the phrase even in this context goes beyond Judah, so as to include Gentiles.<sup>12</sup> He bases this on the fact that (1) in 23 of 32 instances of this phrase outside Joel, this refers to Gentiles alone and (2) the phrase "even on the male and female servants" would probably mean Gentile servants of Israelites. In either case, the main point is that the Spirit's outpouring will not simply be on the priests or prophets but on all classes of people.

2. Joel 2:30-31

In these verses, we are given ominous signs that will precede the Spirit's outpouring . . . the disruption of natural elements (cf. Isa 13:10; 24:23; Ez 32:7-8; Mt 24:29; Lk 21:25; Rev 6:12; 8:12).

3. Joel 2:32

Despite the terrible judgments of this period, there is hope. God promises that "whoever will call upon the LORD will be delivered." There will be an "escape" for some. Salvation in the Old Testament often means "deliverance." Probably this verse includes the idea that those who call upon the LORD (=turning to Him in faith) will escape destruction. This passage needs to be correlated with Zech 12—14. In Zech 12:10 there is a gracious work of God's Spirit that prompts many to turn to the Lord in faith. In ch. 14, the Lord personally returns to deliver His people from destruction. Even though this "salvation" may be a physical deliverance, it is also a spiritual salvation since it involves those who placed their trust in the Lord. The final phrase speaks of "the survivors whom the LORD calls." This is a reference to the believing remnant within Israel, and should

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<sup>9</sup>Kaiser, 92-3.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>11</sup>Chisholm, 1420.

<sup>12</sup>Kaiser, 96-7.

be equated with the group in 2:28 and 2:32a. [For further comments on the New Testament application, see point "C" below].

## B. The Use in Acts 2:17ff.

### 1. The General Context

The context for these verses is the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was sent to baptize those who believed. The Jewish disciples spoke in tongues when this happened as an evidence that the Holy Spirit indeed had come and baptized them into Christ. As the astonished crowds gathered, Peter gave an explanation of the phenomenon. Then he quoted Joel 2:28-32, and even indicated that there was a fulfillment at that very moment: "this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel." By quoting this, it is easy to see the correlation to the Spirit, but he also quotes the ominous signs in nature. These, however, were not part of the day of Pentecost. Was Peter then using Joel as an illustration or did he truly mean to indicate a fulfillment of the prophecy? The fact that he says "this is that" (Acts 2:16) argues that Peter saw a true fulfillment. However, all the details of the prophecy were not fulfilled at that time, nor did it represent the eschatological deliverance of Israel as the context of Joel stresses. The tension may be resolved by making a distinction between a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and the ultimate fulfillment. A closer examination of the situation in the opening chapters of Acts will help us see why Peter quoted Joel.

### 2. The Apostolic Expectations in Early Acts

How did the apostles view this unusual manifestation of the Spirit in relation to the eschatological expectations for Israel? Did they think the Kingdom was near? This does seem to be the case. Notice that even in Acts 1:6 (after the Lord's earthly ministry) they still have the expectation of a future fulfillment of the Kingdom with Israel: "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" The Lord's answer, however, left the question open. Peter also has the expectation that a true repentance by the nation will result in the Lord's return and the establishment of the Kingdom blessings.

*"Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (Acts 3:19-21).*

Keep in mind that the apostles were not aware at this time that God was going to bring in a great Gentile harvest (cf. Acts 10—11). The period of restoration spoken of by the ancient prophets (cf. Acts 3:24) was the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom in its fullness and the blessings that would attend the Lord's advent. Peter sees the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom as potentially realizable at this time. In other words, the Kingdom was still being offered to the nation in Acts 1—3, contingent upon a sufficient repentance and turning in faith to Jesus. Although many Israelites at that time did repent, this did not qualify as a thoroughgoing repentance (in fulfillment of Deut 30) primarily because the religious leaders did not repent.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Joel's Prophecy Fulfilled in Acts 2?

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<sup>13</sup>See Chisholm's discussion in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary (OT)*, 1421.

Peter was well aware that Joel's prophecy pertained to the *last days*, for he states this in Acts 2:17. But from his vantage point, the last days were upon them, the time of judgment was imminent ("Be saved from this perverse generation!" - Acts 2:40), and their only hope was to repent and turn to Jesus. The possibility of the full completion of Joel's prophecy and all the OT expectations of the end time was potentially realizable on the Day of Pentecost. Obviously, from God's perspective, He knew how the nation was going to respond and that the ultimate fulfillment would not come at that time. Also remember that the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church was still a mystery at this point (Eph 3:1-6). But the point is that the details of the eschatological fulfillment of the OT predictions were *beginning to be fulfilled* at Pentecost. They were interrupted by the nation's failure to sufficiently repent. Thus, Peter was quite right to quote Joel, for Joel 2:28 was indeed beginning to be fulfilled. From Peter's perspective, the aspect of the ominous heavenly signs might also have been possible in that general period if the nation had fulfilled their part. Hence, the outcome was a partial fulfillment of Joel, not an ultimate fulfillment. Acts 2 was a valid stage in the progressive fulfillment of the whole, and the events of the Day of Pentecost were indeed an incentive to call upon the name of the Lord. Kaiser similarly concludes, ". . . the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days has received a preliminary fulfillment in the series of events at Pentecost, Samaria, and Caesarea."<sup>14</sup>

### C. Paul's Use of Joel in Romans 10:13

In the original context of Joel, the admonition to call upon the name of the Lord was directed at Israel. Paul, however, relates this verse to Gentiles in Rom 10:13. Was he reinterpreting Joel? Not really. Remember that Paul was writing Romans long after Pentecost and after the fact had been established that the Gentiles were also being baptized with the Spirit in addition to the believing Jewish remnant. He was also clear that the Gentiles were also partaking of the benefits of the New Covenant. What became clear in the progress of events in Acts was that this promise of Joel ("calling upon the Lord so as to be saved") had a broader application than just the Jewish remnant. Since the Gentiles obviously partook of the Spirit, this promise also applied to them. They are thus saved spiritually (spiritual salvation was an aspect that was true in the Joel context as well).

### A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

As Christians, we are often in need of going to the Lord in repentance. The sober fact is that all of us sin at one time or another. When we do, the right thing to do is to confess our sin and repent before the Lord. We must remember, however, that there is such a thing as "false repentance." False repentance occurs when we go through a few mechanical motions, but there is no real change of heart. In Joel 2:12-13, the Lord beckons His people, "Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments." Notice that "true repentance" is first a return to the Lord Himself. Secondly, it must be whole-hearted. Thirdly, outward tokens (such as tearing one's clothing) are not sufficient—especially if one's heart is not broken over his sin. I notice in this passage that the word "heart" occurs twice, and that repetition underscores the most important thing about repentance—it must really come from our heart! If we don't really deal with repentance at the level of our heart, then our heart will not be totally set upon the Lord. Coldness of heart can then set in.

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<sup>14</sup>Kaiser, 99.