

H.L. Rossier

Comments on the book of the Prophet Joel

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Introduction

Joel is exclusively a prophet of Judah and Jerusalem, differing in this respect from Hosea, who, whilst not excluding Judah from the scope of his vision, prophesied concerning Israel. The final chapter of our prophet provides us with proof of this. Here we find the restoration of the ‘captives of Judah and Jerusalem’ (v. 1), the sons of Judah and Jerusalem sold to foreigners (v. 6), and their revenge (v. 8); the definitive repopulation of Judah and Jerusalem (v. 20). Throughout, the prophet emphasises the future blessings granted to Jerusalem (2:32; 3:16, 17, 18, 19, 20); throughout he mentions the temple, the house of the Lord (1:9, 13, 14, 16; 2:17) and Mount Zion (2:1, 15, 23, 32; 3:17). Such, then, is the distinctive character of this book.

This is all the more remarkable given that, in Joel, the most prominent enemy is the Assyrian, whose invasion and final destruction fill the entire second chapter of our prophet (*). Yet the historical Assyrian is the enemy of the ten tribes and the agent of their ruin and definitive dispersion. In relation to Judah, or rather Jerusalem (see the story of Hezekiah), he plays

the role of a defeated enemy and fails to capture the city, whereas the great enemy of Jerusalem and the agent of its ruin is Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (see Jeremiah). Yet Babylon is entirely ignored in our prophet. We must conclude that the Assyrian of Joel has no immediate connection with the historical Assyrian and his successive invasions, with that Assyrian whose attacks, in his decline, fill the history of the ten tribes and the prophecy of Hosea. Joel therefore concerns us with a prophetic Assyrian of whom the historical Assyrian—who, moreover, seems to have been still a future enemy in Joel's time—is but a pale reflection. Gog, the prophetic Assyrian, will no doubt occupy the same territories as the Assyrian of old, but his domain will be infinitely more extensive, for this great and formidable enemy of the end will unite under his sceptre almost all the nations of Asia, and it is to him, to Gog, that the numerous prophecies which speak to us of the historical Assyrian constantly refer us. Since, therefore, the prophet Joel deals exclusively with Judah and Jerusalem, the focus of his prophecy presents the Assyrian as the future enemy of Jeru-

salem. Let us add, however, that in chapter 3, all nations are included with him in the final judgement of the peoples.

(*) ‘The whole chapter’, according to the Hebrew Bible, where chapter 3 begins at verse 28 of chapter 2 in our standard versions.

To this second remark is linked a third: a particular fact distinguishes Joel from all the other prophets. Dealing only with a future enemy, he assigns no historical date to his prophecy.

Indeed, we find in it neither mention of the kings under whose reign Joel prophesies, as is seen in most of the prophets; nor even allusions to certain landmark events in history, as in Ezekiel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Malachi. In this respect, Joel stands alone among all the seers. We do not know when the calamity, memorable though it was, of which the first chapter tells us, took place. The famous earthquake, another event, belonging, like this one, to the realm of natural phenomena, is dated to the days of Uzziah (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5); but the successive invasions of locusts in such quick succession, and the famine that accompanied them, are not men-

tioned anywhere. It has been claimed that these plagues were symbols of the four Assyrian invasions of the territory of Israel, invasions which the prophet is said to have witnessed. Nothing is less certain, and we have no hesitation in saying that, if this were the case, the character of Joel's prophecy would be seriously distorted. The prophet sees the judgement he announces unfolding in the distant future. His visionary gaze turns from an unprecedented yet natural calamity—one that brings to mind the Day of the Lord—to events still long hidden behind the veil of the future, of which this calamity is a foreshadowing. He draws back the veil; he brings present events closer to those of the end, but he leaps, so to speak, over the judgments of Israel by the Assyrians—probably still in the future in his own time, yet on the verge of occurring—over the manifold ways of God in the governance of his people, ways described in great detail by the prophet Hosea; to arrive, in a single leap, right at the very end of time, at the great day of the Lord.

Indeed (and this is our fourth point), the entire prophecy of Joel is confined to the Day of the Lord and could even bear that title. We shall have the opportunity to return to this subject in

detail in the course of this study. It suffices to note here that the Day of the Lord is a day of manifest and manifold judgements, judgements without which access to the millennial blessings could not be opened. These manifest judgements are preceded by providential judgements which, whilst not being the Day of the Lord, give a foretaste of it. Such is Chapter 1 of our prophet's book, and such too is the sequence of events the world is currently experiencing as we write these lines. The purpose of all the end-time judgements is:

1. To glorify the name of God, which has been dishonoured by the conduct of men, and here in particular of Israel, His earthly people.
2. To humble the pride of the nations that rise up against Him (Obadiah 15; Isaiah 2:12–19), and to teach righteousness to the 'inhabitants of the world' (Isaiah 26:9). Therefore, this day is terrible for those who have sinned against the Lord (Zeph. 1:14–18). It is a day of destruction (Isa. 13:6–9), of vengeance (Isa. 61:2; 63:4; Jeremiah 46:10), of wrath (Zeph. 2:2), of darkness (Amos 5:20). These final judge-

ments are carried out by the Lord himself; that is why this day is called the day of the Lord. Now it is Christ who is the Lord, for God ‘has set a day on which he will judge the inhabited earth in righteousness, by the man he has appointed for this purpose, of which he has given a certain proof to all, having raised him from the dead’ (Acts 17:31). — These judgements affect the whole inhabited earth (Rev. 3:10), as we see throughout the Book of Revelation; however, when we turn to the prophet Joel, we immediately observe that, in this prophet, they do not extend beyond the very limited circle of Judah and Jerusalem, and remain within the same framework as chapters 12 to 14 of the prophet Zechariah (*).

(* See the book of Zechariah the Prophet, by H. Rossier

3° Let us not forget, however, that the Lord’s counsel is never limited to His judgments and always goes beyond them. The third purpose of God’s judgments on the last day is to deliver His earthly people, Israel, who can only be freed in this way from the yoke of the nations that trample them underfoot. The terrible day of the Lord will ultimately result

in bringing those who have endured the judgements into the enjoyment of the blessings of Christ's millennial reign. The situation is not quite the same in the New Testament. We may note in the Second Epistle of Peter, which deals specifically with this subject in chapter 3:10–13, that 'the day of the Lord' (identical to 'the day of the Lord') extends beyond the millennial reign and leads us to the dissolution of all things, something the Old Testament never does. In this Second Epistle of Peter, the millennium is not counted as part of the Day of the Lord; one is free to insert it there, so to speak, as a parenthesis, after which the Day of the Lord resumes its course, and then 'the earth and the works that are in it' are completely burned up, to make way for the 'Day of God', the new heavens and the new earth, 'in which righteousness dwells' (2 Peter 3:10–13). It is therefore with the coming of the day of God that the day of the Lord comes to an end in the New Testament, whereas in the Old Testament the day of the Lord ends at the millennium. The prophetic vision of the Old Testament never extends to the day of God; and eternity there does not go bey-

and Christ's millennial reign on earth, called an eternal reign, for the simple reason that it is the Lord who reigns.

Joel shows us, albeit in a very limited way, the three purposes of God's judgements of which we have just spoken. The Assyrian alone is there as God's rod against Judah and Jerusalem, who have dishonoured the Lord. When His purpose is fulfilled, God destroys this enemy, because the axe had exalted itself against the One who wielded it (Isaiah 10:15), and at the same time judges all the nations that have risen up against Jerusalem (Joel 3). The people finally enter into the final blessing through the path of repentance.

CHAPTER 1

The vanguard of the day of the Lord, or the invasion of the locusts

Whilst the prophecy of Hosea (*) is entirely linked to the circumstances of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah—circumstances which the prophet lived through and to which he often refers—the prophecy of Joel is entirely independent of all

these historical events. A memorable event, in the realm of natural disasters, befalling the land of Judah, took place before the prophet's very eyes. Joel regards it as a judgement upon his people, but also as a solemn warning to repent. Chapter 24 of Isaiah bears a strong resemblance to this first chapter. In both cases, it concerns the desolation of the land and the destruction of its prosperity, due to the sin of its inhabitants. This is true, at all times, of all the calamities that strike the world, in the order of natural phenomena: volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, epidemics, devastation by plant or animal pests, and with what frequency and intensity have they not recurred in the years in which we live! God acts through these plagues to reach the consciences of men; and when they refuse to listen, He acts through more terrible calamities, through wars, devastation and plunder, examples of which we find in chapter 2 of our prophet. God has therefore spoken first to His earthly people, then to His Church, and then to the world through these means; and if men do not listen and do not return to Him, they themselves, through their unbelief, seal their final judgement. It is very important to open our eyes to the purpose of these

providential calamities. Had Judah and Jerusalem repented in the face of the locust invasion, God would not have needed to send the enemy into their borders again. Likewise, if the Christian nations had heeded the warnings God gave them through the unprecedented upheavals that have ravaged them in recent years, perhaps ‘His wrath would have turned away and His hand would no longer be stretched out’. Instead, the world has persisted in unbelief amidst so many disasters, refusing to see the hand of God in them, and today we are witnessing the enemy’s invasions, wars and massacres, which are, alas! but the prelude to the days of distress when men will say to the mountains and the rocks: ‘Fall on us!’ (Rev. 6:16).

(*) See the book of the prophet Hosea, by H. R.

The calamity described in the first chapter consists of successive invasions—unprecedented in a country nevertheless accustomed to such plagues—of various species of locusts. ‘What the caterpillar* left, the grasshopper** ate; and what the grasshopper left, the yelek*** ate; and what the yelek left, the locust**** ate’ (v. 4).

- * Gazam, that is to say, a cricket, a young grasshopper without wings.
- ** Arbèh, a winged grasshopper that has reached full maturity.
- *** Yélek, another species of grasshopper.
- **** Chasil, a third species of grasshopper; the first two, as we have said, being the same insect at two stages of development.

God had once sent locusts (arbèh), one of the plagues of Egypt, upon Pharaoh's land, because the king refused to humble himself before God (Exodus 10:3–4). Moses said to him: 'You will see "what neither your fathers nor your fathers' fathers have seen, from the day they came upon the earth until this day"' (Exodus 10:6). Here, God sends them, in almost the same words, upon the land of Judah, likening it, so to speak, to the land of Egypt, from which He had once brought His people out: 'Has this ever happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell it to your sons, and your sons to their sons, and their sons to another generation' (vv. 2, 3). This plague was even more extraordinary than that of Egypt, in that swarms of locusts, of various kinds, had successively, year after year, des-

cended upon the land. Of the nine species of locusts mentioned in Scripture, four—the most calamitous of all—are mentioned here. They are therefore a special and terrible judgement upon Israel, for there is no mistaking it: they are by no means a mere occasional plague. But, let us note well, this judgement does not exclude the possibility of repentance, according to what the Lord had said to Solomon: ‘If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, and if I command the locust (chagab) to devour the land... and if my people, who are called by my name, humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land’ (2 Chron. 7:13, 14). Does this repentance take place in the case before us? Amos, the prophet of Israel, had observed the futility of all God’s providential judgments concerning the ten tribes: ‘The locust (gazam) has devoured the abundance of your gardens, your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees; yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord’ (Amos 4:9). And, in Amos, this painful phrase is repeated from verse to verse, with every new calamity. Then the Lord “brought forth locusts (gob), just as

the spring growth was beginning to sprout; and behold, it was the spring growth after the king's harvest. And it came to pass, when they had completely devoured the grass of the land, that I said: 'O Lord God, please forgive!'" (Amos 7:1, 2). The Lord answered him graciously: 'It shall not be' (v. 3). We see here that the intercession of the man of God, all by himself, halted the complete destruction of the people. Likewise, the future of Israel will depend on the intercession of one man, Christ, whom the prophet Amos represents, and nothing less than the grace of God will be required for the plague to disappear; yet, as we shall see in the prophet Joel, this will not happen unless that grace has produced repentance in the hearts of God's people. It was otherwise with the Pharaoh of Egypt: the east wind had brought the army of locusts; at Moses' intercession, the west wind swept them away and drowned them in the Red Sea. But the humiliation in the hardened king's heart was merely outward and had no root in his conscience. Although he had said, 'I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you; and now, I pray, forgive my sin just this once'; he was determined not to let the Israelites go (Exodus 10:12–20). Yet is it

not remarkable that, even in this instance, a single outward and superficial display of repentance should, at least momentarily, stay the hand of the Lord? He knows full well the state of Pharaoh's heart, and his most secret dispositions cannot escape Him; yet He is a God of patience and grace who delights in recognising the slightest inclination of the sinner towards good, in order to open the way for him to true and sincere repentance. God's manifold ways towards His people tend to produce this result in the conscience of all, so that He may bless them. Hence the often inexorable appearance of His judgements.

The prophet's first word shows us this appeal to the conscience: 'Listen!' (v. 2); the second: 'Awake!' (v. 5). It is God who speaks; let him who has ears listen. When calamities befall the world, souls must recognise in them a call from God, and those who lie in darkness (1 Thess. 5:7) must wake up. Once they are awakened, even the most hardened cannot help but weep and feel the sharpness of the pain: 'Wail,' says the prophet, 'all you wine drinkers.' 'Wail, you vine-growers.' 'Wail, you who minister at the altar' (vv. 5, 11, 13).

But the most piercing cry of pain is still far from being repentance. To bring it about, God sends a second cause of affliction, on which the prophet insists—a loss more terrible than that of the harvests, and which is its consequence—a loss intended to strike deep into the people’s conscience. This cause of affliction is that they have lost the Lord and can no longer draw near to Him. ‘Wail,’ says the prophet, ‘like a virgin girded with sackcloth, for the husband of her youth’ (v. 8). Poor people! Weep for your husband; the Lord is dead to you; you shall never see Him again! There is no longer any way to present the grain offering (see Lev. 2) and its libation in the house of the Lord, for the wheat and the vine are devoured, the fruit trees bear no fruit, the fig tree is gnawed down to the bark, the produce of the fields is lost (vv. 9, 13, 16). Can one come before the Lord empty-handed, without bringing him the homage due to him? A priesthood that has nothing left to offer is useless. God hides his face: ‘joy has dried up from among the sons of men’ (v. 12). They no longer even have the comfort of rejoicing in the produce of the earth, a blessing which man has preferred above all others since Cain was driven from God’s presence,

for behold, God is taking away all adornment, all refreshment, all sustenance of life! In these days of mourning, shame and sorrow, all hope of finding any consolation in the presence of the God whom they have so often despised must be completely abandoned. What remains for man? One thing only: repentance; and it is to this, as we have said, that all God's ways towards him tend. If, as we noted in Amos, the grace and mediation of Christ are the only recourse, repentance is here for the people the only means of benefiting from that grace. Therefore God causes Judah and Jerusalem to say, through his prophet: 'Proclaim a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the elders, all the inhabitants of the land, to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord!' (v. 14.) Last, only recourse! Let them call upon the God they have offended! Let them call upon Him from the depths! But who will survive, if He takes note of their iniquities? And yet, perhaps there will be forgiveness from Him? What is needed above all is to 'declare a fast'. The people must express before God the sorrow of sin that compels the Lord to resort to such extreme severity. Judah, and all the

people, must mourn with sincere and universal repentance. A faint, yet only hope!

Before they have even been able to respond to this urgent call, a new calamity is added to the first (vv. 15–20). A scorching heat, or perhaps the fire that accompanies it, destroys the ‘pastures of the wilderness’, the usual source of food for both large and small livestock. The streams have dried up under the influence of the drought. The desert’s fodder reserves (here referring to certain uninhabited parts of the territory of Judah, well known to David in his flight) were inexhaustible for the flocks in years of plenty. Famine is falling upon all, both man and beast. This dire situation gives rise to thoughts of the Day of the Lord: ‘Alas, what a day! For the Day of the Lord is near, and it will come like a destruction from the Almighty.’ The terror of a general and final upheaval seizes the hearts. Our present generation has the same foreboding in the face of the upheavals that are shaking it, and this is also what men will feel, long before the final judgements, when the Lord opens the sixth seal and a general upheaval comes to rouse them. Then they will say: ‘The great day of his wrath has come, and who

can stand?’ (Rev. 6:17). And yet they will be mistaken, for this will be but the beginning of sorrows and not yet the coming of the day. We shall witness this coming in chapters 2 and 3 of our prophet (*).

(*) Let us not forget that even this scene of desolation, affecting creation, will have passed away when Israel is reconciled with the Lord. Then it will be said: ‘You have visited the earth, you have watered it, you have made it abundantly rich: the stream of God is full of water... your paths drip with fatness. They drip upon the pastures of the wilderness; the meadows are clothed with flocks’ (Ps. 65:9–13).

Fasting is proclaimed, the terror of the day of the Lord is deeply felt; but it is still necessary, as we have already noted in Amos, for a messenger, a mediator, one among a thousand, to come forward, like Elihu to Job, and say: ‘Deliver him!’ (Job 33:23, 24). This mediator is found. A single man who is here, in Amos, in Jeremiah, the prophet himself, as a type of Christ, stands before God on behalf of the people: ‘To you, O Lord, I will cry out!’ (v. 19). Is there a more absolute condemnation of mankind? When they were told, ‘Cry out to the Lord!’ (v. 14),

only one responds: ‘To you, O Lord, I will cry out!’ But that is enough for God: a single righteous man is found in the midst of this perverse generation, a single one upon whom his eyes rest. We therefore find two things, indispensable for deliverance, brought together in this first chapter: repentance and the grace that can respond to it because it rests entirely on Christ, on the person of the Righteous One before God.

CHAPTER 2: 1–27

The Day of the Lord or the Assyrian Invasion

Faced with the locust invasions, so disastrous that men are compelled to recognise them as a judgement from God; faced with the solemn circumstances accompanying them, such as the interruption of priestly duties and the people’s relationship with God; and finally, faced with the terrible famine, men cry out: ‘Alas! What a day! For the day of the Lord is near!’ — But all these events, of which Joel is a witness, open up a distant scene before his visionary eyes. He sees in these evils a picture

of things to come, a symbol of the calamities that will accompany the day of the Lord. Should it not be so today, as we witness the upheavals taking place across the world?

The prophecy of Joel, so different from that of Isaiah and Hosea—as we noted in the Introduction—is careful to remain completely silent on historical events. We are therefore not permitted to introduce them here, as we do with the other prophets. The plague of locusts, whenever it may have occurred, is the starting point; the attack of the prophetic Assyrian against Judah and Jerusalem, in chapter 2, is its symbolic application. The prophet Isaiah continually directs our gaze from Sennacherib, the historical Assyrian, to the Assyrian of the end times, and uses the character and fate of the one to predict the character and fate of the other; the prophet Joel makes absolutely no mention of the former. For him, the Assyrian invasion of the end times in the land of Judah is a characteristic feature of the ‘day of the Lord, great and dreadful’. The events of chapter 1 suggest this, but are merely a faint foreshadowing of it.

The Assyrians therefore play a pivotal role in the events that will precede the establishment of Christ’s millennial reign, as described at the end of our chapter, vv. 23–27, and in chapter 3, vv. 18–21. Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak here of an Assyrian confederacy whose political leader, the Gog of Ezekiel (chapters 38 and 39), or military leader, the King of the North of Daniel (chapters 8 and 11, 40–45), is referred to in our prophet as: ‘He who comes from the North... who has risen to do great things’ (2:20). This symbolic army of locusts always has a king (see our chapter and Rev. 9:11), whereas, viewed from a non-symbolic perspective, as in chapter 1, it is said: ‘Locusts have no king, yet they all go forth in swarms’ (Prov. 30:27).

We have already dealt with the Assyrian in detail in other writings and do not consider it necessary to return to the subject (*); we shall therefore confine ourselves to a few additional remarks on this terrible enemy of Israel in the last days. Daniel’s King of the North and Ezekiel’s Gog have nothing in common with Babylon, although the prophet Jeremiah often speaks of the armies of the North, the people of the North, and the land

of the North in connection with Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, and also of the Medes and Persians who later conquered Chaldea. Gog, whose original domain gradually extended northwards to the far reaches of Russia and Asia, is the descendant and successor of the historical Assyrian. The Assyrian confederacy of the prophecy encompasses all the territories under Gog's rule. The king of the North rules over Asia Minor, which originally formed part of the historical Assyrian realm but became a separate kingdom under Seleucus, one of Alexander's four successors, and subsequently under the Antiochus dynasty. Without being identical to Gog, the king of the North is identified with him, acts in concert with him, and plays a leading role as the commander of his armies (**). The Assyrian of Isaiah is the historical Assyrian, reappearing in the last days, long after Babylon—which had once subjugated, destroyed, and absorbed his kingdom—has vanished forever. Indeed, Babylon will never be restored, except in symbolic form, to represent, in the Book of Revelation, the corruption of apostate Christendom, which has fallen back into idolatry in the last days. Only one of the four world empires, the Roman Empire,

will be resurrected as such and will be a source of astonishment to the whole world. Under the leadership of Gog, ruler of Russia, the Assyrian confederacy will be the great antagonist of the resurrected Western Roman Empire and its ally, the Antichrist, the false Messiah and false prophet, king of the apostate Jewish people. It is the Assyrian who, in the conflict of the end, will invade Palestine and especially Judea and Jerusalem.

(*) See: *The Prophetic History of the Last Days*, by H. R., pages 23–31. *The Book of Zechariah the Prophet*, by H. R., pages 97, 110.

(**) Many question the military role of the King of the North, but his historical character as king of Asia Minor and commander-in-chief, and his prophetic character, which differs in no way from the former, seem to us to emerge very clearly from a study of chapter 11 of Daniel (vv. 5–19 and vv. 40–45).

The Assyrian confederacy of the last days has Gog as its political leader (Ezek. 32:22–30; 38:1–6). It is of him that the Lord ‘spoke in days of old’, through his servants ‘the prophets of Israel, who in those days, for many years, prophesied’ that the Lord would bring him against them (Ezek. 38:17). Now the

prophets of Israel foretold the Assyrian, which proves that Gog and the Assyrian are the same person (*).

(*) See also concerning the Assyrian: Isa. 5:26–30; 7:18–25; 10:12; 14:24; 18:2; Ezek. 31:12; Micah 5:5; Nahum 3; and on the king of the North: Dan. 8:21–24; 11:40–45; Joel 2:20.

In our chapter, the Assyrian with his armies is compared to the locusts of chapter 1. On a single occasion the Word presents us with a southern enemy under this image, and this fits perfectly with the origin of locusts, coming almost invariably from the South and the East. This is in Judges 6:5, where Midian, Amalek and the sons of the East come against Israel ‘as numerous as locusts’. In all other passages, this image is used to denote the enemy from the North. Thus in Jer. 46:20, 23; 51:14, 27 and in our chapter. The fact that the army of locusts comes from the North therefore confirms the symbolic nature of this invasion.

Let us now examine the details of our chapter:

‘Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound it loudly on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of

the Lord is coming; for it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness: it is like the dawn spreading over the mountains—a people numerous and mighty, such as has never been before, and after which there will be none until the years of generations and generations” (vv. 1, 2).

The thought that the day of the Lord is near, a thought prompted by the calamity that has befallen Judah (1:15), is the starting point for what follows. Joel sees a future army, like swarms of locusts, an image, as we have seen, familiar to prophecy. This army is far more terrible than that of the devastating insects. Of the latter, a plague of unprecedented intensity up to that day, it is said: ‘Has this ever happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?’ (1:2); but of the armies in chapter 2, it is said: ‘A people... such as there never was before, and after which there will be none until the years of generations and generations.’

The alarm has been raised; their approach must be signalled: ‘Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound it loudly on my holy mountain!’ On two occasions the silver trumpets were sounded

loudly in Israel: first for the departure of the camp, and secondly to go to war against the enemy. In the latter case, the loud sounding of the trumpets brought the people to mind before the Lord, and they were delivered from their enemies (Numbers 10:1–9). It is this occasion that is recalled here. The countless army of the Assyrians is invading the land of Judah. How can we stand up to them? Can a handful of men be of any use against this mighty foe? Yet the trumpet sounds loudly in Zion and on the holy mountain: we must gather together. To fight? What madness! Do you not understand that this would be fighting against the Lord? This army, you did not realise, poor blind people, is the army of the Lord! ‘The Lord makes his voice heard before his army’ (v. 11). There is therefore no recourse left! None, except that the Lord is with those who are against you. It is with Him that you are dealing. Sound the trumpet loudly, not to fight an enemy before whom you must inevitably fall, but to bring yourselves to mind before God. To bring yourselves to mind? Is this not to remind Him of our guilt? Undoubtedly, but who knows? There is nothing but vengeance in the Judge’s heart. Perhaps He will lay aside the rod

of His judgement to take an interest in you. ‘With Him is goodness.’ Such is the true meaning of this passage, and the solution to which the Spirit of God wishes to lead His guilty people. Alas! the desired result is still far from being achieved here, and we shall see what is still lacking for the blessing to be poured out upon Judah and Jerusalem, when we consider in v. 15 the second use of the trumpets.

‘Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; for it is near’ (v. 1). Here the day of the Lord is coming. It is no longer, as in chapter 1, verse 15, an anticipation of that day: ‘It is near, and it will come’, but: it is coming, it is near. This is the beginning of that dreadful day of which it is said: ‘A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness: it is like the dawn spreading over the mountains’ (v. 2), not to bring light upon the world, but, on the contrary, darkness, as it is said in Amos 4:13. But this darkness is far from equalling that which will be described to us later (2:30, 31; 3:15); here we have only the first signs of the day of the Lord. The enemy, like an army of locusts, like a thick cloud, obscures the light of day ready to appear. Ezekiel 38:9

says the same, speaking of the Assyrian: ‘You will come up, you will come like a storm, you will be like a cloud to cover the land, you and all your bands, and many peoples with you.’ If the foretaste of the Day of the Lord was given by the plague of chapter 1, the coming of that day is linked to the future invasion of the Assyrian.

Wherever this army has passed, the land, once like the Garden of Eden, as in the days when Lot gazed upon the Jordan Valley, lies utterly devastated: ‘Before him a fire devours, and a flame burns in his wake; before him the land is like the Garden of Eden, and in his wake, the desolation of a wilderness; and nothing escapes him.’ This is an allusion to the second part of the calamities in chapter 1 (vv. 19, 20). Then comes the description of this army: ‘Their appearance is like that of horses, and they run like horsemen. They leap: ... it is like the sound of chariots on the mountain tops, like the sound of a flame of fire devouring stubble, like a mighty people arrayed for battle’ (vv. 4, 5). The prophet witnessed the invasion of locusts and borrows imagery from it. All who have witnessed such invasions describe them in the same way. One observer says: ‘This

immense army, at rest, made a peculiar sound as it fed. We could hear this sound before reaching the main body of the army.’ Another said: ‘It is difficult to express the effect upon us of the sight of the entire atmosphere, filled on all sides and to a great height, with an innumerable quantity of these insects, whose flight was slow and uniform, and whose sound resembled that of rain; the sky was obscured, and the sunlight considerably dimmed ...’ Another said again: ‘Gathered into a compact body and forming vast battalions, and, following a straight course, keeping their ranks like men of war, they scaled the trees, the walls and the houses and destroyed all the greenery they encountered along the way. Moreover, they entered every house and every bedroom like thieves.’

But here, the description of the enemy goes beyond the phenomenon: ‘It is like the sound of chariots on the mountain tops... like a mighty people arrayed for battle... they rush through the arrows and are not wounded... they spread throughout the city’ (vv. 5–9). It is ‘the army of the Lord’, ‘the mighty executor of his word’. In v. 1, the day is coming, for it is near, at the moment when the trumpet sounds resoundingly; now:

‘The day of the Lord is great and exceedingly terrible; and who can endure it?’ (v. 11). In chapter 3:14, we see it again ‘near in the valley of judgment’.

Does the people of Jerusalem heed the resounding sound of the trumpet? Alas! In that future time they will hear it no more than in days of old. All the prophets inform us of this. Jerusalem, trusting in its alliance with the Roman Empire and the Anti-christ, will boast of having made ‘a covenant with death, and... a pact with Sheol’. She will say: ‘If the sweeping plague passes by, it will not reach us’ (Isaiah 28:15). The enemy takes her by surprise; the city is in his power. Note that this concerns only the city, Jerusalem, and its wall. It is there, in fact, that this whole scene from Joel takes place; it is in Zion that the trumpet is to be sounded with a loud blast. The army scales the wall, spreads through the city, climbs into the houses, and enters through the windows. Jerusalem is here in contrast to the other cities of the land of Israel. In Ezekiel, this same enemy, Gog, says: ‘I will go up against a land of unwalled towns; I will come against those who are at ease, who dwell securely, all of whom dwell in open settlements, having neither bars nor gates,

to take plunder and to pillage... ..against a people gathered from the nations, who... dwell in the heart of the land’ (Ezek. 38:11–22). Furthermore, Zech. 14:2 tells us that Jerusalem will be besieged and that the city (this word is repeated three times; see also Luke 24:49) will be taken by this same enemy. Finally, Isaiah tells us that the city will not be spared from ‘the flood of destruction’, that is, the Assyrian, but that, when deliverance comes, they will no longer rely on ‘the scribe’ and ‘the one who counts the towers’ (Isaiah 28:14–21; 33:18). We see, therefore, that in contrast to ‘the open cities’, Jerusalem, the capital and centre of resistance against the enemy from the North, will be fortified. But the prophet goes further, and his language clearly shows us that the army of locusts is but a pale image of the future invasion by the Assyrians. ‘Before them the earth trembles, the heavens are shaken, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their splendour’ (v. 10). For ‘the Lord makes his voice heard before his army, for his camp is very great, for the executor of his word is mighty; because the day of the Lord is great and exceedingly terrible; and who can endure it?’ It is no longer, as at the beginning of the

chapter, the day that is coming, but now it is here. The question arises once more: What is to be done? Chapter 17:30–31 of Acts gives us the answer: ‘God... now commands all people everywhere to repent; for he has set a day on which he will judge the inhabited earth in righteousness, by the man he has appointed for this purpose, of whom he has given certain proof to all, having raised him from the dead.’ Repentance in the face of judgement is therefore the only thing necessary for mankind; and this is what we also find in our prophet. There is, even now, he says, room for repentance: ‘Thus says the Lord: “Even now, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning; rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents from the disaster he has threatened” (vv. 12, 13). He calls the people to this, as it is said in Hosea 6:1: ‘Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us to pieces, and he will heal us; he has struck us, and he will bind up our wounds’, or in James 4:9: “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before

the Lord, and he will lift you up.’ ‘Who knows? He may turn and have compassion, and leave behind a blessing, an offering and a drink-offering to the Lord your God’ (2:14). The grain offering and the drink offering had disappeared from the house of the Lord, whilst His preliminary judgments were falling upon the people (1:9, 13). Perhaps they will now find them again if they repent. We learn, in fact (Isa. 66:20; see also 18:7), that this will be the case at the end of time when the Remnant of Israel has returned to the Lord: It will be as though the sons of Israel were ‘bringing the offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord.’ Then the offering and the libation will be the believing Remnant itself, offered to God as belonging to Him and for Him. Yet this repentance, to be effective, must be genuine and not merely outward: ‘Rend your hearts and not your garments’ (v. 13; see also Zech. 12:10–14).

Thus all parts of the prophecy agree to show us that the future blessing of the Jews will depend on their return, with true humility, to the God whom they have offended. The first blast of the trumpet, with its piercing sound, to bring the people to mind before God, when the Assyrian and his army, the rod of

the Lord, were descending upon Jerusalem, had gone unheeded (2:1), and this hardening of heart had resulted, as we have just seen, the capture of the city by the king of the North, which Zechariah describes so vividly, and of which this chapter tells us (*). After this disaster, will the faithful heed the call that the God of grace addresses to their consciences? He says to them: ‘Return to the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents from the disaster he has threatened’ (v. 13). Here He takes the titles revealed to Moses in Exodus 34:6, 7, for we must not forget that the people—that is, the faithful of the future Remnant of Israel—will still be under the covenant of the law. But the prophet adds here: ‘He relents from the disaster he has threatened’. At the slightest sign of repentance, the Lord relents, repents, and changes His mind regarding this legal contract to which both parties are bound. The new covenant—this unilateral covenant, dependent solely on God’s grace towards His people—will only come into being when the Spirit of God has produced true repentance in the heart of Israel.

(*) See the ‘Book of Zechariah the Prophet’ and ‘The Prophetic History of the Last Days’, pages 31–39.

Verses 15–17 are the response to the invitation in verses 12–14. Under pressure from the enemy who has invaded Jerusalem, the urgent call to humble oneself is heeded. It took nothing less than this final calamity to finally reach the consciousness of the elect. ‘Blow the trumpet in Zion, proclaim a fast, call a solemn assembly.’ Here the trumpet no longer sounds loudly, for the aim is not to confront the enemy pressing in on the people in their own land, but to gather the congregation. ‘When the congregation is assembled,’ it is said, ‘you shall sound the trumpets, but not with a loud blast. The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall sound the trumpets’ (Numbers 10:7, 8). This gathering does not yet have the character of what the millennial gathering will be, the ‘great congregation’, of which it is said: ‘On your days of rejoicing, and on your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over your peace offerings, and they shall be a memorial for you before your God’ (Numbers 10:10) — but it precedes the final gathering, which cannot take place

without it. It is a gathering of a few, of the believing Remnant in Jerusalem, in solemn fasting, humiliation and tears.

Is it not the same for the faithful today? National humiliation finds no more real resonance today amongst populations struck by unprecedented disasters than it did in Judah, called to ‘set apart a young man’ during the plague of locusts (1:14); but repentance is the lot of a few whom the Lord has sealed and who ‘sigh and groan’ in the midst of a rebellious world. This is a genuine repentance, not an outward one; a repentance in which the faithful among the people rend their hearts and not their garments (v. 13). The ruin of the Church, the final judgement upon Christendom, and the humiliation of having contributed to this state of affairs and of having dishonoured the name of Christ, produce repentance in the hearts of a small number who, in this spirit, represent the Assembly. The poor, humiliated Remnant of Jerusalem and Judah will form the future people and become the nucleus of the millennial earthly Israel, just as today’s Christian Remnant is the representative of the great heavenly assembly. However, the humiliation of Jerusalem differs from ours in more than one respect. Firstly, it is

brought about, not by the announcement of future judgements, but by the great and dreadful day of the Lord which these faithful will endure alongside the apostate people, whereas ours takes place before the ‘coming wrath’. Secondly, the scene unfolds with the realisation that the people’s relationship with God is severed, whereas for us, although sin interrupts our fellowship with God, it never severs our relationship with Him, which is based on the finished work of Christ.

How solemn this future scene will be: ‘Gather the people together, consecrate the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those who suckle ...; let the bridegroom come out of his chamber, and the bride out of her bridal chamber!’ (v. 16). All classes of the population are called to repentance; even nursing infants must bear the burden of the people’s guilt; from the greatest to the least, no one is exempt from condemnation. The most intimate joys of family life are set aside to come and observe the fast. All civil and religious authorities take part: ‘Let the priests, the servants of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar.’ They do not even dare to stand before the altar. Have they not rejected, and then crucified, the Lamb of

God, the only one who could reconcile them with the Lord? They say: ‘Spare your people, O Lord, and do not deliver your inheritance to reproach, lest they become a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples: “Where is their God?”’ We see here that, despite everything, and at a time when they are still under the sentence of Lo-Ammi (not my people), they persist in saying: ‘Your people’. This is truly faith, and it characterises the believing Remnant speaking here, who, whilst doubting themselves utterly, have never doubted God’s faithfulness to His promises. These words: ‘Where is their God?’ how many times will they ring in the ears of the Remnant of Judah, fugitives amongst the nations, during the persecution stirred up against them by the Beast and the false prophet, as we see in the second book of Psalms (Ps 43:3, 10 and also 79:10; 115:2); they now reach the ears of that part of the Remnant remaining in Jerusalem. Ah! how they pierce the repentant hearts of the faithful! Were these not the very words their fathers had spoken against the Messiah, dying for the nation? ‘He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if He cares for him; for he said, “I am the Son of God”’ (Matt. 27:43).

What was the fast of old, at the time of the locust invasion (1:14), compared to the present fast? A fleeting movement of contrition, even if it were proven that Jerusalem had, at that time, responded to the call: ‘Declare a fast!’ for, as we have seen, only one had said then: ‘To you, O Lord, I will cry out’ (1:19). Now the humiliation is real, the repentance complete. It is ‘the great lamentation of Jerusalem’ of which the prophet Zechariah speaks (12:11–14). Blessed thing, this humiliation! It brings us back into God’s presence! And for how many centuries had the Lord waited, waited in vain for it to come about among this rebellious people! Had they humbled themselves for their idolatry? Had they humbled themselves after nailing the Son of God, their Messiah, to the cross? Ah! How rebellious, obstinate and proud is the human heart—our hearts—dominated by a will that refuses to submit! Are not these things, illustrated by the history of Israel, told for our instruction? When our conscience, that inexorable judge, tells us that we have sinned, are we ready to acknowledge it? Are we not rather, like Adam, quick to make excuses, as if excuses could clear us? We excuse our worldliness, we excuse our lukewarmness, our cow-

ardice, our lack of activity for the sake of Christ, and the last thing on our minds is to ‘sanctify the fast’. It happens more than once that, like David, we harbour some hidden fault within us, stifling the voice of our conscience when it seeks to speak, forgetting that God has seen everything, until at last the ‘day of the Lord, great and terrible’ dawns, that day when all is laid bare and the guilty one finally cries out: ‘I have sinned against the Lord!’

Yes, humiliation is a solemn and painful thing. It is the surgeon’s knife applied to limbs that have not been mortified and are, consequently, sensitive enough to cry out when the instrument touches the raw flesh. But how precious is humiliation! ‘Before I was afflicted, I went astray,’ says the Psalmist; ‘it is good for me that I have been afflicted’ (Psalm 119:67, 71).

The blessing is not long in coming; see how it appears at once! If we had known this, ah! how quickly we would have bowed our heads to the dust, confessing our sins before the Father who is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness! How touching is God’s instant response, after twenty

centuries of hardening of this people who had rejected their Saviour and their King! ‘Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and have pity on his people. And the Lord will answer and say to his people: “Behold, I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, and you shall be satisfied; and I will no longer deliver you to reproach among the nations”’ (vv. 18, 19). ‘Spare your people,’ had said the Remnant (v. 17), appealing to the former relationship between God and himself; appealing to it whilst he was still under the sentence of Lo-Ammi, and the great and terrible day of the Lord had come upon him. Immediately God answers his people. The sentence is lifted, abolished, and destroyed forever; relations with God are restored, and all the earthly blessings that flow from them are regained, for this is an earthly people. “In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Sons of the living God’” (Hosea 1:10). Wheat, new wine and oil, the grain offering and the drink offering, once destroyed during the preliminary judgments (1:9), once again become the portion of the people, who are satisfied with them. The house of the Lord, which had been without sacrifices and offerings for half a week

of years, is once again open (Dan. 9:27); the faithful may approach God in his temple; he is no longer ‘exposed to reproach among the nations’ who say, ‘Where is their God?’ (vv. 19, 17).

But what will the Lord do with this Assyrian, the rod of his wrath, who has invaded the land of Israel and even seized the holy city for the first time? ‘I will drive away from you the one who comes from the north, and I will banish him to a barren and desolate land, his face towards the eastern sea, and his rear guard towards the western sea; and his stench shall rise, and his foulness shall rise, because he has exalted himself to do great things’ (v. 20).

This event, of which the judgment of Sennacherib during the reign of Hezekiah is but a faint foreshadowing (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 32:21), is continually mentioned by the prophets who speak of the judgment of the future Assyrian. Thus Isaiah 10:24–27: ‘Therefore thus says the Lord, the Lord of hosts: O my people who dwell in Zion, do not fear the Assyrian! He will strike you with a rod and raise his staff against you as he did against Egypt; for yet a very little while, and the indignation

will be accomplished, and my wrath, in their destruction. And the Lord of hosts will raise up a scourge against him, as Midian was struck at the rock of Oreb; and his staff shall be over the sea, and he shall lift it up in the manner of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck; and the yoke shall be broken because of the anointing.’ And again, Isaiah 14:24, 25: “Surely, as I have planned, so it shall come to pass; and as I have purposed, so it shall be done, to break the Assyrian in my land; and I will trample him underfoot on my mountains; and his yoke shall be removed from them, and his burden shall be taken from their shoulders.’ Ezekiel, speaking of Gog, the Assyrian, says: ‘And you shall come from your place, from the far north, you and many peoples with you, all riding on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army; and you shall come up against my people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. This shall be at the end of days.’ ‘And I will summon the sword against him upon all my mountains,’ says the Lord God, ‘ every man’s sword shall be against his brother. And I will enter into judgement with him by pestilence and by blood; and

I will cause a torrential rain to fall, and hailstones, fire and brimstone, upon him and his bands, and upon the many peoples who are with him” (Ezek. 38:15, 16, 21, 22). And the same prophet: ‘Behold, I am against you, Gog... and I will turn you back, and I will lead you, and I will bring you up from the far north, and I will bring you against the mountains of Israel. And I will strike your bow from your left hand, and I will cause your arrows to fall from your right hand; you shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your bands, and the peoples who are with you; I will give you as food to every kind of bird of prey and to the beasts of the field; you shall fall upon the open fields; for I have spoken, says the Lord God” (39:2–5). ‘Behold, it is coming and will be fulfilled, says the Lord God: this is the day of which I have spoken’ (39:8). And likewise Daniel: ‘The king of the North will sweep down upon him like a storm, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships; he will enter the land and flood it and sweep through it; and he shall come into the land of beauty, and many lands shall fall; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, and Moab, and the chief men of the children of Ammon. And he shall stretch out

his hand against the lands, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. And he shall have in his power the treasures of gold and silver, and all the desirable things of Egypt; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians will follow in his footsteps. But news from the East and the North will terrify him, and he will go out in great fury to exterminate and utterly destroy many people. And he will pitch the tents of his palace between the sea and the mountain of holy beauty; and he will come to his end, and there will be no one to help him' (Daniel 11:40–45). To conclude, let us also quote Micah 5:6: 'And He shall deliver us from the Assyrian, when he comes into our land and sets his foot within our borders.'

Thus, 'the one who comes from the North' (*), the Assyrian, having first sacked Jerusalem and then pressed on to invade Egypt, will return from there to attack the city and the land of beauty (Palestine) and will be destroyed there by the immediate intervention of the Lord: 'I will drive away from you the one who comes from the North.' It is then, and then only, that the final deliverance of Jerusalem will take place, having been partially fulfilled a first time, historically and as a type under

Hezekiah, when the angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 men in the camp of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who was besieging Jerusalem but did not take it. This enemy will be driven ‘into a barren and desolate land (the wilderness of Judah?), his face towards the eastern sea (the Dead Sea), and his rearguard towards the western sea’ (the Mediterranean). The corpses of this multitude will cover the ground, and their stench will rise, and their infection will spread. (Here, a further allusion to the army of locusts which, once destroyed, spreads its stench through the air.) A sudden and terrible destruction comes upon this last enemy of Israel, ‘because he has exalted himself to do great things’ (v. 20). But it is the Lord alone who does them: ‘Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice; for the Lord does great things’ (v. 21). Indeed, the pride of man that precedes his crushing defeat, his hatred against God and His people which leads him to plot sudden attacks, evil, plunder and destruction—all this is reduced to nothing when God rises to intervene. God does great things! If his judgments are great, if his day ‘is great and exceedingly terrible’, if the Assyrian, through whom he chastises his people, is his ‘great army’ (v. 25), his mercy,

his grace and his deliverances are even greater still. The greatness of his divine character lies in bringing about his deliverances from the very heart of his judgements. Thus, above all else, he is great in reconciling qualities that are utterly irreconcilable to the human mind: his justice and his grace, his holiness and his love. Yes, the Lord will do great things for Israel, who will recognise them at the dawn of the Messiah's reign; but, praise be to His name, these things have already been done for us at no cost to us, without our having to go through the day of tribulation, the great day of the Lord, to know them! At Golgotha, the place of judgement that fell upon our Substitute, God, by giving His own Son, brought His hatred for sin and His love for the sinner into conflict with one another.

(*) We repeat: 'the king of the North' or 'he who comes from the North' is never Nebuchadnezzar, although Chaldea and the neighbouring regions are often called the North.

'Fear not, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the desert are turning green, for the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and the vine yield their strength' (v. 22). Following the defeat of the Assyrians, all the plagues that had afflicted the land have van-

ished. The land is green again, the fields are covered with harvests, the vine and the fig tree—these joyful symbols of Israel—bear their fruit. Grain offerings and drink offerings may once more be presented to the Lord. The same promises are found in Ezekiel 36:29, 30. ‘I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not send famine upon you; and I will multiply the fruit of the trees and the produce of the fields, so that you will no longer bear the reproach of famine among the nations.’

‘And I will restore to you the years that the locust, the grasshopper, the caterpillar, and the cutworm—my great army which I sent among you—have devoured’ (v. 25). These words refer back to chapter 1 and are not an allusion to the armies of Assyria. This entire passage concerns the blessing of the land, spared from the calamities sent as judgments in the days when the people were hardened. The era of peace which Creation will enjoy under the reign of the Messiah is no trivial matter, and this thought should fill our hearts with joy and hope. ‘For the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we

know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now’ (Rom. 8:21–22).

“And you, O sons of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He gives you the early rain in its measure, and sends down upon you the early rain and the latter rain at the beginning of the season.” These are purely temporal blessings; the early rain, which follows the sowing in October, and the latter rain, that of March, following which the grain sown in October promises an abundant harvest. But it is worth noting that the blessing of the rains, by which the harvest and the vintage are assured, is linked to the presence of the Lord, the Messiah, the King, in the midst of his people. ‘His coming is prepared like the dawn of day; and he will come to us like the rain, like the latter rain that waters the earth’ (Hosea 6:3). ‘In the light of the King’s countenance is life, and his favour is like a cloud of rain in the latter season’ (Prov. 16:15) (*). It is then that the Lord will restore and publicly acknowledge His relationship with His people, once called Lo-Ammi; then, too, the people themselves will rejoice in the name of their God: ‘You shall praise the name of the Lord your God, who has done marvellous

things for you; and my people shall never be put to shame. And you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the Lord, am your God, and that there is no other; and my people shall never be put to shame” (vv. 26, 27). All the shame of former times is past (1:10, 11, 12); the Lord of glory comes to take his place in the midst of his people. Thus ends this section of the book.

(*) See also regarding the rains: Zech. 10:1; Deut. 11:14; Jer. 5:24; Ps. 84:6; 2 Sam. 23:4.

CHAPTER 2: 28–32

The outpouring of the Spirit

Here we find a new division of the subject. This is marked in Hebrew Bibles, which begin chapter 3 at verse 28 of our chapter 2. The prophet moves, in effect, from the assured temporal blessings for the land of Israel—the rains of the early and late seasons—to the spiritual blessings that the presence and exaltation of Christ will bring to his earthly people, as well as to all nations.

‘And it shall come to pass, after this, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh’ (v. 28). ‘After this’: that is to say, following the destruction of Assyria, but this destruction itself comes following the repentance of the people. Indeed, it is after the fast and the solemn assembly, when true repentance finally penetrates the hearts of the elect, that the enemy is destroyed. Then Israel will not only be showered with temporal blessings, but will share in all the benefits of the new covenant that the Lord will establish ‘with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah’. Under the working of the Holy Spirit, they will receive a new heart, capable of knowing the Lord their God, who will never again remember their sins or their iniquities (Jer. 31:31–34). This outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in connection with the new covenant given to Israel, is often foretold by the prophets: ‘I will take you from among the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land; ... and I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you’ (Ezekiel 36:24–27). ‘And I will no longer hide my

face from them, for I will have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God’ (Ezekiel 39:29). ‘And I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication’ (Zechariah 12:10).

But a blessing, far exceeding the boundaries of Israel and Judah, is announced to us here: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” This gift will be poured out not only upon the chosen people, but upon the great multitude of the nations of the millennial age who will have received the Gospel of the kingdom (Rev. 7:9).

‘And your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and even upon the servants and handmaids in those days I will pour out my Spirit’ (vv. 28–29). It is of the utmost importance to consider the quotation from this passage in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:17–21). The cross of Christ had been both the place of the final judgement of mankind and of Israel, and the place of victory over the Enemy. Following this victory, Christ, having risen from the dead and ‘having led captivity captive’,

went to sit at the right hand of God. Then He was able to baptise with the Holy Spirit those who believed in Him. This great event took place at Pentecost. All those among the Jewish people who believed received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and, through it, were formed into one body. But this imparting of the Holy Spirit did not take place without faith and repentance. That is why Peter said to those whose hearts were seized with remorse at the thought that they had crucified their Messiah: ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:37, 38). For the first disciples of Jesus, repentance had already taken place at John’s baptism in preparation for receiving the Messiah entering his earthly kingdom; but since this Messiah had been rejected by the people and crucified, the disciples were still awaiting the moment when, according to the words of the Forerunner, Jesus would baptise them with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11). This word was confirmed by the Lord to his disciples after his resurrection (Luke 24:49), for they could not be made partakers of the Holy Spirit until this event had taken place. Thus a First

Remnant of Judah was saved and brought into the Assembly. Had the gift of the Holy Spirit been accepted at that time by the nation and received by the whole people, the terrible judgments that followed would have been spared them; but Israel did not merely reject its Messiah, the Son of God; it also rejected the Holy Spirit and stoned Stephen, who was the bearer of the Spirit in the sight of all. Following this crime, in accordance with the prophecy of Matt. 22:7, the angry King, ‘having sent his troops... put those murderers to death and burned their city’, an event which took place in the year 70 AD, during the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. As judgement was about to be fulfilled, all those who had been baptised with the Holy Spirit escaped it by fleeing ‘from this perverse generation’ (Acts 2:40). The hardening of Israel had a second consequence. Not only was a Jewish remnant saved and took their place in the Assembly, but the door was opened to the nations, according to the word of Joel: ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh’, and ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (vv. 28, 32). From then on, Jews and Gentiles, reconciled to God in one body through the cross, both had access to

the Father through one Spirit (Eph. 2:16, 18). The Church Age was thus inaugurated: following Israel's rejection, the Lord was preparing for Himself a Bride, a pearl of great price, a thousand times more precious and glorious than the Jewish Bride, a Bride who will be His eternal companion, His Beloved in heavenly glory. The formation of the Church takes place on earth, and it is there that, in the present age, all God's ways concerning her are unfolding. As soon as she has been taken from the earth to heaven, at the coming of the Lord, God's ways towards his former people—now rejected—will resume their course. This is what all the prophets tell us. God's former people will persist in their unbelief; they who did not want the Son of David as their king will fall under the yoke of the Antichrist. Jerusalem will become a cup of staggering for all nations. Whilst the Church, the New Jerusalem, will shine in heavenly glory, the earthly Jerusalem will have to endure all the horrors of the siege a second time for having given itself over to the false Messiah. We saw mention of this event at the beginning of our chapter.

But then, a second Jewish Remnant—or rather, the future Remnant—linking, beyond the parenthesis of the Church, to that which surrounded the Lord on earth, this Remnant, we say, will turn to the Lord. The veil covering their eyes will be removed (2 Cor. 3:16). Through the sorrows of the great tribulation they will acknowledge their guilt, and the enemy’s final attack, that of the Assyrian, will lead them to a complete judgement of themselves and to repentance as described in our chapter. Following this repentance and the Lord’s final victory over the Assyrian, the second outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the witnesses of the end will take place, just as the first had taken place following the victory of the cross and the resurrection which was its proof. The gift of the Holy Spirit will make the Remnant, not, as today, a heavenly people, but the earthly people of the Messiah, whose centre will be the earthly Jerusalem, the city of the great King. Then this word will be fulfilled: ‘And I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God’ (Ezekiel 39:29). In Ezekiel, the destruction of Gog, the Assyrian, and following it the gift of the Holy Spirit, is the

last event mentioned before the prophet moves on, in chapters 40 to 48, to the description of the temple in Jerusalem and the land of Israel during the Millennium. This is not quite the case in Joel, as we shall see in chapter 3. However, the blessing of Jerusalem is linked there, as in Ezekiel, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: ‘For on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, and in Jerusalem, as the Lord has said, and for the survivors whom the Lord shall call.’ (Joel 2:32.) The deliverance of which Joel speaks is achieved only through the destruction of the Assyrian, the sole figure to whom his prophecy alludes in the second chapter, for the Roman Beast and the Antichrist, so prominent in the book of Daniel and especially in Revelation, are not even mentioned by our prophet.

From all that we have just said, it may be observed that the passage in Acts (2:16–21) is not the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy, and this is what the apostle Peter takes care to emphasise when he says: ‘These men are not drunk, as you suppose, ... but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.’ (Comp. Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23.) What took place at Pentecost before everyone’s eyes was not a case of artificial excitement, but was brought

about by the Holy Spirit. The very quotation of this passage by the Apostle Peter contains things that were being fulfilled at the very moment he spoke, and others that were reserved for a time to come. To be convinced of this, it suffices to note the latter in brackets. Here, then, is the passage, read in this way: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and upon my servants and upon my handmaids in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy; and I will show wonders in the heavens above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire, and a vapour of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

Note this phrase: ‘My servants and my handmaids’, those who belong to the Lord. Here, and in the Septuagint, they replace the ‘servants and handmaids’ of the Hebrew text, those who belong to the Jewish family. At the same time, this term is suffi-

ciently vague in Joel to leave room in advance for servants specific to the time of the Church, who will be unknown in the future days of Israel's restoration. Note further that Peter says: 'In the last days', and not: 'After that', as in our prophet. This latter phrase clearly shows that Joel's prophecy could not be definitively fulfilled at Pentecost, but only after the defeat of the Assyrian, whereas the 'last days', elsewhere called 'the ends of the ages', have come upon us since Christ was rejected by the Jews and the world (*). What characterises the day of Pentecost as well as the passage from Joel is that these three things are found there: repentance, deliverance from the Enemy, and the Spirit poured out upon all flesh. But, moreover, one great fact stands out at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is given there, proof of Christ's resurrection and exaltation, and He unites all who believe in Him into one body. Joel foretells a future time when the door will be opened to the Gentiles; in Acts, it is declared open by the apostle (2:39). We find, in chapter 1 of Hosea, the same prophecy confirmed by Rom. 9:26, concerning the admission of the nations into the blessing (**). Only in Joel, does the phrase 'all flesh' not refer to the present

admission of the Gentiles into the Church through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but to the entry of the Gentiles, the ‘great multitude which no one’ can number (Rev. 7:9), and to their inclusion in the millennial blessing which God’s people will enjoy.

(*) This alteration of the text is all the more striking as it is not found in the Septuagint, the version generally cited in the New Testament but which is not followed in this passage.

(**) See the book of the prophet Hosea, by H. R., page 17.

In verses 30 and 31, the prophet interrupts his main subject and digresses to show that signs will occur before the Day of the Lord: ‘And I will show signs in the heavens and on the earth: blood, and fire, and columns of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.’ This passage, it seems to us, relates to the content of chapter 2, that is to say, the invasion by the Assyrians. Indeed, this invasion is called ‘the day of the Lord... great and exceedingly terrible’ (2:11), and is preceded by signs: the heavens shaken, the sun and moon darkened, in v. 10. This passage seems to us to correspond to chapter 6 of Rev-

elation, where ‘the sun turned black as sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood’ before the day of the Lamb’s wrath, for, despite people’s fears, this event will not take place at that time (Rev. 6:12, 17). The signs just mentioned will therefore precede the day of the Lord, but there are others which will follow it and take place at the very moment of the coming of the Son of Man. This is what we read in Matt. 24:29, 30: ‘And immediately after the tribulation of those days’ (a tribulation of which the invasion of the Assyrian is the final act) ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky.’ The sign, that is to say, the appearance of the Son of Man, will therefore be immediately preceded by signs. We find these in chapter 3:15 of our prophet: “The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their splendour; and the Lord shall roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He shall make His voice heard.” The brief parenthesis in verses 30 and 31 seems to me to have been inserted here to establish the contrast between the heavenly gift of the Holy Spirit, which will ac-

company repentance and deliverance among the Jewish Remnant, and the earthly upheavals that foreshadow the Lord's judgements upon the apostate people. Thus the prophet concludes by saying: 'And it shall come to pass that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. For on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, and in Jerusalem, as the Lord has said, and for the survivors whom the Lord shall call' (v. 32). As we have already seen, salvation will far exceed the narrow confines of Judah, Jerusalem, and even Israel; it will be extended to 'everyone', just as it is said elsewhere: 'Whoever believes in Him shall not perish.' Since, by virtue of Christ's work, there is no longer today 'any distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord of all is rich towards all who call upon Him', and since 'everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' (see Rom. 10:12, 13, which quotes our passage), so it will be in a future day. However, in the future of which Joel speaks, Mount Zion and Jerusalem will be the objects of earthly deliverance, whereas the heavenly blessing today has the Church as its object. It remains nonetheless true that all the 'survivors whom the Lord calls' will share in Christ's glorious

reign on earth; and these survivors, as our passage teaches us, include not only the Remnant of Judah and Israel, but also the Remnant of the nations, as presented to us in chapter 7 of Revelation.

CHAPTER 3

The Day of the Lord or the Judgement of the Nations

Chapter 3 shows us a new aspect of the Day of the Lord. This day had already been foretold as being near, at the time of the invasion of the locusts (1:15). Chapter 2 showed it to be coming and near at the time of the Assyrian invasion, of which the army of locusts in chapter 1 was merely a type (2:1), and as preceded by signs in verse 31 of the same chapter; and finally as being present when the Assyrian attack takes place (2:11).

We have seen that following the repentance of Judah and Jerusalem, the Assyrian will be destroyed and the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon the Remnant and upon all flesh, but there remain other enemies to be presented to us, who must be des-

troyed, namely all the nations gathered against Jerusalem. The day of their judgement is the day of the Lord, just as was the day of the Assyrian's defeat. Indeed, the events of chapters 2 and 3 take place concurrently and are separated in Joel only to highlight the main theme of this prophet: the attack and annihilation of the Assyrian. In fact, I have reason to believe that Assyria is included in chapter 3 within the judgement of all the nations, though it is not mentioned there, its specific fate having been dealt with in detail in chapter 2. We even know from Daniel and Revelation that its judgement will not precede that of the apostate nations represented by the Roman Beast and the false prophet, but will follow it very closely, which, chronologically, would in a sense place chapter 3 before chapter 2. The same terms are used in these two chapters to define the day of the Lord, showing that it is indeed the same day: 'The day of the Lord is near in the Valley of Judgment' (3:14; cf. 2:1). What we have just presented regarding the sequence of these events is confirmed by the fact that the millennial blessing is mentioned both after the Valley of Jehoshaphat and after the defeat of the Assyrian (2:23–27; 3:4–7).

The various acts of the final drama are therefore called by this name: the day of the Lord, but chapter 3 deals with the whole of the final act.

A Remnant has been formed following the repentance of Judah and Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit has come upon them. There is deliverance for the survivors whom the Lord has called. These are the days when God restores the captives of Judah and Jerusalem (3:1), for, as we noted above, Joel deals only with the Remnant viewed from this limited perspective, and not with the ‘captivity’ as a whole, that is to say, the Remnant of Israel and Judah. To secure complete deliverance for His people, it is necessary that, on the day of the Lord, all the nations (goyim) that have ‘trampled’ Judah and Jerusalem should fall under the same judgement as the Assyrians: ‘I will gather all the nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat’ (3:2).

Much has been written and discussed about the ‘Valley of Jehoshaphat’. A tradition, with no basis in the Word of God, locates it in the Kidron Valley, which separates Jerusalem from the

Mount of Olives. This tradition, which still persists today among Jews and Muslims, dates back only to the first centuries of our era. All place the site of the Last Judgement there, for they are unaware of the judgement of the living nations of which the prophecy speaks so often, and here in particular. This legend may have arisen from the fact that Jerusalem (3:16; Zechariah 14:4) is associated with the scene of the judgement. But the scene itself must not and cannot be localised. Even the word used for ‘valley’ (Emeq in Hebrew) never applies to a narrow valley such as that which separates Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

First and foremost, we must remember that the name Jehoshaphat, meaning ‘the Lord judges’, has a direct connection with our chapter, which presents the Lord’s judgement upon the nations, and the place where it will take place as the valley of judgement (or rather of ‘what is decreed’, cf. Isaiah 10:22). This name therefore has a symbolic meaning. Furthermore, I have no doubt that it alludes to the story of King Jehoshaphat, recounted in 2 Chronicles 20, for—and this must not be forgotten—our chapter deals with the judgement of the nations in or-

der to introduce the blessing of the repentant Remnant of Judah. Now, the story of Jehoshaphat gives us precisely the story of the deliverance of the Remnant brought about by God's judgement on his enemies. It was at the end of the ascent of Ziz and the valley (a steep-sided valley, Hebrew: Nachal) which opens onto the wilderness of Jeruel and towards that of Tekoa, that Jehoshaphat's victory was won over the great multitude of nations that had come up against Jerusalem (vv. 12, 15).

Jehoshaphat had been unfaithful to his God by allying himself with the wicked Ahab, king of Israel (2 Chron. 18). Pressed by the enemy, he had cried out in the midst of the battle, and the Lord had rescued him (18:31). Unfaithful a second time, he had allied himself with Jehoram, son of Ahab, and with the king of Edom against Moab. This was a disgrace to his testimony as a servant of the Lord (2 Kings 3). The defeat of Moab stirred up violent hatred against Judah among that proud people. Together with the Ammonites and the Maonites of Seir (Edom), they invaded the territory of God's people, skirting the Dead Sea, and encamped at En-Gedi. All this, a consequence of the king's un-

faithfulness, is also, in miniature, the story of the unfaithfulness of Judah and Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat recognised this; before facing the enemy, he proclaimed a fast and gathered the people, and ‘all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives and their sons’ (2 Chron. 20:3, 13). This fast inevitably recalls that of Joel 2:15. Then, in his extreme weakness, Jehoshaphat invokes the name of the Lord to be saved: ‘O our God, will you not judge them? For there is no strength in us against this great multitude... but our eyes are upon you’ (2 Chron. 20:9–12). We see the same plea, from the depths of humiliation, in Joel 2:17. Then the Lord declares that this war is not theirs, but God’s (2 Chron. 20:15). The Spirit of the Lord stands in the midst of this congregation (v. 14), just as in Joel He is the blessed portion of the Remnant (Joel 2:28). Jehoshaphat’s men go down to meet these multitudes, towards the wilderness of Tekoa, in equipped companies, not to fight, but to see the deliverance of the Lord who is with them (vv. 17, 21). They meet the enemy in the valley (Hebrew Emeq, the same word as in Joel 3:2, 12, 14). This valley of judgement becomes for Jehoshaphat and his people the valley of Beracah,

that is to say, the valley of blessing. After the victory, they sing the famous millennial hymn: ‘Praise the Lord, for his steadfast love endures for ever’ (20:21).

All this, let us repeat, brings us strikingly back to the scene described in Joel. Following Israel’s unfaithfulness and in the face of the judgments that ensue, the congregation is gathered together, fasting and repentance are proclaimed, Judah and Jerusalem are called to attention, and the Holy Spirit is given. The nations come up in great numbers against Jerusalem in the valley where judgement is decreed, and there they are destroyed. Judgement is carried out by the Lord himself and not by those who accompany him. It will be the same when the King of kings comes down from heaven with his armies and strikes the nations with the double-edged sword that comes out of his mouth (Rev. 19). On that day, and following this scene—considered here in Joel from a Jewish perspective—the Valley of Jehoshaphat will become the Valley of Beracah, that is, the valley of the millennial blessing under the reign of Christ (Joel 3:18–21).

Although the allusion to Jehoshaphat's victory seems clear to us, there is, moreover, no need whatsoever to pinpoint the location of this scene. The significance of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, as we have said, is that 'the Lord judges', as He did in 2 Chronicles 20. Whether the place is the same in Joel and in Chronicles is of no consequence whatsoever, though it is possible; but it is often dangerous to attempt to localise prophetic events when their symbolic meaning is evident.

The Valley of Jehoshaphat forms part of a series of events that all relate to the 'great and terrible day of the Lord', and are linked to a pivotal event: the appearing of the Lord. This appearing will take place when the heavens are opened and Christ, as we have just seen, comes forth with his heavenly hosts. Linked to this great event are the various acts of his coming in judgement to establish his kingdom. These acts, as we have shown elsewhere (*), do not occur simultaneously—that is to say, they do not take place at the same moment, which would be impossible—but form an uninterrupted event with its various manifestations. They all belong to his 'appearance' and form part of the day of the Lord.

(*) See the book of Zechariah the Prophet by H. R., page 113.

The appearing of the Lord or ‘the appearing of His coming’ is the second act of His coming. In the first act, invisible to the world, He will come to gather the saints to bring them with Him into glory. In the second act, accompanied by His saints to execute judgement upon the nations, He will be visible to all, for it is said: ‘Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.’ It is of this second act, never of the first, that the Old Testament prophecy speaks to us, for his coming for the saints is a mystery revealed only in the New Testament.

But this second coming, the appearance of the Lord, has two aspects of its own, one heavenly and the other earthly. The heavenly aspect belongs to the New Testament, the earthly to the Old. In making this observation, we cannot emphasise enough the difference between the perspectives of the Old and New Testaments, which, whilst never contradicting one another, must not be confused with one another. This observation is very important in the case at hand. In the New Testament, the

prophetic passages concerning the Lord's appearing show us, in 2 Thess. 1 and Rev. 19, his revelation from heaven with the angels of his power and all the heavenly saints to execute vengeance upon the Christianised nations forming part of the western domain of the Beast, that is to say, the Roman Empire which will be resurrected in the end times. Nor is the judgement of the Assyrian mentioned there. It is the Beast and the false prophet who are judged and cast into the lake of fire. The Old Testament prophecy does not present things to us in this light. There the Lord is revealed on earth. Undoubtedly, he comes from heaven, but just as his disciples once saw him ascending into heaven (Acts 1:11), his feet will alight upon the Mount of Olives. He does not come, as in Revelation, to claim his rights to the universal kingdom and take possession of the earth by destroying all his enemies; he comes to establish his kingdom over Israel, to be anointed King over Zion, the holy mountain of the Lord (Ps. 2:6). But for this to take place, judgement must be executed upon all the nations that have enslaved Israel. The Lord gathers them together and brings them down into the Valley of Jehoshaphat. He enters into judgement

with them concerning his people, his inheritance which they have scattered among the nations. The subject of the judgement is solely the treatment they have inflicted upon Israel, the people of God. ‘They have divided my land, and cast lots for my people; they have given the young boy for a prostitute, and sold the young girl for wine, and they have drunk it’ (vv. 2, 3). Tyre, Sidon and Philistia (later Egypt and Edom, v. 19) are singled out in the judgement, for here we have the general judgement of all the nations that have divided up the land and ‘trampled Jerusalem underfoot’ (Luke 21:24). ‘And what do you want of me, Tyre and Sidon, and all the districts of Philistia? Is this the recompense you give me? And if you reward me, I will bring your reward down swiftly and speedily upon your heads; because you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my beautiful and desirable things, and have sold the sons of Judah and the sons of Jerusalem to the sons of Javan, in order to drive them from their borders” (vv. 4–6).

The aforementioned peoples had plundered and stolen God’s inheritance, selling the sons of Judah to Greece (*), to seize

their land, that which belonged to the Lord. They will suffer a fate different from that of other peoples: the sons of Judah will sell them to the Sabeans.

(*) See also the sale of the sons of Israel to Edom by Tyre and the Philistines (Amos 1:6, 9).

It is interesting to compare this passage with one from a book that has no connection with the inspired writings, though it has the value of a historical document. We read in the First Book of Maccabees (3:38–41): ‘Lysias chose Ptolemy, son of Dori-mene, Nicanor and Gorgias, skilled commanders and friends of the king; and he sent with them 40,000 foot soldiers and 7,000 horsemen, to invade the land of Judah and lay it waste according to the king’s command. They set out with all their troops, and having entered Judea, they camped near Emmaus, in the plain. When the merchants of the land heard of their arrival, they took with them much silver and gold, as well as shackles, and came to the Syrian camp to buy the children of Israel as slaves. To this army were added the troops of Syria and those of the land of the Philistines.’

This judgement is a military judgement of a particular nature and, as we have said above, recalls the victory of Jehoshaphat. Just as the Lord had made his voice heard before his army, before the Assyrians when it came to chastising his people (2:11), so now he makes his voice heard in the ears of the nations to destroy all their power. He compels the nations to take up arms. They believe they are pursuing their own designs and political aims, and do not suspect that they are rushing headlong towards the final judgement. All work for peace is abandoned and farming tools are turned into weapons of war: ‘Proclaim this among the nations, prepare for war, rouse the warriors; let them draw near, let them come up, all the men of war! From your ploughshares, forge swords, and from your pruning hooks, spears. Let the weak say: “I am strong!” ‘Hurry and come, all you nations, from every quarter, and gather together!’ (vv. 9–11.) They march up for battle, to contend for the small Remnant of Judah and, indeed, against its King who has manifested his glory to his saints by appearing to them on the Mount of Olives. This is, in fact, the final scene. Whatever the political motives of the peoples, all—the armies of the Western Roman

Empire and the armies of the North and the East—gather to take possession of Jerusalem. This is the supreme conflict brought about by the ‘Eastern Question’. What will be the outcome? ‘There, O Lord, send down your mighty men!’ (v. 11.) Some have sought to interpret these mighty men of the Lord as the heavenly armies. Once again, this amounts to introducing the scenes of Revelation (chapter 19) into the Old Testament prophecy, whereas here, I have no doubt, the small Remnant of Judah surrounding its king, just as in days gone by David’s ‘mighty men’, or as the handful of mighty men who surrounded Jehoshaphat on the day of battle. Isaiah 13:3 tells us who they are and what their character is. ‘I have given orders to my saints; I have also summoned my mighty men for my wrath, those who rejoice in my greatness.’ But, no more than Jehoshaphat and his men, are they called to fight. They witness the judgement that the Lord is about to carry out. It will be the same in Rev. 19 for the heavenly armies; yet the mighty men of the Son of David will plunder the nations and take their spoil (2 Chron. 20:25), or, as in Isaiah 11:14: ‘They will swoop down on the Philistines from the west, and together they will plunder

the peoples of the east: Edom and Moab shall be the prey of their hands, and the sons of Ammon shall obey them.’ These nations had escaped the Assyrian in Dan. 11:11. The same is said of Edom in Ezekiel 25:14: ‘I will take vengeance on Edom by the hand of my people Israel.’ And again, in Obadiah, v. 15: ‘For the day of the Lord is near against all nations: as you (Edom) have done, so shall it be done to you; your reward shall fall upon your own head.’

The judgement, whilst having a warlike character, is not strictly speaking a battle: “Let the nations rouse themselves and go up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations from every quarter’ (v. 12); this scene is quite different in character from the coming of the Lord on a white horse, with the armies of heaven, judging and fighting in righteousness (Rev. 19:11–14).

The seat of this judgement, the place where the Lord sits, is Jerusalem and Zion: ‘The Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem he will make his voice heard, and the heavens and the earth will tremble’ (v. 16).

Despite certain similarities, the picture presented here bears no resemblance to that of the judgement in Matt. 25:31–46, which comes later. There, ‘the Son of Man will come in his glory, and all the angels with him; then he will sit on the throne of his glory, and all the nations will be gathered before him.’ He will bring forth and gather all the nations, but not to execute a national judgement upon them. It will be an individual judgement, separating the righteous from the wicked among the nations. They will be declared good or evil according to the way in which they have received and treated the brothers of the Son of Man, the Jewish messengers sent by him to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom and to urge the nations to submit to the sceptre of the true David. Following the pronouncement of the judgement, some will go away into eternal torment, others into eternal life.

The scene in Joel is quite different. It ends with the harvest and the vintage: ‘Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; come, tread the grapes, for the winepress is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great’ (v. 13). These images are used in many other places in Scripture. Revelation 14:14–20 bears

much resemblance to what is told here, but has a far broader scope. There we see one like the Son of Man, seated, but on a cloud, and reaping at the time appointed by God; only the harvest encompasses the entire population of the earth. Here, we see him seated in Jerusalem, where he has his throne, and causing the multitudes to flock into the valley of judgement (Hebrew: Charuts), the valley whose sentence had been decreed in advance. The nations come to fight, thereby revealing what is in their hearts against Christ and against his people, for what affects his people affects him. For them to be caught red-handed, they must be found armed before the inexorable judgement, they who have used all the tools of peace and the prosperity of peoples to prepare for war. Are we not already witnessing, in our own day, this unbridled waste that sacrifices everything to the military armament of the multitudes?

In Rev. 14, the harvest and the vintage are quite distinct from one another; the former concerns the nations, the latter the apostate Israel. Here there is nothing of the sort, though I have no doubt that the apostate Jews, the people of the Antichrist, having allied themselves with the nations, are included in their

judgement. The harvest and the vintage are combined in our passage ('the harvest is ripe... the vats are overflowing') because this scene deals not with the relationship of the nations to the unbelieving Jews, but with the Remnant of Judah and Jerusalem when their captives are restored. The harvest here becomes the judgement of Israel's enemies, separating the tares from the wheat; the vintage their merciless extermination.

Let us add two or three more passages relating to the same event. Psalm 18:30–45 celebrates the judgement of the nations entrusted to the Son of Man. It concludes with their apparent submission to the authority of his iron sceptre. Psalm 78:65, 66 also describes this scene: He who chose the tribe of Judah and Mount Zion as the seat of his power, there 'struck his enemies from behind, he delivered them to everlasting shame', Zech. 14:3, seems to include, in addition to the judgement of Assyria, that of the nations which colluded to oppress Israel, for the battle there is distinguished from the 'day of battle'. We could cite many more passages; we shall confine ourselves to these.

Summarising all the passages we have just considered, we may note four events forming part of this great whole: the day of the Lord and the appearing of the Lord, or the manifestation of his coming. These events are:

1. The destruction of the armies of the Beast and the false prophet by the appearance of the Son of Man, coming down from heaven with his armies (Rev. 19).
2. As a consequence of point 1, the appearance of Christ in Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, to deliver the Jewish Remnant and destroy the Assyrian (Isaiah 31:4–9; Zech. 14:3, 4).
3. The warlike and collective judgement of the nations which, surrounding the territory of Israel, have been the oppressors of God's people. The Remnant of Judah is associated with this warlike judgement. (Being general, it also encompasses all the nations mentioned under points 1 and 2, but the whole is considered from the Jewish perspective.) (Joel 3, Obadiah, etc.)

4. The judgement of the nations, of an individual nature, when the Son of Man, surrounded by his angels, comes to sit on the throne of his glory. This judgement affects, among the nations, only those who rejected the Lord's messages when they proclaimed to them the Gospel of the kingdom.

Just as the Day of the Lord was preceded by terrible signs (2:30, 31), similar signs accompany this day in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. 'The sun and the moon will be darkened, and the stars will withdraw their brightness' (v. 15).

After the judgement, 'the Lord will be a shelter for his people and a refuge for the sons of Israel'. Then they will know him through the blessings of the new covenant: 'You will know that I, the Lord, am your God.' He will henceforth dwell among them: 'I dwell in Zion, my holy mountain'. 'Jerusalem shall be holy', now purified of all defilement and consecrated to the Lord, and the foreigners who had been the instruments of God's judgement against his unfaithful people shall no longer trample the beloved city underfoot (vv. 16, 17).

‘And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streams of Judah shall flow with water’ (v. 18). Now the blessing may flow freely. The Valley of Jehoshaphat has become the Valley of Beracah (2 Chronicles 20:26). Throughout the land of Israel, joy, abundance and spiritual blessings are widespread. From now on, the people of the Lord lack nothing. The land has once again become what it was meant to be in God’s mind at the time when grace opened its borders to the twelve tribes (Deut. 8:7–10).

‘A spring will flow from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Shittim’ (v. 18). This is a natural fact, and at the same time a symbol. (See Ezek. 47:1–12; Zech. 14:8; Rev. 22:1, 2.) Divine blessing spreads life wherever it goes. Sittim is situated near the Jordan at Jericho in the plains of Moab (Numbers 26:3; 31:12; 33:48, 49). It was there that Israel dwelt when it committed fornication with the daughters of Moab (Numbers 25:1). It was from there that Joshua sent spies to reconnoitre Jericho (Joshua 2:1); and it was also from there that the people set out to cross the Jordan. The waters will flow down from

Jerusalem into the Arabah, or the Valley of Sittim, where the Jordan also flows, and will reach the Dead Sea. In Zechariah, the spring flows out of Jerusalem, heading towards the Mediterranean on one side and the Dead Sea on the other. Here, it flows from the temple, situated on Mount Zion, and waters the valley that stretches beyond the Jordan. In Ezekiel, the waters flow down into the plain (of Sittim) towards the east, and reach the Dead Sea to make it healthy. The territory of Edom, the mountain of Seir which overlooks this once desolate scene, will bear witness to the abundance of blessings poured out upon this people, whose blood Edom shed in its violent hatred and rage for destruction. All the prophets tell us that Edom will receive no remission on the day of vengeance (see Obadiah).

Henceforth, the scene of blessing is established for ever, but, as we have noted many times in the course of this study, it encompasses, in our prophet, only Judah and Jerusalem. ‘Judah (in contrast to Edom, which shall be “a desolate wilderness”) shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation.’ And God adds: ‘I will cleanse them of the blood of which

I had not cleansed them: and the Lord shall dwell in Zion' (v. 21).

It is no doubt because this scene is confined to Judah and Jerusalem that the 'cleansing of the blood' is mentioned, for I believe this refers to the blood of Christ, the guilt of which falls upon Jerusalem and Judah, just as the innocent blood of the people fell upon Edom, which had shed it (v. 19). God's people are now purified of it, and the Lord can dwell in peace among them on the mountain of royal grace. The blood of which Jerusalem was guilty by sacrificing the Holy One and the Righteous One has become the blood of atonement by which their guilt is expiated for ever, by which they are reconciled with God, by virtue of which they shall dwell from generation to generation around their glorious King, who Himself has chosen Zion and desired it to be His dwelling place. 'Here,' He will say, 'is my resting place for ever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it!' (Ps. 132:13, 14).

Is it not remarkable to see how, in the very last words of the book, the motive behind all God's dealings with His people is

revealed? The outrage against His only Son, who came down to earth to take away the sin of the world, the crucifixion of their King, was the cause of the terrible judgments God inflicted upon them—yet their very sin, the crime by which they shed the blood of the Lamb of God, is the means employed to purify and redeem them, to reconcile all things to God, and to establish upon the earth a reign of righteousness and peace. What marvellous grace! God uses Satan’s hatred and man’s crime to bring in the reign of Christ and our eternal blessing! To Him be glory for ever and ever!

