

## (Section 2) ANSWERING AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

Joel chapter 2 has to be one of the most interesting, riveting chapters in the Bible. But to understand it, we are challenged to answer an important question.

- The question is in verses 1-11, is this army mortal or immortal?

Before answering this question, there is an important prophetic principle that must be first established. It is known as **partial and full fulfillment**. In order for a prophecy to be completely fulfilled, it must have every detail, every "*jot and tittle*", satisfied by a highly endorsed and reliable secular source. If, after an exhaustive critical examination there is found just one detail in the prophecy that has not come to fruition, then it is categorized as partially fulfilled.

Applying this critical difference correctly and incorrectly can be seen in the following example.

In 1997 in Hamilton, Ontario Canada there was a debate between the Christadelphians and the Church of Christ. The centre piece of the debate came down to a difference in the understanding of Joel 2:28-32. Unfortunately those of Church of Christ could only see the partial fulfillment at Pentecost and did not see the still future full fulfillment of this prophecy, even though history clearly shows that Titus took Jerusalem in AD 70. There was no deliverance in Jerusalem in AD 70 and this is why the apostle Peter by inspiration didn't quote the last part of Joel 2:32.

### PARTIAL (Pentecost) & FULL FULFILLMENT (After Christ's return)

- *JOEL 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:*
- *JOEL 2:32 ... for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.*

Partial and Full Fulfillment is a property of many Bible Prophecies, which allows God's prophetic word to be current to several generations. This feature appears in many Bible prophecies and is unique to Bible prophecy. Appreciating it offers hope and enthusiasm for God's word for several generations. It also is important to interpreting the prophecy and providing evidence to support faith.

Because this principle is so important, included are three further examples of Bible prophecies that can be shown to have a partial and full fulfillment. These are included in **Appendix #1**.

The important question is whether the army described in Joel 2:1-11 is immortal or mortal. If it is immortal then by context it fits Christ's saints, who will deliver Israel from the "*northern army*" in Joel 2:20. It is important since we could be part of this immortal army.

**An ARMY matching no other ARMY!**

*Joel 2:2 ... a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.*

*verse 3 A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: ...*

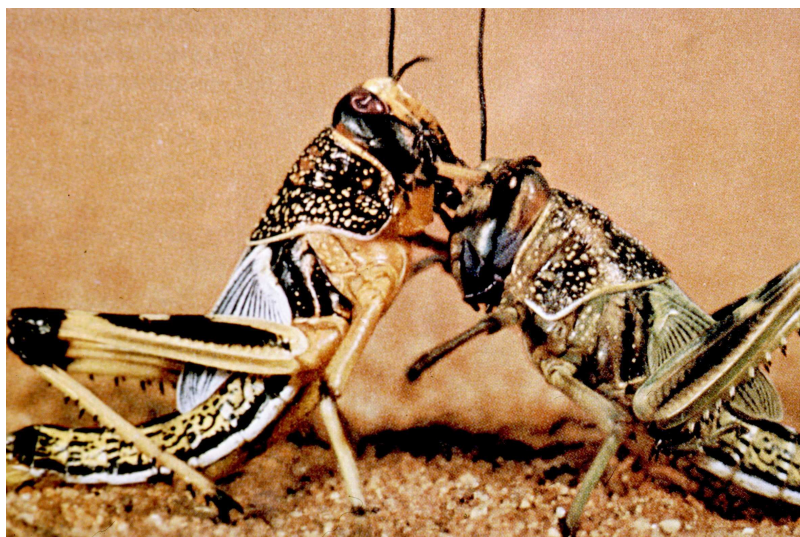
*verse 5 Like the noise of chariots on the tops (7218 “rosh”) of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array.*

*verse 7 They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks:*

*verse 8 Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. (YLT “cut off”, NKJV “cut down”)*

*verse 9 They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief.*

This army obviously draws from the earlier analogy of the locusts and their ability to fly, climb and devour. However, there are some major differences in that locusts have no king, and, as previously noted from the "National Geographic Magazine", they struggle for room, they push, kick and shove and do not follow the description in Joel 2:7-9.



The description in verse 8 of falling upon the sword, and not being wounded, suggests that their advance is that of an immortal army as well as an invincible one. A closer look at verses 7 & 9 shows it doesn't match well a human army which usually does not climb up entering through windows. No matter how much poetic license is given this army, it doesn't correspond well to a mortal army of men. In fact, a key

principle when interpreting Scripture is that when you have the correct interpretation, everything fits as a glove and suddenly the vision is there, with no need to force it.

**The “Lord’s army an IMMORTAL army?”**

v.1 "in Zion ... in my holy mountain"

v.1 "day of the Lord"

v.2 "many generations" – (Hebrew = all generations)

v.3 "nothing shall escape"

v.4 "appearance of horses"

v.5 "tops (2<sup>nd</sup> level = 7218 “rosh” also in Eze. 38:2 = saints {the chariots} leap on “rosh” Russian armies) of mountains (armies) shall they leap". This results as seen in Eze. 39:1-16.

v.5 "devour stubble"

v.5 "people set in battle array"

In Joel 2:1 -- The "shophar" is blown to sound the alarm of the "*day of the LORD*". The difficulty is **which** "*day of the LORD*" and what type of army is this that makes all to "*tremble*"?

### **Another ARMY like this? -- NO!**

***JOEL 2:2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of MANY generations.***

- As devastating as Babylon's or Rome's armies were, Joel sees an even more powerful army, for it will have no equal! To support this conclusion, the translation of the last part of v. 2 requires clarification as to whether, after many generations, there will be an even more powerful invasion of Jerusalem than has happened already. The KJV seems to say this but modern translations, i.e. NKJV, NRSV, and NIV do not. Further the Hebrew for the word "*many*" is the same Hebrew word translated "*generation*" a couple of words later. The point is that an immortal army would cause ALL to "*tremble*" making this "*day of the LORD*" more terrifying and causing the prophet to say "*their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.*" (NRSV)
  - (See also Psalm 72:5 where in the Hebrew language, the word "*generation*" is repeated and translated "*throughout all generations*".)
  - Hebrew = even to the years of generations and generations. (Psalms 72:5; 100:5; 145:13)

***JOEL 2:2 (NRSV) "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come."***

- This "*day of the Lord*" is unique because of the power of the invading army. However, this is NOT the "*northern army*" in Joel 2:20 and Ezekiel 38, 39, which God destroys. When we compare these two prophecies and see how Ezekiel describes God's fury against the "*northern army*", it becomes quite apparent that this "*northern army*" isn't the army in Joel 2:1-11.
- Further, the texts says "His" army (v.11) which does not sit well with the description of the "*stink*", the "*ill savour*" of the "*northern army*" coming up, and seen by the passengers who come up to Jerusalem to worship after Jesus' return, (Joel 2:20).

### **Prophecies that are parallel:**

- *Joel 2:20 But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things.*
- *Ezekiel 39:11 And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel, the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea: and it shall stop the noses of the passengers: and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude: and they shall call it The valley of Hamongog. 12 And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them that they may cleanse the land.*

If this army in Joel 2:1 is an immortal army, the question is why so great a devastation as seen in Joel 2:3?

***Joel 2:3. A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.***

Yes, there are the obvious parallels to the devastation caused by plagues of locust. It sometimes makes sense for human armies (i.e. General Sherman in the American civil war, to scorched the earth, as he marched through the southern states) to utterly destroy, but what would be the purpose of an immortal army doing this?

The answer is best illustrated by asking another question. What would cause the greater outcry, having the Dome of the Rock destroyed at Armageddon or destroyed later by Israel when Jesus sits upon David's throne? The answer is obvious, and especially as we apply this to the whole area described in Ezekiel chapter 45, including the holy portion for the sons of Zadok, the Levites and the possession of the city. Yes, with the great earthquake noted in Zech. 14:4,5 and having Jesus Christ and the saints clear this area at Armageddon with the inhabitants fleeing through fear fits like a glove and this is described in v. 6.

#### **Joel 2:6 – TWO MODERN TRANSLATIONS:**

***v.6 Before them the people writhe in pain; All faces are drained of colour. (NKJV)***

***v.6 Before them peoples are in anguish, all faces grow pale. (NRSV)***

The preceding verses, Joel 2:4 & 5 draw from chapter 1, where locust, in feeding make the sound of rushing flames, driven by wind or as described in Jer.8:16, as snorting horses which devoured land and people, **BUT the outcome is different** in Joel 2, for in v.18, God will be jealous for HIS land and pity HIS people in that day.

- *JER 8:16 The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it; the city, and those that dwell therein.*
- *JOEL 2:18 Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people.*

#### **Joel chapter 2 – THE LORD'S ARMY!**

Joel 2:7-9 matches amazingly, when descriptive of an immortal army, which can move as the locust, leaping from mountaintop to mountaintop. In fact, the next couple of verses are far easier to equate to an immortal army as compared to a mortal one. This army, unlike locust and human armies, will "not break ranks" or "thrust another" or be wounded, but be as the angels. Here the saints will "run to and fro" (cp Isa.33:4) and gravity will have no effect. No wonder in verse 10, the earth and heavens will tremble (Isaiah 1:2 & 10 = people, rulers) for the people and the rulers will be confounded at this army, which moves with the spirit wind, and cannot be destroyed with the weapons of war. Who is this army? **Verse 11 says it is the LORD'S army.**

**Joel 2:11** *And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for ("ki") his camp is very great: for ("ki") he is strong that executeth his word: for ("ki") the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?*

Again this doesn't prove an immortal army, but notice in the Hebrew the three key sentences are all introduced by the Hebrew word ("ki"). "*FOR* ("ki") *His camp is great, FOR* ("ki") *strong is he who does His word, FOR* ("ki") *great is the day of God*". "Ki" is for emphasis so notice the middle phrase: "*FOR he is strong that executeth HIS word*" - which corresponds well with Christ and not well with "Gog, the commander of "northern army" in v.20. So the question is WHY NOT AN IMMORTAL ARMY?

### **Why not an IMMORTAL army?**

- v.7 "run, climb the wall like men of war"
- v.7 "not break ranks"
- v.8 "neither shall one thrust another"
- v.8 "sword, shall not be wounded"
- v.9 "run to and fro"
- v.9 "run upon the wall"
- v.9 "enter at the windows"
- v10 "earth, heavens tremble"

But first do we really care - is this that important, or just a point of interest? Well, if it is an immortal army, we could be part of it and the more real the prophetic word becomes, the more impact it will have on us. For example the following questions just naturally arise.

- What will be the role of this army?
- Is it one of clearing, destroying -- teaching?
- Doesn't God use the natural elements to destroy the Goggian confederacy?
- What about the inhabitants that are left?
- What of the one third that has survived the Goggian confederacy?
- What will be the role of God's saints at this time?

Scripture shows force will be used to bring about God's will upon earth when Jesus is revealed: as the "*lightning ... out of the east*" (Mt.24:27), with "*feet ... in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east*" (Zech.14:4), "*in flaming fire*" (2Thess.1:8), and "*glorified in his saints*" (1Thess.1:10). This multitudinous Christ will "*execute vengeance upon the heathen*" (Psa.149:7) and involved are not only the natural elements (Eze.38:22) but as seen in modern warfare, ground troops are still required. These troops are described in Joel 2:1-11 and those that survive will be given a wonderful opportunity to accept Jesus (Zec.13:8,9; Joel 2:23) as he makes Jerusalem his capital and rules upon the throne of his father David, Luke 1:32).

### **The saints like their commander – NO LONGER PASSIVE!**

- *2 Thessalonians 1:8* *In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:*
  - *Psa.149: 7* *To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; 8* *To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; 9* *To execute upon them the*

*judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD.*

This militant role of Jesus and his saints many today have difficulty with. What however usually is not seen is the full picture including the problem of changing human hearts. The example of Pharaoh in the exodus is a good one for his heart became so hard he couldn't see. Here the context is the "northern army" (Joel 2:20) which has just wiped out two thirds of Israel and a passive Jesus would have little effect on it. This army is beyond changing but the third left in Israel will see the intervention of Christ and be converted, (Zec.12:10;13:6,8). This role of Jesus with his saints is further detailed in Joel chapters 2 and 3 but before proceeding, another important question arises which is:

### **How dogmatic does one need to be concerning Bible prophecies which are still future?**

In the May 1898 issue of the "Christadelphian Magazine" there is an article by R.Roberts entitled: "True Principles and Uncertain Details" which says:

"There are general principles as to which there can be no compromise: but there are also unrevealed applications of these principles in detail which cannot be determined with certainty, and which every man must be allowed to judge for himself without any challenge of his right to fellowship. To insist on uniformity of opinion on those uncertain details is excess of zeal which may be forgiven, but which meanwhile inflicts harm and distress without just cause... It may help discernment if we consider some examples unaffected by uncertain details."

#### **"The Judgment Seat"**

- *"The General Truth* – That Christ will call the living and the dead before his judgment at his coming."
- *"Uncertain Detail* – Where will he set it up? Will it be in Palestine, or Egypt, or the solitudes of Sinai, in Arabia? We cannot be sure."

This important observation being said, when it comes to Joel and our question: "How dogmatic does one need to be concerning Bible prophecies which are still future?" The following chapter has been entitled: "reasonable firm".