

(Section 3) REASONABLY FIRM

Have you ever tried to be reasonably firm without being dogmatic? I mean regarding a subject you are enthused about and feel is important? This needed balance in interpreting God prophetic word was well stated in the December 1991 "Christadelphian Magazine". The title is "THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME" by F.Pearce.

"The shape of things to come"

"There is no intention to be dogmatic about this, --- though it may appear so -- one has to be reasonable firm in stating the case, otherwise no impact is made. But the opposite, that we do not and cannot know anything definite, is equally unacceptable. The Scriptures do make certain positive statements and we should be prepared to accept them as valid."

Being reasonably firm without being dogmatic is helpful, as we cover this amazing prophecy in Joel. Joel's vision can help keep us watching, which today is especially important, remembering Jesus' warning which is in his last chapter of his greatest prophecy:

"Behold, I come quickly"

- *REV 22:7 Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.*
- *REV 22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*
- *REV 22:20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

We, the last generation, are about to experience the suddenness with which Jesus will come, and the quickness of the events that follow will amaze us. Today, however this warning has lost its newness, and because people and whole religious groups have made inaccurate, and just plain wrong interpretations, this vision with its warning isn't understood.

Further the arrogance of some take the prophetic word too far and predict the date of Jesus' return has made many Christians lukewarm when it comes to Bible prophecy. What is astounding is that Jesus said in Mat.24:36,37 that neither he nor the angels in heaven knew the day and hour of his return. Yet, in spite of these words, many have made predictions that Jesus would return at such and such a date. The arrogance and ignorance of men when it comes to the prophetic word must astonish God's angels in view of Dan.2:21.

"God CHANGES the "times and seasons"!"

Mat. 24:3 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

- 2250 hemera {hay-mer'-ah} AV - day 355, daily 15, time 3, misc 16
- 5610 hora {ho'-rah} AV - hour 89, time 11, season 3, misc 5; 108

DAN 2:21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

So God CHANGES the "times and the seasons" when there is true repentance in the land, therefore - the angels don't know the day or hour, let alone we. Yes there may be a basis that the "evil steward" will reason that Christ's delays his coming, (Mat. 24:48) and Paul in Hebrews 10:37 does say: "for yet a little while", and it may seem our Lord does "tarry" for he is not willing that any should perish" (2Pe.3:9) but "the Lord is not slack" and he will "suddenly come" (Mal. 3:1) as "a thief in the night" (Rev. 16:15)!

Christ's 2ND coming:

- *Mt.24:48 "... My Lord delayeth his coming;"*
- *HEB 10:37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.*
- *2PE 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*
- *MAL 3:1 "... and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple,... he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." (see Appendix #5)*
- *REV 16:15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*

We need to be so careful in interpreting Bible prophecy and this especially applies with Christ's return. This point is well illustrated in Christ's parable of the "fig tree" and the interpretation that the "fig tree" is the Israeli nation which put forth leaves in 1948 and the generation that saw this, will still be alive when Jesus returns. Therefore it is concluded that Christ's return CAN'T be far away! This interpretation is probably correct, but we must not be dogmatic for scripture is carefully designed that each generation would think that Christ could come in their lifetime. And as for the "fig tree" parable, there could be a scientific break through in the aging process and the generation that witnessed Israel's birth as a nation could live longer. So we can only be reasonable firm in stating the life span of the generation that witnessed Israel becomes a nation.

Reasonable Firm but not Dogmatic!

Mt.24:34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled .

Hopefully we can be "reasonable firm in stating the many Bible prophecies" without being dogmatic.

We need the oil within our lamps, but for our lamps to be brightly shining, the oil must first be beaten out, then made pure, and then used! Fortunately obtaining this oil is becoming much easier for the bridegroom is almost here, and the early morning rays of the "sun of righteousness" are lighting up the prophetic word.

Prophetic mountain ranges lightened by the "sun of righteousness"

Song of Solomon 2:8 The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. 9 My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice. 10 My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. 11 For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;

Christ's bride (the ecclesia) has risen and today is looking through the lattice and seeing the tops of the mountain ranges of God's prophetic word light up, one after another, like a bounding deer, for the rays of the "sun of righteousness" are bouncing from one range to another. Yes, the lattice is like looking through a dark glass, and we must be careful describing what we see, but we also must not lose the hope, effect and inspiration that comes from God's prophetic word. Have you even seen a bounding deer in full flight? There is seemingly an effortless flow of energy and movement that is both thrilling and inspiring. This excitement as the prophetic mountain ranges bound into view like the bounding deer is so needed to counter our busy material world. Yes we must not be dogmatic, but there is a vision in Joel and today it needs to be seen.

Coming back to Joel 2:20 when the "northern army" is destroyed between the seas, there is then a wonderful vision of hope.

The "northern army" - GONE!

- *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, ...*
- *EZE 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.*

**Looking east from Mt. Olivet with Dead Sea reflecting
The mountain ranges can be seen beyond the road to Jericho.**



Yes, there still is the potential for a partial fulfillment as there was in Joel's time when hearts could be rent, rather than garments and the evil day is put off. Certainly the appeal of our loving heavenly Father couldn't be better worded.

Rend HEARTS and not garments!

- *JOEL 2:12 Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: 13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for*
he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.
- *EXO 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7 ... and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*

This exhortation and warning is to all Ages, but the prime context in Joel 2:20-32 is after Jesus

returns. For example, as seen in v.26, “*my people shall never be ashamed*”. Further today we don't have a Josiah in our land, a leader who tries with all his might to turn hearts to God, (2Kings 23:25).

No, there is no Josiah today and human hearts have been hardened by violence, materialism and the sins of the fathers have affected the children. Also the Sodomite is in our land which God hates.

King Josiah REALLY TRIED to change hearts!

2KI 23:25 And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

- 2Ki 23:4 - the vessels of Baal in God's temple destroyed
- 2Ki 23:5 - Baal worship around about Jerusalem prohibited
- 2Ki 23:7 - Sodomite houses next to God's house broken down
- 2Ki 23:10- Topheth, Molech, sun worship destroyed
- 2Ki 23:13- Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Milcom destroyed
- 2Ki 23:21- Passover kept

Our Judeo-Christian heritage has been replaced by the vessels of Baal -- not that we bow down to these gods of wood and stone, but we do bow down to their modern day counterparts and evil is called good. And even though lip service is given to condemning the injustice and violence in our land, hearts are not really rent. In fact, life goes on and the wicked prosper.

The HEART of man!

- *Isaiah 5:20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*
- *Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*
- *Gen. 6:5 And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

No, - A good king like Josiah wouldn't make much of a difference in our land. People would just continue to rend garments over the violence, terrorism and injustice, but few hearts would be turned to God, in fact we must ask the question, what would it take to rend the hearts of the people in our day and age? For example, if Jesus came, as he did the first time, meek and humble, would he be able to rend hearts? What does it take to rend hearts? The prophet Zechariah tells us what it will take to rend hearts:

What it will take to REND HEARTS?

- *ZEC 13:8 And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein.*
- *ZEC 12:10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him ...*

Two thirds of the people of Israel being destroyed is a terrifying picture of what it will take to rend Israeli hearts! Knowing the human heart first hand, deep down we know it takes a catastrophe and for most, it must be experienced first hand.

Coupled with this catastrophe, Israel will witness first hand the intervention of God's army, which will destroy the Goggian "*northern army*". Catastrophes have a way of having people take stock and it is only when God's judgments are in the earth that the world will learn righteousness.

What it takes to rend Israeli hearts!

- *Zech.13:6 And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.*

Upon seeing this in conjunction with their catastrophe (Zec.13:8), Israel will recognize their MESSIAH and finally rend both garments AND HEARTS, to "*mourn*" their messiah the Lord Jesus Christ. Upon this a trumpet will be blown in Zion, and a solemn fast will be held, and God will again be jealous for His people and His land.

Israel rends garments and hearts!

- ZEC.12:10 And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn
- JOEL 2:15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly:
- JOEL 2:18 Then was the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people. (RV)
- JOEL 2:20 But I will remove far off from you the northern army

The result of this as outlined by the Prophet Joel 2:19 is that Israel will no longer fear being made a reproach by the nations again, for Jesus Christ will be set up in Zion and the "*northern army*" will be destroyed. The devastation also will be reversed, v.25 that which the locust, cankerworm, caterpillar and palmerworm had eaten.

Notice the last phrase in v.25 - "*my great army which I sent among you*". Yes God sent these plagues of insects AGAINST Israel, and yes God does call foreign armies, "His army", but the CONTEXT in v.25 is to "restore" – how? V.25 says with "my great army AMONG you". This army can't be the "northern army" since it is destroyed BY God. This didn't happen with the Babylonian armies the Grecian or Roman armies, when they came against Israel. No the "northern army" is not God's army but Gog's army which is destroyed by God.

- *Ezekiel 38:21 And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man's sword shall be against his brother. [22] And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.*

After God destroys the "NORTHERN" army:

- *JOEL 2:19 Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen:*
- *2:20 But I will remove far off from you the NORTHERN army, ...*
- *2:25 And I will RESTORE to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent AMONG you.*

Since insects in Joel 2:25 symbolize armies, is it possible to interpret which insect describes which army, and then, answer why the "palmerworm" comes LAST in Joel 2:25, and FIRST in the sequence in Joel 1:4?

Difficulty one is that the precise meaning of the four Hebrew words used for locust is uncertain. This can be seen by the differences of translation where even the newer translations do not agree.

KJV	HEBREW	NAS	NKJV	NIV
Palmerworm	"gazam"	gnawing	swarming	locust swarm
Locust	"arbelim"	swarming	crawling	great locust
cankerworm	"yalek"	creeping	consuming	young locust
caterpillar	"chesil"	stripping	chewing	other locust

Locusts have different stages but their metamorphosis is more simply then that of the butterfly or beetle. The locust is thought to pass through three main stages, after emerging from the egg. The eggs are deposited in April and May and hatched in June. Immediately after the locust are hatched, they are in the larva stage, having no wings but being able to move in compact bodies by hopping to find and devour food. After about three weeks time their fourth molt brings them to the pupa stage in which their wings are partially developed, but enclosed. In another month they cast this pupa skin off and as soon as their wings are dry and expanded they ascend into the air.



Some have tried to parallel the different stages of locust with the four Hebrew words in Joel. Yet, this does not give a consistency of interpretation. In the July 1975 "Christadelphian Magazine", Bro. F. Pearce showed by adding the numerical value to consonants of the four Hebrew words used in Joel 1:4 these insects could be links to Daniel. Bro. Peter Islip includes the historical dates.

JOEL 1:4	HEBREW	NUMERICAL	HISTORY	YEARS
palmerworm	"gazam"	50	Nebuchadnezzar to Cyrus – 588-538 BC	50
Locust	"arbeh"	208	Cyrus to Alexander 538-330 BC	208
cankerworm	"yaleq"	140	Alexander 330-190 to the Maccabees	140
caterpillar	"chaciyl"	108	Rome about 38 BC-70AD	108

This article said that the Babylonian desolation of Jerusalem and its temple lasted from 588 BC to

538 BC, the year that Cyrus took Babylon, which was 50 years in total. He then showed that the Persian domination lasted from 538 to 330 BC, the year of the victory of Alexander the Great which was 208 years, and that the period of Seleucid Greek domination lasted from 330 BC to their defeat by the Romans at the battle of Magnesia in 190 BC giving 140 years; then followed the period of the Maccabees and liberty, to be followed in its turn by Roman domination and annihilation from about 38 BC to 70 AD., a period of 108 years. The locust figures therefore are a further composite designation for the "*kingdoms of men*" of which Daniel's image and the beasts in Daniel chapter 7 and 8 describe.

This linkage using Hebrew numerical value and history is an interesting one, but caution is needed. To illustrate, Bro. Fred Pearce was quoted to begin this chapter, but not from his 1976 "Christadelphian Magazine" article, but from an article he wrote 15 years later that appeared in 1991 "Christadelphian Magazine" entitled "The Shape of Things to Come".

"There is no intention to be dogmatic about this, --- though it may appear so -- one has to be reasonable firm in stating the case, otherwise no impact is made. But the opposite, that we do not and cannot know anything definite, is equally unacceptable." Yes, there still are some questions and the exact dates of when these empires were directly involved with Judah and Jerusalem do vary, however, to not be reasonable firm and miss the impact is equally unacceptable."

This quote is repeated to show its importance. Spiritual discernment when it comes to Bible prophecy takes time and comparing articles written by spiritual brethren that are separated by years bears this out. Therefore "being reasonably firm" as to why the insect order changes in Joel 2:25 is unwise since we are not sure of the meaning of the Hebrew words translated "*palmer worm*", "*locust*", "*cankerworm*" and "*caterpillar*", nor can the interpretation be checked by history for v.25 is future. We therefore can't be reasonable firm as to why the insect order changes. Continuing, the prophetic picture clears for the gloom is gone and "the LORD will do great things."

"Be glad and rejoice", the gloom is gone!

JOEL 2:22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do ring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. 23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former <4175> rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

- "beast"/"trees" = nations - Dan.8:20;4:20,22
- "fig tree"/ "vine" = Israel - Hos.10:1
- "former"/"latter" rains = God word - Psa.72:6
- 4175 "mowreh" = autumn rain but AV margin & (TWOT) = teacher

Prophetically these double symbols of rain show great abundance. The fig tree and vine describe the nation of Israel, which is doubly blessed with both former and latter rains. There is both literal and spiritual abundance in the land for Almighty God through His dear son has taken direct control, ruling from Mount Zion. Zion's glad morning has come, her gloom is gone, for her messiah, her "teacher" of righteousness has returned, causing joy and gladness throughout the land.

The prophetic symbolism employed to describe this wondrous change is both graphic and really amazing. Rain is such a fitting symbol of God's spirit word that comes down softening the earth, so fruit might grow. The Psalmist captures this picture in Psalm 72, with the rain coming down upon the "mown grass", however, the setting isn't quite the same, for Psalm 72 describes the millennial age when the grass (people) are "mown" showing shape and discipline. Unfortunately Joel 2:31 shows still a further harvest entitled the "*great and terrible day of the Lord*", therefore the people in Joel 2 are not described as mown grass.

The marvel of Bible symbolism

- *PSA 72:6 He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. 7 In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.*
- *DEU 32:2 My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass:*

In comparing scripture with scripture, it is possible to show that Jesus Christ with his saints will be directly involved in spreading the rain (doctrine) not only upon Israel but throughout the world.

The TEACHER of righteousness

JOEL 2:23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the FORMER (4174 "mo-reh = teacher) rain MODERATELY (6666 "tzedakah" = righteousness), and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

- 4175 "mowreh" { mo-reh' } = autumn rain but AV margin = teacher
- 6666 "tzedakah" (tsed-aw-kaw) translated righteousness, 2Sam 22:21,25; 1Kings 8:32; 2 Chron. 6:23 Faith in the Last Days, Dr. J. Thomas translates v.23 - "... for he hath given to you the Teacher of Righteousness, and he shall cause to descend for you a rain ..."

The Hebrew word translated "former" interestingly also has the meaning "teacher" as noted in the K.J. margin and the Hebrew word for "moderately" is also translated "righteousness". Dr. Thomas seeing this, translated verse 23 "... for he hath given to you the *Teacher of Righteousness, and he shall cause to descend for you a rain; a teacher and a latter rain in the first month.*" What is happening with the differences of translation, is the literal and spiritual meaning of v.23, is overlapping.

This "rain" is symbolic of the millennial gospel revealed in God's word which fortunately will not stop with Israel but will go forth to water the whole world as described in Rev. 14:6.

The gospel preached to all nations!

REV 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people

- Angel = "rainbow" angel of Rev. 10:1 = multitudinous Christ as messenger.
- Christ's authority, not yet over the whole world therefore the "*midst of heaven*".
 - *Revelation 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting*

gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

The timing is after Armageddon and before the “*great and terrible day*” of God in Joel 2:31. Before we can really appreciate what is described, the sequence of events from Jesus’ return to the beginning of the millennium needs to be further developed and established. This will be done in the next chapter. Before establishing this sequence it would seem reasonable that Jesus’ brethren and sisters who have been made immortal will be directly involved in preaching this “*everlasting gospel*” to the world. This preaching effort will be led by Jesus Christ, that great “*teacher of righteousness*” and “*every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people*” will have opportunity to accept Jesus as messiah.

There is here a special exhortation to those who are alive when Jesus returns and are blessed as his brethren and sisters, for likely they would have opportunity during this period of good news to come to help educate those they would have known and who have lived through Armageddon. Therefore there is added importance to this group of believers just before Jesus’ return to conducting themselves wisely.

The apostle Paul noted to Timothy the important to “*have a good report of them which are without*” that is outside the ecclesia of God.

The faithful and wise servant:

- *1TI 3:7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

This dimension of maybe being able in the future, to sit down with our earthly boss, and show that Jesus has returned and is going to usher in the Kingdom Age can help us now in being careful in what we say and do. You can imagine, if we have not been faithful or undermined our earthly boss, how much more difficult it will be for us to assist, in bringing in this new age. This applies to neighbors, to those who may work for us. In fact the exhortation goes on and on. God’s prophetic word, not only gives vision and hope, but incentive to walk with integrity, “*having a good report of them which are without*”, making sure our light is brightly shining, for who knows, how God will use us today or in the future.