

A CRITIQUE OF THE PREWRATH INTERPRETATION OF THE DAY OF THE LORD IN JOEL 2–3

by
Alan D. Cole¹

Many men teach; some men educate; few men inspire. Dr. Rolland D. McCune does all three. When I first started seminary, I viewed theology as a cold and dry subject that one had to endure in order to graduate. While sitting under the instruction of Dr. McCune, I not only learned theology; I came to love theology. His life of dedication to knowing the Word of God and the God of the Word have been a constant example and inspiration to me. I consider it a great honor to be able to contribute to his festschrift.

The Day of the Lord is a subject that fascinates many theologians. The nature of the topic and the variety of individuals who study it produce a host of opinions regarding its interpretative issues. In fact, almost every aspect of the Day of the Lord seems to be debated.² One area of debate is the relationship of the Day of the Lord to the seventieth week of Daniel and the Millennium. Gerald B. Stanton states, “There has been a great deal of confusion over the location of the Day of the Lord. Some writers have placed it at the time of the Rapture, others at the time of the revelation, and still others as a bridge which spans the two.”³

The *terminus a quo* of the Day of the Lord is a significant question

¹Dr. Cole is Professor of Bible and Theology at Faith Baptist Bible College, Ankeny, IA. This article is an excerpt from his unpublished dissertation, “A Critique of Prewrath Rapture’s *Terminus A Quo* of The Day of the Lord” (Th.D. dissertation, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004).

²For example, is the Day of the Lord history or eschatology, is it a day or a period, and does it contain judgment only or is blessing a part of it (Richard L. Mayhue, “The Prophet’s Watchword: Day of the Lord” [Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981], pp. 8–9)? Mayhue points out that “a study on the literature written on DOL [Day of the Lord] produces a plethora of opinions” (p. 8).

³*Kept From the Hour*, 4th ed. (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1991), p. 75. John F. Walvoord echoes these same sentiments when he states, “There are few prophetic subjects about which there is more confusion than the theme of the Day of the Lord” (*The Rapture Question*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979], p. 174).

because it is a major factor in determining the Rapture's timing. Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴ In this text, Paul promises church saints that they will be exempted from wrath. If the wrath is the same judgment that is associated with the Day of the Lord, then one's location of that wrath in Daniel's week provides support for his understanding of the Rapture's timing.⁵ Charles C. Ryrie recognizes this significance when he comments, "The question of the Day of the Lord is a watershed between pre- and posttribulationism."⁶

Even within pretribulationism there is not a consensus as to what the Day of the Lord includes. There are those who believe that it begins with the seventieth week of Daniel.⁷ At least one pretribulationist, Paul D. Feinberg, believes that the Day of the Lord begins at the midpoint of the seventieth week. He thinks, however, that the entire week is a period of wrath, seeing a distinction between the Day of the Lord and divine wrath.⁸ Some pretribulationists believe that the Day of the Lord begins near the end of the seventieth week, usually with the Battle of Armageddon.⁹ Additionally, there is disagreement whether or not the Millennium should be included in the Day of the Lord.¹⁰

⁴Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from the NASB, 1995 updated edition. In direct quotations from various authors, the text they cite will be maintained.

⁵This article assumes that in v. 9 Paul is referring to the Day of the Lord which he mentioned in verse 2.

⁶*Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), p. 566.

⁷See, for example, J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), p. 230; Renald E. Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View: An Examination and Critique* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), p. 166; and Leon J. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events: An Introductory Study of Last-Day Events* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), pp. 55–56, 85.

⁸"The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position, in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* ed. Ben Chapman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 60–63. See also Thomas R. Edgar, "An Exegesis of Rapture Passages," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp. 209–210.

⁹E.g., Allen Beechick, *The Pre-Tribulation Rapture* (Denver: Accent Publications, 1980), p. 104; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:398; C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 1349, n. 1; Mayhue, "Prophet's Watchword," pp. 33, 130, 209; and John A. Sproule, "An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), p. 13. Sproule, however, argues that "wrath" (ὀργή) includes all of the judgments from Revelation 6–19 (pp. 131–35, 142–43, 164).

¹⁰For examples of those who would include it, see Beechick, *Pre-Tribulation Rapture*, p. 106; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:398; Henry A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on*

In 1990, a new position on the timing of the Rapture and the Day of the Lord emerged. This new understanding was labeled the Prewrath Rapture. The two most notable adherents of this view are Marvin J. Rosenthal and Robert D. Van Kampen.¹¹ According to their thinking, the Day of the Lord will begin some time between the middle of Daniel's seventieth week and its end. Connected with this new timing of the Day of the Lord is the affirmation that the Rapture begins just before the Day of the Lord and even on the same day. Van Kampen defines his position as follows:

The prewrath position is really quite simple: the true and faithful church will be raptured (or rescued) when Antichrist's great tribulation (persecution) against God's elect is cut short by Christ's coming (Matt 24:22, 29–31). First He will rescue the faithful who will be undergoing Satan's wrath, and then He will destroy the wicked who remain on earth during the Day of the Lord, God's wrath. The wrath of God is never equated with the persecution of God's elect.¹²

Van Kampen believes that "the single most important event prophetically depicted in the Old Testament is the eschatological wrath of God—The Day of the Lord."¹³ Any study of the Day of the Lord must begin with the relevant texts in the OT.¹⁴ If the exegete misinterprets

the Epistles of Peter, in *Expository Notes on the Epistles of James and Peter* (Neptune: Loizeaux, 1947), pp. 98–99; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p. 230; Robert L. Saucy, "The Eschatology of the Bible," in vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p. 107; Showers, *Pre-Wrath Rapture View*, pp. 157–61; and Walvoord, *Rapture Question*, pp. 214, 218. For those who would not include it, see Mayhue, "Prophet's Watchword," pp. 130, 209; Sproule, "Exegetical Defense," p. 13; and Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *A Review of the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church by Marvin Rosenthal* (Tustin, CA.: Ariel Ministries Press, 1991), p. 14.

¹¹Marvin J. Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990); Robert D. Van Kampen, *The Sign*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), and idem, *The Rapture Question Answered: Plain & Simple* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1997).

¹²Van Kampen, *The Sign*, pp. 19, 306.

¹³Robert D. Van Kampen et al., eds., "Chapter 6," in *Revelation Commentary* (Orlando: Sola Scriptura, 2002), p. 13 [online], accessed 8 October 2002, available at <http://www.revelationcommentary.org>. See also Rosenthal, *Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, pp. 9, 118. Regarding the Day of the Lord Van Kampen also states that "it is the focal point of the end times" (*The Sign*, pp. 348–49).

¹⁴Van Kampen himself realized the foundational role that the OT texts have in this study and submitted his interpretation of the OT to Walter Kaiser for advice. He wanted to make sure that his understanding of the key OT passages was correct in order to secure the foundation on which the rest of his system was built (*Rapture Question Answered*, pp. 197–98). Mayhue surveys the various proposals for the origin of the term "Day of the Lord" and concludes that the issue really is not significant. He states, "Whether a DOL type concept existed within or without Israel prior to its first use by either Obadiah or Joel is really of minimal importance. This writer rejects the theory

the OT passages relating to the Day of the Lord, his understanding of the NT passages will also be incorrect. The majority of OT support for the prewrath view is derived from the interpretation of the texts in Joel relating to the Day of the Lord. Therefore, this article analyzes prewrath rapturism's arguments from the Joel 2–3 which are used to support its timing for the start of the Day of the Lord.

Prewrath rapturists affirm several tenets relating to the Day of the Lord in the OT. First, they assert that the *terminus a quo* of the Day of the Lord is clearly delineated in both the OT and NT.¹⁵ Second, the Day of the Lord does not equal the same time period as either the seventieth week of Daniel or the second half of that week.¹⁶ Third, the Day of the Lord does not extend into the Millennium.¹⁷ Fourth, the Day of the Lord is a period of unparalleled wrath.¹⁸ Fifth, the Day of the Lord has two purposes. One is to judge the unsaved world and the other is to cleanse the Israelites.¹⁹ Sixth, every "Day of the Lord" reference or any reference using a similar expression has some relationship to the end times.²⁰

THE PREWRATH INTERPRETATION OF JOEL 2–3

Charles C. Cooper, a prewrath rapturist, divides Joel into two units. Chapter one is historical and chapters two through three are prophetic. Cooper refers to the destruction of the northern army (2:18–20) and the rejuvenation of the land (2:21–27) as "immediate." Evidently, he interprets these prophecies as future to Joel's time but having occurred by the time of the NT. According to him, Joel 2:28–32 was initially or partially fulfilled at Pentecost but awaits complete

that we need to know the origin to understand its meaning as used by the prophets. Its use in context by the prophets makes its meaning understandable" ("Prophet's Watchword," p. 53). Mayhue places Obadiah and Joel as the earliest of the writing prophets in which the Day of the Lord terminology is found. See pages 70–71 for his rationale for dating Obadiah early. See his survey of the suggestions for the origin of the term "Day of the Lord" on pages 34–54.

¹⁵Van Kampen, *The Sign*, p. 194.

¹⁶Rosenthal, *Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, pp. 115–16. See also Van Kampen, *The Sign*, p. 194.

¹⁷Rosenthal, *Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, p. 127. According to the prewrath view, the interpreter can only hold to the Day of the Lord extending into the Millennium by believing that there are two Days of the Lord. Rosenthal objects to the idea of two days. He believes that there is only one, as indicated by the article "the" (p. 129).

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 118, 146–47. See also Van Kampen, *The Sign*, pp. 351, 491.

¹⁹Van Kampen, *The Sign*, p. 355. See also Rosenthal, *Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, pp. 163–64.

²⁰Van Kampen, *The Sign*, p. 349, see note.

fulfillment in the seventieth week. This future complete fulfillment, along with the rest of Joel, will take place in the seventieth week.²¹

Rosenthal, Cooper, and Van Kampen find support for their view in Joel 2:1–3. Rosenthal identifies the trumpet blast of verse 1 as the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52. He believes that both passages refer to the announcement of the Day of the Lord which occurs at the Rapture.²² Cooper does not think that verse 1 refers to the Day of the Lord but instead refers to the army, which is also mentioned in the verse. He cites four reasons for this opinion. First, since Joel is not speaking of a universal judgment, the description is limited geographically to Israel. Second, Cooper argues that verses 1–2 are describing conditions that precede the Day of the Lord but do not constitute the Day of the Lord itself. Third, Joel warns about a great army and not the Day of the Lord. Fourth, the phrase, “there has never been anything like it,” refers to the army and not to the Day of the Lord.²³ In verse 3, Joel refers to a consuming fire. Van Kampen asserts that this fire indicates that the Day of the Lord stems directly from God and not human agents.²⁴

The interpretation of Joel 2:28–31 is highly significant for the prewrath position. According to Van Kampen, verse 31 is “the classic Day-of-the-Lord passage in Joel.”²⁵ Verse 31 indicates that the strange events of verses 28–30 will take place “before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” Advocates of the prewrath view argue that the Day of the Lord cannot occur before these signs because these events must precede the Day of the Lord.²⁶ According to Cooper, these disturbances are not characteristic of the early seal judgments. The two events, Daniel’s week and the Day of the Lord, do not begin at the same time.²⁷ In the opinion of prewrath rapturists, the events of verses 30–31 are the same as those occurring in Revelation 6:12–14. The

²¹“Dispensational Foundations: Acts, Joel, and Revelation, Part 2 of 2,” *Parousia*, Spring 1998, pp. 3–4. The issue of the relationship of Joel 2 to Acts 2 is beyond the scope of this study, and rarely surfaces in the prewrath literature. Consequently, Acts 2 is not discussed in this article.

²²*Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, pp. 192–93.

²³Charles Cooper, “Whose Wrath Is It? Prophecy Under Fire: Critics & Critiques,” *Parousia*, Fall 2001, p. 9.

²⁴*The Sign*, p. 352.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 283. In Joel 2–3 the English verse numeration is used for sake of clarity.

²⁶For an example see Charles C. Cooper, “The Prophetic Pillars of the Prewrath Position, Part 2: The Rapture Initiates the Day of the Lord,” *Parousia*, Winter 2000, p. 6.

²⁷“Dispensational Foundations,” p. 8.

sixth seal, therefore, is not a part of the Day of the Lord but instead, the sign which precedes that day.²⁸

Based on the sequence in 2:28–3:7, Cooper thinks that this passage indicates the timing of the Rapture. He asserts that verses 28–29 refer to the Holy Spirit and prophetic utterances, and verses 30–31 describe the cataclysms which immediately precede the Day of the Lord. In verse 32, Joel refers to “deliverance,” which Cooper interprets as the Rapture. Another indicator of this association is the expression, “the survivors whom the LORD calls” (2:32). Cooper believes that this phrase refers to those raptured. He also asserts that Joel 3:1–7 is the Day of the Lord. According to this interpretation, the Rapture occurs just after the signs of the Day of the Lord and before the actual start of it.²⁹

In Joel 3:14–15, the prophet refers to the darkening of the sun and the stars but states that this event will occur prior to the Day of the Lord. Van Kampen equates these heavenly disturbances with those of 2:31 and thinks that both passages are speaking of the same event. He also connects this sign with the one in Matthew 24:29 (“the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light”) and Isaiah 13:10–11 (“The sun will be darkened and the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world...”).³⁰ Van Kampen understands the larger context of Joel 3 to describe a war. He designates this battle as “the Jehoshaphat Campaign,” probably based on verse 2, “I will gather all the nations, and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.” He identifies the location as the Kidron Valley, but also suggests that the Berachah Valley may be a possible location (2 Chr 20:20–26). He thinks that the timing of this battle occurs at the sixth seal just before the Day of the Lord. He believes that the armies who oppose Israel are the Gentile nations. These countries comprise the seven remaining nations of Antichrist’s ten-nation coalition (3:11–12). According to Van Kampen, Israel’s enemies will be defeated at this battle (Zech 12:4, 6; 14:12–14).³¹

Rosenthal does not appear to agree with Van Kampen on this passage. Rosenthal seems to imply that 3:14–16 describes the kingdom.³² He appears to be in disagreement with Van Kampen that this passage is describing an event that occurs prior to the Day of the Lord. Although Rosenthal does not believe that there is blessing associated with the Day of the Lord, his comments here seem to indicate otherwise.

²⁸Van Kampen et al., “Chapter Six,” p. 13.

²⁹“Dispensational Foundations,” pp. 4–5.

³⁰*The Sign*, pp. 283–84.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 287–90, 360, 368, 498–99.

³²*Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, p. 119.

ANALYSIS OF THE VIEW

The analysis of the prewrath arguments from Joel 2–3 will be considered in three sections: Joel 2:1–11, 2:28–32, and 3:14–15. Joel 2 begins an extended discussion on the Day of the Lord. The structure of this chapter is as follows: (1) verses 1–11 discuss the Day of the Lord and the invading army, (2) verses 12–17 are a call to repentance, (3) verses 18–27 promise kingdom blessings, and (4) the final section, verses 28–32, describes the outpouring of the Spirit and the cosmic disturbances.³³ The crux of the prewrath view is in verses 28–31, which Van Kampen, Rosenthal, and Cooper connect to events just before the day of God’s wrath.³⁴ According to them, these incidents are the same ones recorded in Revelation 6:12–14.

Rosenthal and Van Kampen think that Joel 2 refers to the eschatological Day of the Lord; Cooper, however, is a bit unclear as to what he believes to be eschatological in this chapter. On the one hand, he seems to interpret verses 1–11 as an eschatological army that invades Israel just before the Day of the Lord. On the other hand, he refers to the fulfillment of verses 18–27 as future and immediate. He is unclear as to whether he interprets verses 18–27 as historical future or eschatological. However, he does think 2:28–3:21 has its ultimate fulfillment in eschatology.

The eschatological timing of verses 2:1–11 and 2:28–3:21 is accepted by this writer, and therefore, is not debated.³⁵ Joel 2:12–27 also reflects an eschatological timing. In verse 18, Joel records for Israel that Yahweh “will never again make you a reproach among the nations.” In verses 26–27, Joel records that Israel “will never be put to shame.” The blessings that Joel records in these verses indicate that Yahweh is dwelling with his people (v. 27). These prophecies can only find their fulfillment in the eschatological kingdom. Furthermore, the northern army of verse 20 appears to be the King of the North (Dan 11:40–12:1). The location of his defeat “between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain” (Dan 11:45) corresponds to Joel’s description of the

³³*Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, s.v. “Joel 2, Eschatology of,” by Roy E. Beacham, p. 217. See also Duane A. Garrett, “The Structure of Joel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28 (September 1985): 294–97, who basically holds this view.

³⁴In his critique of the prewrath view, Phil Piccolo points out that this affirmation is “the link holding together Rosenthal’s claim that cosmic disturbances precede his DOL” (Phil Piccolo, “Day of the Lord Precursors?” *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* 7 [Fall 1991]: 57).

³⁵For a further defense of this view, see Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), pp. 300, 353–54.

defeat of the northern army.³⁶ In light of these arguments, Joel 2:1–3:21 is understood to refer to eschatological events.

Joel 2:1–11

Joel 2:1–11 divides into four sections: verses 1–2, verses 3–4, verses 6–9, and verses 10–11. The words “before them” (לפניהם) indicates each new section beginning with verse 3. Verse 1 mentions the Day of the Lord and verse 11 describes it, thus acting as an *inclusio* for verses 1–11. In verse 2, the day is described as “a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.” This description is repeated in verse 10 (“the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness”)³⁷ further indicating the *inclusio* structure of this section.

In verse 1, Yahweh issues the command to “sound an alarm” and to be afraid.³⁸ The reason for this terror is that the Day of the Lord is coming upon the people. This trumpet blast announces the Day of the Lord; it warns the nation of approaching danger. Rosenthal assumes that a conceptual link exists between the trumpet of this verse and the one of 1 Corinthians 15:52. However, Joel 2:1 does not mention the Rapture. Rosenthal must read his NT theology into the OT passage in order to see the Rapture mentioned. In Joel 2:1, the trumpet warns of the Day of the Lord and its impending doom. The trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 announces the Rapture and the coming of Christ. The trumpet of Joel 2:1 is sounded in Zion; it has a limited area in which it is heard. The trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:12 is for all those who are in Christ (1 Thess 4:16–17); it has an international audience. The two trumpets are not synonymous.³⁹

Cooper also argues that the Day of the Lord has not arrived

³⁶Beacham, “Joel 2, Eschatology of,” p. 217. Daniel J. Treier interprets the fulfillment of 2:18–27 as historical but does recognize the validity of the eschatological interpretation. He states, “It must be admitted that some of the language of 2:18–27 could lead one to interpret the physical blessings eschatologically” (“The Fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32: A Multiple-Lens Approach,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 [March 1997]: 15).

³⁷Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 56–57. J. Bourke thinks that *inclusios* are common in Joel (“Le Jour de Yahvé dans Joël,” *Revue Biblique* 66 [1959]: 12).

³⁸Leslie Allen states, “The horn blast was thus the ancient equivalent of the modern air raid siren blaring its alert” (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, New International Commentary on The Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], p. 67).

³⁹According to Fish, “All trumpets are not alike, and it is arbitrary to assume that the trumpet which announces the gathering of the church to the Lord is the same as that which announces the eschatological judgment of the Day of the Lord” (John H. Fish III, “The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: A Review Article,” *Emmaus Journal* 1 [Fall 1991]: 32–33).

because it is “near.” The prophet, however, describes the day as “near” in order to stress that it could come at any moment. This announcement is similar to the one in 1:2–16. In 1:2–12, the prophet describes a great locust plague that has devastated the land. In verses 13–14, he calls for national repentance and in verses 15–16, he stresses the nearness of the Day of the Lord. This plague pictures or illustrates the Day of the Lord.⁴⁰ From Joel’s prophetic perspective, Israel is almost in that day.⁴¹ Joel stresses its nearness in order to emphasize immediate repentance.

In 2:1, Joel uses this same type of perspective. The conceptual links between 1:14–16 and 2:1 appear to support this idea. The expression, “all the inhabitants of the land” in 1:14 parallels the same expression in 2:1.⁴² Also in 1:14, all of the inhabitants are to gather at the temple. This idea parallels in 2:1 the alarm being sounded on Mt. Zion, the “holy mountain,” instead of it coming from the walls, the usual place of warning.⁴³ In 1:15, the day is described as “near” and “coming.” In 2:1, this order is reversed to “coming” and “near.”⁴⁴ In 1:13–14, the prophet Joel calls upon the people to repent in view of the coming of the Day of the Lord. Joel appears to follow this same pattern in 2:1–11. He calls upon the nation to repent (v. 1) in light of the coming Day of the Lord.⁴⁵ Finley states that “both chapters indicate the need for action in the face of disaster.”⁴⁶

Although the trumpet is to sound in Joel’s time, the coming day is in the distant future. However, Joel views the day as near. He does not see the length of time between his announcement and the day’s arrival. This perspective is similar to the prophets foretelling the two comings of Christ (his birth and revelation) as one event (Isa 9:6–7). Alva J. McClain defines this phenomenon as follows:

In other words, somewhat as a picture lacks the dimension of depth,

⁴⁰Willem A. Van Gemeren states, “For Joel, the locust plagues serves as a metaphor for the Day of the Lord” (*Interpreting the Prophetic Word* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990], p. 121).

⁴¹Note the *New Living Translation*, “The day of the LORD is upon us,” and the *New International Version*, “It is close at hand.”

⁴²Bernard E. Northrup, “Joel’s Concept of The Day of the Lord” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1961), p. 132.

⁴³Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, p. 334.

⁴⁴Northrup, “Joel’s Concept of The Day of the Lord,” p. 132.

⁴⁵Chisholm states, “Certain that the Lord’s Day was around the corner, Joel issued a call to alarm” (*Interpreting the Minor Prophets*, p. 56).

⁴⁶Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), p. 42.

the prophecy often lacks the dimension of time: events appear together on the screen of prophecy which in their fulfillment may be widely separated in time. Thus the student may find a prophecy having all the external marks of literary unity, yet referring to some event in the *near* future connected with the historical phase of the Kingdom and also to some *far-off* event connected with the Messiah and His Millennial Kingdom.⁴⁷

In verse 2a, Joel depicts the Day of the Lord as a time of “darkness and gloom,” and “clouds and thick darkness.” Associated with this day is the approach of a great army that Joel compares to the dawn breaking over the mountains. The point of this analogy is that the army is enormous.⁴⁸ Charles Cooper’s contention that verses 1–2 do not describe the Day of the Lord cannot be substantiated from the text. In verse 1, Joel announces the approach of the Day of the Lord and then in verse 2, he describes it. This description is similar to verse 10, which refers to the Day of the Lord. Joel is proclaiming that the army is an aspect of this day (“a great and mighty people”).

Cooper’s arguments regarding verses 1–2 are a response to Renald Showers. In attempting to refute the prewrath view, Showers argues that the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord overlap. He thinks that both are described as an “unparalleled time of trouble.”⁴⁹ Showers then points out, “Since there can only be one unparalleled time of trouble, this common association prompts the conclusion that the Great Tribulation cannot be totally separate from the Day of the Lord.”⁵⁰ If Showers is correct, then the Day of the Lord overlaps the Great Tribulation. Since the prewrath view begins the Great Tribulation at the middle of the seventieth week, the association of the two names would refute the view. Cooper, however, contends that the army is described as “unparalleled,” and not the Day of the Lord. He asserts that Showers has assumed his point.⁵¹

The disagreement between Cooper and Showers concerns the antecedent of the pronoun *it* in 2:2. The last half of verse reads, “There has never been anything like it...to the years of many generations.” Showers understands the referent to be the Day of the Lord. Cooper, however, understands the antecedent to be the “mighty people.” If Cooper is correct, then Showers’ descriptive link between the Day of

⁴⁷*The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (reprint of 1959 ed., Winona Lake: BMH, 1974), pp. 136–37.

⁴⁸Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, p. 335.

⁴⁹*Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, s.v. “Rapture, The Prewrath,” by Renald E. Showers, pp. 355–59.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 356. Wood makes this same argument (*Bible and Future Events*, p. 54).

⁵¹Cooper, “Whose Wrath Is It?” p. 9.

the Lord and the Great Tribulation is nullified in this passage.

Cooper's view appears to be stronger because the closest antecedent to the pronoun *it* is the noun *עַם*, which means "people" or "nation."⁵² In the following verses, Joel describes these people in terms like an army, which seems to indicate that they are under discussion at the end of verse 2. Cooper is correct in understanding the expression, "there has never been anything like it," to refer to the people or army and not to the day of wrath.⁵³ However, one should not draw too sharp a distinction between the two. Verses 3–9 describe the army and the terrors it causes. In verse 3, fire precedes and follows the army.⁵⁴ The army is an organized war machine (vv. 4–5) that terrorizes its victims (v. 6). The army is also depicted as unstoppable (vv. 7–9). Since the Day of the Lord is associated with the army, that day is to some extent unparalleled.

On the other hand, Showers is not totally wrong in his contention that the Day of the Lord and the Great Tribulation overlap. Daniel 12:1–7 indicates that there is a time of unprecedented "distress" that lasts for three and a half years. In Matthew 24:15, Christ refers to the "abomination of desolation" which occurs in the middle of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:27). In verses 16–20, Christ teaches that after this event, those living in Jerusalem should flee. In verse 21, he describes this period as a "great tribulation" that is unprecedented. Daniel 9:25, Revelation 12:6, 14, and 13:4–8, point out that the Antichrist will persecute the Jews for three and half years. These descriptions indicate that the Great Tribulation will last for three and a half years and is unparalleled.⁵⁵ Cooper even admits this when he comments, "Scripture also states that the Great Tribulation (three and a half years) will be a period of unparalleledness for Israel."⁵⁶ According

⁵²Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (reprint ed., Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 766 [hereafter cited as BDB].

⁵³Roy E. Beacham, "The Analogical Use of Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:15–2: A Literal Approach" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Bible Faculty Leadership Summit, Allen Park, MI, 7 August 1998), p. 98.

⁵⁴Finley points out, "Joel is quite interested in 'before and after' descriptions, and they form a motif throughout the book" (*Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, pp. 44–45).

⁵⁵Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture and the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), pp. 43–46.

⁵⁶"Whose Wrath Is It?" p. 10. Cooper makes this same identification a second time. After he refers to the period when Satan is cast to the earth (Rev 12:12), he states: "This time is further limited in Revelation 12:13–14 to *time, times and half a time*—three and a half years or forty-two months. This can be none other than the same time as Antichrist (the prince of the people to come) rules on the earth, which is the same time as 'a time of distress' (Dan 12:1) which equals 'a great tribulation' (Matt 24:21)" (p. 10, italics original). According to Cooper, the Great Tribulation lasts for

to the prewrath view, the Day of the Lord is in the second half of Daniel's week. This inclusion indicates that there is some amount of overlap between the Day of the Lord and the Great Tribulation. They are not totally separate entities as Van Kampen, Rosenthal, and Cooper contend.

Furthermore, the army that Joel describes in verses 1–11 is identified in verse 20 as the northern army. This identification seems apparent because there is no other army in the chapter to which Joel refers. In verse 20, Yahweh declares that he will “remove” this army. The army that Yahweh uses in verses 1–11, he destroys in verse 20. Daniel 11:40–45 describes the destruction of the King of the North, which takes place just before the second half of the seventieth week of Daniel (12:1–7).⁵⁷ This timing leads to the conclusion that the northern army in Joel 2:1–11 and 20 is destroyed near the week's midpoint, and this timing is the focus of Joel's discussion.⁵⁸ If these conclusions are correct, then the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord involves the same period of time as the Great Tribulation. Both periods are unparalleled, share the same time, and contain the same judgments.⁵⁹

The expression “great and terrible” is used in other passages that refer to entities that are unparalleled.⁶⁰ In Deuteronomy 7:21, Nehemiah 1:5, 4:14, and Daniel 9:4 it refers to God who is “great and awesome.” In Psalm 99:3 it refers to God's “great and awesome name.” In Deuteronomy 10:21 it refers to God doing “great and awesome things.” In 1 Chronicles 17:21, it refers to God magnifying his name by “great and terrible things.” Finally, in Deuteronomy 1:19 and 8:15,

three and a half years. These passages contradict the prewrath argument that this period cannot last for 42 months because it is cut short (ἐκολοβώθησαν, Matt 24:22). However, God has “cut short” the Great Tribulation by his decree (Dan 9:24; Mark 13:20) that it will not run longer than three and a half years (Showers, *Pre-Wrath Rapture View*, p. 30).

⁵⁷For a discussion of this timing, see George M. Harton, “An Interpretation of Daniel 11:36–45,” *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (Fall 1983): 215–21. See also John C. Whitcomb, *Daniel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), pp. 156–61; and William R. Foster, “The Eschatological Significance of the Assyrian” (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1956), pp. 152–54.

⁵⁸Beacham, “Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:15–21,” p. 96. For an extended discussion of this timing, see Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 350–55.

⁵⁹Since the Great Tribulation and the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord refer to the entire second half of the seventieth week, the prewrath division of the second half is invalid, leaving a two-fold division for Daniel's week. Furthermore, Daniel 9:27 divides the week into two halves, not three segments (Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1995], pp. 224–25. See further Beacham, “Joel 2, Eschatology of,” p. 218).

⁶⁰Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 341.

Moses refers to the “great and terrible wilderness.” In each of these expressions, the idea of something unparalleled or *par excellence* is in view. This idea is a fitting description for the title, Great and Terrible Day of the Lord. Zane Hodges refers to the title “Great and Terrible Day of the Lord” as “the day of the Lord *par excellence*.”⁶¹ This period is a time of God’s unparalleled wrath and judgment.

Beacham lists the names for the second half of the seventieth week as “great tribulation (cf. Matt 24:15 with 24:21), a time of ‘great wrath’ (Rev 12:12–14) and an ‘unprecedented time of trouble’ (Dan 12:1, cf. 7, 11).”⁶² In his opinion, “This period precisely mirrors Joel 2:11 and 31, the ‘great and terrible day of the LORD.’”⁶³ He appears to be correct that the designation “Great and Awesome Day of the Lord” is a technical description of the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week.⁶⁴

This understanding of the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord is problematic to the prewrath view. This *terminus a quo* is too early for the view. If church saints are not appointed unto the Day of the Lord wrath (1 Thess 5:9), then the mid-week is the latest the Rapture can occur. In addition, the timing includes the period when the Antichrist persecutes Israel. This understanding indicates that the wrath of the Antichrist and the wrath of God take place at the same time. This truth also contradicts the prewrath contention that the two cannot overlap.

Verses 10–11 comprise the final section of this pericope. In verse 10, Joel states that the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord will be preceded by earthquakes and the darkening of the heavenly luminaries. These descriptions are similar to John’s revelation concerning the sixth seal (Rev 6:12–13). This connection indicates that the sixth seal must transpire at the midpoint of the seventieth week. In verse 11a, Joel identifies the commander of the army as Yahweh. He is pictured as a general who issues orders to the warriors during the battle.⁶⁵ This description is so significant that Prinsloo states, “*The crucial point of the entire pericope... is that Yahweh personally commands this army.*”⁶⁶ Joel’s

⁶¹Review of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, by Marvin Rosenthal, in *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 4 (Spring 1991): 86.

⁶²“Joel 2, Eschatology of,” p. 218.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid. Mulholland also recognizes that this title is a special designation, but does so cautiously (John H. Mulholland, “An Analysis of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* by Marvin Rosenthal,” [paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Region of the ETS, Philadelphia, PA, 5 April 1991], p. 6).

⁶⁵Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, pp. 48–49.

⁶⁶Willem S. Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für

association of Yahweh with the army indicates that God uses the northern army to carry out his wrath. This portrayal refutes Van Kampen's claim that the Day of the Lord is never executed through human agency. God will use this army as an instrument of his wrath, as indicated in this section.

Joel 2:28–32

The structure of Joel 2:28–32 is composed of three strophes: verses 28–29, 30–31, and 32. Each strophe begins with a *waw* perfect—וַיִּזְרַח in verse 28, וַיִּזְרַח in verse 30, and וַיִּזְרַח in verse 32. The first and the last strophe contain *inclusios*. The first strophe is bracketed by the expression, “I will pour out My Spirit,” and the last one is bracketed by “whosoever calls on the name of the LORD” and “whom the LORD calls.” Because the first and the third strophes are marked off, the second one is also.⁶⁷ Kaiser states, “Such an analysis is sufficient to suggest that there are three distinct movements or parts to the message.”⁶⁸ This understanding should not lead to the dissection of the parts from the whole. The pericope contains a conceptual unity. The first strophe describes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after an event in the future. Verses 30–31 describe events that must occur “before the great and awesome day of the LORD.” Finally, verse 32 refers to survivors who are delivered from the turmoil of the previous two verses that affects Jerusalem.⁶⁹ Although some individuals understand this deliverance to be soteriological,⁷⁰ it is better understood as referring to physical deliverance.⁷¹ The individuals are escaping from Jerusalem which is

die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985), p. 48.

⁶⁷Michael P. V. Barrett, “Pentecost and Other Blessings: Joel 2:21–28,” *Biblical Viewpoint* 29 (November 1995): 29–30. David Hymes thinks that the middle strophe contains an *inclusio* that is indicated by the use of דָּמָא...דָּמָא, “blood...to blood” (“Notes on Joel 3:1–5,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1 [1998]: 86). This suggestion is forced, however, in that the section begins and ends with “wonders in the sky” and ends with “the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”

⁶⁸Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Promise of God and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Joel 2:28–32 and Acts 2:16–21,” in *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz*, ed. Morris Inch and Ronald Youngblood (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), p. 114.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 114–15.

⁷⁰For example, see Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 375, and Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 149–51.

⁷¹According to Alexander Kerrigan, “for the prophet Joel salvation chiefly means deliverance from temporal tribulations” (“The ‘Sensus Plenior’ of Joel 3:1–5 in Acts 2:14–36,” in *Sacra Pagina: Miscellanea Biblica, Congressus Internationalis Catholic: de Re Biblica*, 2, ed. J. Coppens et al., Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum

suffering the effects of the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord. They are not escaping from their sin in order to find refuge in the blood of Christ.

Cooper's contention that "deliverance" (v. 32) refers to the Rapture appears to be forced into the text. The salvation of verse 32 is described as an escape from Mount Zion and the city of Jerusalem. The time of the deliverance takes place at the inception of the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord (v. 31).

Advocates of the prewrath view contend that Joel 2:30–31 describes cataclysms that must precede the Day of the Lord. In their opinion, the Day of the Lord cannot take place until these convulsions occur. Although the prewrath timing of these events is new to pre-tribulationists, the basic argument regarding the precursors is not. Pre-tribulationists have in fact provided at least four answers to it.

One answer is to understand that the cosmic disturbances occur during the time following the Rapture but still preceding the seventieth week. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, for example, holds this view. He believes that there are five occurrences during the end times when the heavenly luminaries are extinguished.⁷² He believes that Joel 2:31 is the first "blackout" and precedes the seventieth week, which he equates with the Day of the Lord.⁷³ Gerald Stanton also suggests this as a possibility but later in the same paragraph relates the passage to the Second Coming of Christ.⁷⁴ Fruchtenbaum's explanation is in theory a possible solution. It maintains that the Rapture is imminent, that the signs follow the Rapture but precede the Day of the Lord, and that the day itself begins with the first seal.

A second answer is that the designation, "Day of the Lord," can be a two-fold concept which refers either to the whole period or to an event within the period. Pentecost, for example, holds this view. He identifies the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord as a description of the time just before the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁷⁵ Showers also believes that there can be a two-fold designation. He uses the names

lovaniensium 12–13 [Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, J. Gabalda, 1959], 2:309, 311).

⁷²Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA.: Ariel Ministries Press, 1983), p. 87. The other four "blackouts" he identifies are as follows: the sixth seal, Revelation 6:12–14 (p. 148); the fifth trumpet, Revelation 9:2 (p. 154); the fifth bowl, Revelation 16:10–11 (p. 191); and the seventh bowl, Revelation 16:17–21; Matthew 24:29; Joel 3:14–17 (pp. 252–53). Showers also recognizes that there are several blackouts during the Day of the Lord (Showers, *Pre-Wrath Rapture View*, p. 99).

⁷³*The Footsteps of the Messiah*, p. 87.

⁷⁴*Kept From The Hour*, p. 386.

⁷⁵*Things to Come*, pp. 59–60.

“broad Day of the Lord” and “narrow Day of the Lord” to describe the two phases of this period. The broad Day of the Lord consists of the seventieth week of Daniel and the Millennium. The narrow Day of the Lord consists of an event within the larger period, which he identifies as The Battle of Armageddon (Joel 3:9–16; Zech 14:1–5). He points out the similarity in the descriptions between Joel 2:28–32 and 3:9–16 and thinks that the two passages refer to the same event. Based on this evidence, Showers concludes that in 2:28–32 the “great and awesome Day of the LORD” refers to the narrow day.⁷⁶ In other words, the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord refers to the period at the close of the seventieth week and not the whole second half of the week. This view of Pentecost and Showers is a possible explanation. It allows one to understand that the broad Day of the Lord is taking place before the precursors begin, and that the narrow Day of the Lord is what follows the precursors.

Steven L. McAvoy offers a third suggestion. The basis of his understanding rests on the meaning of “comes” (בָּיָא) in Joel 2:31. He lists several definitions, all of which carry some idea of completion or fulfillment.⁷⁷ This concept allows the interpretation that the precursors will occur before the completion or fulfillment of the Day of the Lord. In other words, the precursors need not occur before the period begins, but only before it ends.⁷⁸

McAvoy believes this view has several strengths. First, it appears to reflect a familiar idea in the verb בָּיָא. Second, this view allows 2:31 to carry the same significance of the Day of the Lord that was seen in 2:2 and 2:11, and it supplies an answer for the comparable events in the Day of the Lord. Third, it affirms that the Day of the Lord does not have precursors. This affirmation clarifies how the day surprises men “like a thief” when they think that they are in safety (1 Thess 5:2–3). It also explains why Paul did not include precursors as something to look for when he discussed the ἀποστασία in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Fourth, it allows the sixth and seventh seals to be a part of the seventieth week instead of an event after it or at its culmination.⁷⁹ This explanation answers the prewrath interpretation concerning the precursors. These

⁷⁶Showers, *Maranatha*, pp. 35–38; idem, *Pre-Wrath Rapture View*, pp. 161–67.

⁷⁷“A Critique of Robert Gundry’s Posttribulationism,” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1986), p. 239. His discussion in this section applies to Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5. Note the following examples of his definitions: “come in, come, go in, go...come to pass,” “the completion of the harvest” (BDB, pp. 97–98); and “the sense of ‘fulfill’” (*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. “בָּיָא,” by Horst D. Preuss, 2:31).

⁷⁸McAvoy, “Robert Gundry’s Posttribulationism,” p. 240.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 240–41.

cataclysms can occur before the Day of the Lord reaches its culmination.

Beacham provides a fourth alternative. According to him, the Day of the Lord is described in verse 11 as “great and very terrible,” and this expression is virtually the same one found in verse 31, “the great and awesome day of the LORD.” Beacham understands this designation as a technical expression that refers to the last half of the seventieth week. Accordingly, the Scriptures rather clearly differentiate between the “Day of the Lord” in general (which seems to include the entire seventieth week and on into to the kingdom) and the “Great and Terrible Day of the Lord” (which specifically refers to the last half of the seventieth week). In his view verses 28–32 are connected literarily and chronologically to verses 1–11. The expression “after this,” אַחֲרַיִתְּכֶם, in verse 28 describes events which chronologically follow the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord in verse 11. Verses 12–27 are thus a literary digression which bisects the discussion on the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord (that is, the last half of the seventieth week). When Joel finishes this discussion, he returns (v. 28) to his original subject (v. 11).⁸⁰ Beacham further points out the similarities between the two sections, 1–11 and 28–32. He states, “The terms ‘earth,’ ‘heavens,’ ‘sun,’ ‘moon,’ ‘darkness,’ and the ‘Day of the Lord’ which is ‘great and terrible’ all serve as structural connectors between verses 10–11 and 30–31.”⁸¹ This evidence leads him to identify a further chronological construct:

Verses 28–29 are bound to verses 30–31 by the temporal referents “after” (v. 28) and “before” (v. 31). In his return to the theme of the great and terrible Day of the Lord, Joel informs his audience of events that would come “after” that day (vv. 28–29) and events that would come “before” that day (vv. 30–31). The section concludes with another call to repentance (v. 32).⁸²

Beacham understands the pericope (vv. 28–32) to present in reverse sequence the seminal and terminal markers of the great and awesome day. Verses 28–29 present what will happen “after” that time and verses 30–31 present what will happen “before” it. Verse 32 is another call for repentance. This understanding leaves Beacham with an *inclusio* for the entire chapter. Verses 1–11 discuss the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord. Joel moves to an excursus in verses 12–27 which is composed of two sections. Verses 12–17 are the prophet’s call to

⁸⁰“Joel 2, Eschatology of,” pp. 217–18; idem, “Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:15–21,” p. 99.

⁸¹“Joel 2, Eschatology of,” p. 218.

⁸²Ibid.

repentance and verses 18–27 are his description of kingdom blessings. Then in verses 28–32, Joel returns to his discussion of the Great and Awesome Day of the LORD. The entire chapter is bracketed by a discussion of the events which take place just before this period.⁸³

Beacham discusses the title “Great and Awesome Day of the Lord” and concludes that it is a technical designation of the second half of the seventieth week (a three and a half year period within the boarder Day of the Lord).⁸⁴ In his view, the events of verses 30–31 take place just prior to the second half of the week, and actually introduce or initiate that time. The word “before,” *לפני*, in verse 31 literally means “at the turning of or ‘face of.’”⁸⁵ Beacham further notes that the sixth seal describes the same event and announces the arrival of “great” wrath (Rev 6:17) over against the more general wrath of the first half of the week.⁸⁶

Beacham’s explanation answers the prewrath interpretation. It notes the rather clear distinction in Scripture between “wrath” and “great wrath” and between the “Day of the Lord” and the “Great and Awesome Day of the Lord.” Furthermore, it demonstrates that the precursors of Joel 2:31 introduce the second half of the week instead of occurring much later in the week. This understanding allows one to believe that the Day of the Lord in general begins earlier in the week, in fact, even at its beginning. This interpretation forwards the belief that the cataclysms come immediately before the second half of Daniel’s week, designated in 2:31 as the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord.

All four views provide adequate answers to the prewrath interpretation of the precursors in Joel 2:31. However, only one of the views can be correct. The explanations of Fruchtenbaum, Pentecost, and McAvoy are problematic because they do not recognize that the title

⁸³“Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:15–21,” pp. 99–100.

⁸⁴This conclusion has already been demonstrated; therefore, Beacham’s evidence is not cited. See his full discussion in “Joel 2, Eschatology of,” p. 218.

⁸⁵BDB defines the word as “at the face or in front of, the most general word for in the presence of, before” (p. 816). See Genesis 18:22, 27:7, 47:2, Exodus 4:21, and Proverbs 18:16 for examples of this definition. The word can convey the idea of leading a procession, as in Genesis 32:21, 33:14, Exodus 17:5, and 23:20. In 1 Samuel 9:15, the word refers to a time one day before the following event (pp. 816–17). John Mulholland thinks that *לפני* “is used for spacial location rather than for temporal location, and may well be translated ‘in the presence’ of the Day of the Lord” (“Analysis of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture*,” p. 6).

⁸⁶“Joel 2, Eschatology of,” p. 218. Other individuals see the connection between Joel 2:30–31 and Revelation 6:12–17, although they would not necessarily agree with Beacham’s timing of these two passages. For examples, see Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, pp. 74–75; and Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p. 101.

the “Great and Awesome Day of the Lord” is a technical name for the second half of Daniel’s week. The designation is similar to the title the “Great Tribulation.” Fruchtenbaum’s view is problematic because it cannot account for Joel’s apparent description of the northern army’s defeat near the middle of the week. Finally, the first two views fail to properly relate verses 28–32 to the preceding context. Beacham’s view appears to be the best alternative. It recognizes the significance of the designation “Great and Awesome Day of the Lord” and it relates the defeat of the King of the North (v. 20; Dan 11:45) to the context. It considers Joel 2:28–32 in light of the entire chapter, it recognizes and properly relates the chronological time indicators in verses 28 and 32, and it adequately explains the timing of verses 1–11, 20, and 32.

A difficulty with Beacham’s view is understanding אַחֲרַיְהוּא, “after this” (Joel 2:28) to refer to events following the great and awesome day of verse 11. Many individuals think the phrase refers chronologically to the immediately preceding section, verses 18–27.⁸⁷ Bewer understands the expression to refer all the way back to the first chapter.⁸⁸ Finley apparently views the phrase as a transitional marker that indicates a shift to an eschatological timeframe. Although he admits that אַחֲרַיְהוּא can have a temporal significance, he thinks that the use of וְהָיָה, “and,” preceding the expression gives it the idea of a shift in predictive thought.⁸⁹ Wolff understands the phrase to be a mere conjunctive without chronological reference.⁹⁰ However, to understand the phrase as simply indicating a shift in thought or functioning as a mere conjunctive does not do justice to the expression. Beacham states:

Events in the Bible which are said to happen ‘after’ something (אַחֲרַיְהוּא), without exception follow, in strict chronology, that to which the particle אַחֲרַיְהוּא refers in the context; never are the events temporally transposed (Gen 6:4; 15:14; 23:19; 25:26; 41:30; 2 Chron 35:20; etc.). This strict chronological sequence holds true even when the temporal phrase אַחֲרַיְהוּא is engaged as a so called ‘formula of transition’ (2 Sam 2:1; 8:1; 10:1; 13:1; 21:18; cf. 1 Sam 24:5; Judg 16:4; 2 Kgs 6:24; 2 Chron 20:1; 24:4).⁹¹

⁸⁷See for example, Richard D. Patterson, “Joel,” in vol. 7 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), p. 255; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987), p. 260; and Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, pp. 97–98.

⁸⁸Julius A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Obadiah and Joel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), p. 122.

⁸⁹*Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, p. 71.

⁹⁰Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, trans. by Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p. 27.

⁹¹“Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:15–21,” p. 100.

On the other hand, it seems unlikely that the events of 2:28 would follow, chronologically, verses 12–27. Verses 12–17 call for the national repentance that leads to the kingdom blessings recorded in verses 18–27. As noted previously, verses 18 as well as 26–27 describe events that find fulfillment in the kingdom. Furthermore, the outpouring of the Spirit is connected chronologically with the new covenant blessings of Israel in its return to the land (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 34:25–38; 36:24–38). The outpouring must coincide with the initiation of the blessings, not follow them. Beacham’s suggestion that verse 28 chronologically and linguistically relates back to Joel 2:11 best fits the use of אֶת־יְהוָה as well as the conceptual link of the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord in verses 11 and 31.⁹²

The discussion of Joel 2:28–32 indicates that the precursors of verses 30–31 are linked with those in verses 10–11. Both descriptions refer to the same convulsions and these cataclysms initiate the second half of the week. The prewrath contention that Joel 2:30–31 refers to events that occur later in the second half of the week is incorrect. Van Kampen, Rosenthal, and Cooper believe that Christians are raptured before the Day of the Lord wrath (1 Thess 5:9). Joel 2:10–11 and 30–31 demonstrates that the Day of the Lord must begin by the middle of the week, at the latest. The prewrath view affirms that the Rapture and the Day of the Lord begin on the same day. However, for the view to properly correlate with what Joel 2 teaches, it must place the Rapture in the middle of the seventieth week. This placement, however, makes the view a midtribulation view and causes the prewrath position to lose its distinctiveness. If the interpretation that has been suggested in the discussion of Joel 2 is correct, then the prewrath view is refuted. The prewrath view also asserts that Joel 2:30–31 and Rev 6:12–17 (the sixth seal) refer to the same event. If this assertion is correct, then Joel 2:30–31, in conjunction with other OT texts, sets the time of the sixth seal as the middle of the seventieth week.

Joel 3:14–15

Van Kampen understands Joel 3:14–15 to refer to the same event as 2:28–32 and links these passages with several others—Isaiah 13:10–11, Zechariah 12:6, 14:12–14, Matthew 24:29, and Revelation 6:12–17. Van Kampen believes this battle occurs after the midpoint of Daniel’s seventieth week, but before the Day of the Lord. The problem with this interpretation is that Joel 2:28–32 and 3:14–15 are not discussing the same events. In Joel 3:2, Yahweh declares that he “will

⁹²Ibid., pp. 99–100; and idem, “Joel 2, Eschatology of,” p. 217. Treier also sees the incongruity of having 2:28–32 follow 2:18–27 (“Fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32,” p. 15).

gather the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.” This gathering appears to be the event that leads to the reestablishment of Israel’s “fortunes” (v. 1), an expression that describes the kingdom. Joel detailed some of these “fortunes” in 2:18–27. The collection of many nations (3:2) indicates that Joel is describing a universal judgment. This truth is seen elsewhere in the chapter. In verse 9, all nations are commanded to prepare for war. In verses 11–12, all the nations are “invited” to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. However, in Joel 2:20, only one nation, the King of the North, is destroyed.⁹³ This variation signifies that the two chapters refer to different events. In Joel 3:13, Joel uses the grape harvest and wine press analogy to portray the battle. This analogy is similar to the one John uses in Revelation 16:14–20 to refer to the final battle of the nations. The two descriptions (Joel 3:14–15 and Rev 16:14–20) appear to portray the same event, one that occurs near the end of the seventieth week.⁹⁴

The Prophet Zechariah provides a description of a battle that is similar to the one Joel describes in chapter 3. In Zechariah 14:2, Yahweh gathers “all the nations against Jerusalem to battle.” In verses 3–4, he descends personally to fight for Israel. During this time, the sky will be darkened (v. 6–7). Zechariah’s description appears to parallel the one in Joel 3:14–15. In Matthew 24:29, Christ returns after the Great Tribulation and the skies are darkened. The correlation of Zechariah 14:2–7 and Matthew 24:29 with Joel 3:14–15 appears to describe the same final judgment on the nations near Jerusalem. One of the characteristics of that time will be a suppression of the light sources. This understanding leads to the conclusion that there is more than one darkening of the sky. There is one in Joel 2 that occurs in the middle of the seventieth week, and there is one in Joel 3:14–15 which occurs at the end of the week.

A difficulty with this explanation is the description in Joel 3:14, “for the day of the LORD is near” (כִּרְיֹב). This description gives the impression that the day has not arrived because it is “near.” The problem with this explanation is that Joel describes an event that transpires at the end of the seventieth week. However, the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord begins at the middle of the week. In other words, the Day of the Lord is already in progress by the time the event occurs that Joel describes in 3:14–15. The question then raised is, how can the Day of the Lord be near when it is already in progress?

A possible solution is that Joel is describing one event of the Day

⁹³Foster, “The Eschatological Significance of the Assyrian,” pp. 44–45.

⁹⁴Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “Joel,” in vol. 1 of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: SP Publications, 1985), p. 1422.

of the Lord and uses it to represent the whole period. In Joel 3, the prophet describes a portion of the Day of the Lord that occurs at the end of the seventieth week, but he uses it as a paradigm for the whole day. He then refers to the day as “near” in order to impress his audience with the need of repentance. If a part of the day which occurs at the end of the seventieth week is near, then those portions of the day which occur earlier are certainly near. From Joel’s perspective, the Day of the Lord is so vivid that it appears to be near to him, even though there are many years between him and the day.

This phenomenon is not unusual for Joel; he has used it in 1:15 and 2:1. From his perspective, that day is coming and is near, therefore the people should repent. When this understanding of prophetic vision is applied to 3:14–15, it indicates that Joel views this day to be near his time. This interpretation answers how the day in 3:14–15 can be near and yet take place at the end of the seventieth week.

If this interpretation is correct, then Van Kampen’s timing for these verses is too early. The explanation that Joel views the day as near to him does not prohibit interpreting these verses as occurring at the end of the seventieth week. Even if Van Kampen’s timing is correct that these events are also described in 2:30–31, he is still faced with a problem. Joel 2:30–31 describes the Great and Awesome Day of the Lord that begins at the midpoint of the week. If 3:14–15 describes the same event, then this correlation indicates that the Day of the Lord begins in the middle of Daniel’s week, a time too early for Van Kampen.

CONCLUSION

Joel 2–3 is a key text in the discussion of the Day of the Lord. What the interpreter concludes regarding this passage has a significant role in his understanding of the *terminus a quo* of that eschatological day of wrath. Joel discusses the attack by a great army (2:1–11), heavenly convulsions (2:10–11, 30–31; 3:15), and the judgment on all nations (3:15). The attack by the northern army and the convulsions of 2:10, 30–31 are declared to transpire “before” the great and awesome Day of the Lord. Van Kampen, Rosenthal, and Cooper believe that these events occur after the midpoint of Daniel’s seventieth week but before the close of its second half. In their opinion, the cosmic disturbances indicate the beginning of the Day of the Lord and coincide with the Rapture.

However, this understanding is incorrect. In 2:1–11, 30–31 Joel describes events which initiate the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord, a designation for the second half of Daniel’s week. In chapter 3, Joel describes events which conclude that week. Advocates of the prewrath view have failed to properly interpret the significant designation that Joel uses to describe the second half of Daniel’s week, the Great and

Terrible Day of the Lord. Joel's timing for these events indicate that the precursors mentioned in his prophecy pose no problem for equating the Day of the Lord with the start of the seventieth week. Such a *terminus a quo* for that period of wrath provides strong support for pretribulationism based on 1 Thessalonians 5:1–10.