

Joel 1 - The Plague of Locusts; The Day of the Lord

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Joel 1

I. Present day of the Lord (Joel 1:1-20)

- (1) Report of the present day of the Lord (1:1-4)
 - (A) Joel as the recipient of the report (1:1)

1 The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

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1 This message from the LORD came to Pethuel's son Joel.

1 The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.

- "...word of the LORD that came to Joel" - the Hebrew phraseology actually means "the Word of Jehovah took possession of Joel"

— This divine possession resulted in a prophetic revelation; this also happened to the Apostle John when he wrote the Book of Revelation

— "Joel" - a common name, and means "Jehovah is God." This is an inversion of the name Elijah, which means "God is Jehovah."

— The fact that his parents gave him a name connected to God indicates that they were members of the believing Remnant of that time

- "...son of Pethuel" - his father was Pethuel (which means "the openheartedness of God" or "the sincerity of God")

The rest of Joel 1 describes the effects of a severe locust plague that had recently destroyed the agriculture of the land. Some interpreters take this locust invasion as an allegory, but it seems better to take it as a literal invasion.

(B) Uniqueness of the report (1:2-3)

(a) Incomparable with past generations (1:2)

2 Hear this, you elders, And listen, all inhabitants of the land. Has *anything like* this happened in your days, Or in your fathers' days?

2 Hear this, O elders, And listen, all inhabitants of the land. Has *anything like* this happened in your days Or in your fathers' days?

2 "Hear this, you elders! Listen, all of you residents of the land! Has there ever been anything like this during your lifetime, or even when your ancestors were alive?

2 Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?

- This was the most unique invasion of locusts in all of past history; prophesied in Deut 28:38

— Joel asks the elders (old men) of Israel, who had lived the longest, if they could ever remember anything in their lifetimes like this recent invasion

— None of the elders could remember a previous locust invasion as bad as this one, and they can't remember their fathers telling them of an invasion as bad as this one

(b) Necessity of communicating report to subsequent generations (1:3)

3 **Tell your sons** about it, And *have* your sons *tell* their sons, And their sons the next generation.

3 Tell your sons about it, And *let* your sons *tell* their sons, And their sons the next generation.

3 Pass it on to your children, and from your children to their children, and from their children to the following generation.

3 Tell *ye* your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.

- "Tell your sons" - because this was the most unique invasion of locusts in all previous history, they were to pass it on to succeeding generations, to let them know how terrible it was (Cf. Deut 6:1-2)

— Moses had instructed Israel to rehearse the works of God to their children (Deut 4:9; 6:6-7)

— Why? To remind them of God's *mercy and goodness* and to remind them that God *would judge sin if they became disobedient* (Lev 26; Deut 28)

- Sometimes "natural" disasters are warnings of more to come...Joel uses this as a springboard to the "Big One": The Day of the Lord.

(C) Content of the report (1:4)

- (a) Gnawing locusts (1:4a)
- (b) Swarming locusts (1:4b)
- (c) Creeping locusts (1:4c)
- (d) Stripping locusts (1:4d)

4 What the gnawing locust has left, the **swarminglocust** has eaten; And what the swarming locust has left, the **creepinglocust** has eaten; And what the creeping locust has left, the **strippinglocust** has eaten.

4 What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; And what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; And what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.

4 Whatever the devouring locust left behind the locust swarm has consumed! Whatever the locust swarm has left behind, the young locust has consumed! Whatever the young locust has left behind, the ravaging locust has consumed!"

4 That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.

- Four different words for "locusts" appear in this verse (and in 2:25), but a total of nine occur in the OT

- "...swarming locust" - *arbeh*, the most common winged locust

- "...creeping locust" - *yekeq*, consuming locust; 3" long, 1" antennae (Jer 51:27)
- "...stripping locust" - *chaciyl*, old skin; small wings
- Joel is not speaking of four different kinds of locusts or four different development stages of a locust: he is speaking of four successive swarms of locusts eating what the previous swarm left behind
- Four waves of invasion picture a thorough devastation (Cf. Jer 15:3; Ezek 14:21). Though the prophets sometimes used locusts as a figure for horses (Jer 51:27), most interpreters have concluded that Joel described a real locust invasion rather than a military invasion by soldiers on horses.
- God had threatened locust plagues as punishment if His people proved unfaithful to Him (Deut 28:38,42)

Joel was not talking about four different kinds of locusts, he was speaking of four successive swarms of locusts eating what the previous swarm had left behind. The number four is often used by the prophets to designate the totality of destruction, especially in the OT (Cf. Jer 15:3; Ezek 14:21). What Joel tried to do here was to emphasize the totality of the devastation by presenting these four swarms of locusts, each swarm eating what the previous swarm had left behind. By the time Joel wrote these words, it is not prophecy; it is already history. But this history is going to become the background of something prophetic.

Other Prophetic Patterns

1. Jacob's trouble; affliction (Is 60:14; Jer 30:5-8)
2. Cry to God; heard (Jer 31:18-20)
3. God will command oppressors; let them go (Is 43:6)
4. Two witnesses, with miracles before enemies (Rev 11:3-6)
5. Enemies will also perform (Rev 13:14-15)
6. Sore judgments from God (Jer 25:15-16)
7. God will protect His people (Rev 7:4; 12:6,14-16)
8. Water turned to blood (Rev 8:8; 11:6; 16:4-5)
9. Satanic frogs (Rev 16:13)
10. Plague of locusts (Rev 9:2-11)
11. Boils and blains (Rev 16:2)
12. Hailstones from heaven (Rev 8:7)
13. Darkness (Is 60:2; Rev 16:10)
14. Hearts hardened (Rev 9:20-21)
15. Death to multitudes (Rev 9:15)
16. Israel to be delivered (Zech 14:3-4; Rom 11:26)
17. Judgment in "fours" (Jer 15:3; Ezek 14:21)

A Call to Mourning

Joel called on four different entities to mourn the results of the locust invasion: drunkards (v5-7), Jerusalemites (v8-10), farmers (v11-12), and priests (v13). In each section, there is a call to mourn followed by reasons to mourn. Interestingly, drunkenness and immorality are the only social sins that Joel charged the people with committing in this book (Cf. 3:3).

(2) Call to mourning and repentance (1:5-20)

(A) Drunkards (1:5-7)

(a) Call to repentance (1:5)

5 Awake, you **heavydrinkers**, and weep; And wail, all you wine drinkers, Because of the sweet wine, For it has been eliminated from your mouth.

5 Awake, drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you wine drinkers, On account of the sweet wine That is cut off from your mouth.

5 "Wake up, you drunkards! Cry aloud and howl, you wine drinkers, because your supply of new wine has been snatched from you.

5 Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.

- "...heavy drinkers" - *shikkowr*, to reel in intoxication

— The drunkards are to awaken and weep because the grape vines have been destroyed by a "nation" (v6) of locusts

— The locusts have gotten to the grapes first. They have stripped all the vineyards, and there will be no more wine for the drunkards.

(b) Reason: to avert covenant curses (1:6-7)

6 For a **nation** has invaded **my land**, Mighty and without number; Its teeth are the **teeth** of a lion, And it has the jaws of a lioness.

6 For a nation has invaded my land, Mighty and without number; Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness.

6 Indeed, a nation has invaded my land— it is strong and its population is too large to count— with teeth like a lion and fangs like a lioness.

6 For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion.

- "...a nation" - it is not unusual for locusts to be depicted as a human military army (Prov 30:25-27)

- "...my land" - shows Joel's own personal agony at the effects of this invasion

- "...teeth" - like a lion, lioness (Cf. Rev 9:7-8)

7 It has made **my vine** a waste And **my fig tree** a stump. It has stripped them bare and hurled *them* away; Their branches have become white.

7 It has made my vine a waste And my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast *them* away; Their branches have become white.

7 That nation laid waste my vines, and stripped bare my fig tree, discarding it. It stripped off its bark.

7 He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white.

- "...my vine...my fig tree" - Joel's personal agony is seen in the totality of the devastation
- The vine and the fig tree were symbols of God's blessings on Israel and symbols of Israel itself, so Joel probably also meant that the locusts had left the whole nation bare
- God's own (House of Israel, Judah are represented by the vine and fig tree—usually mentioned together)

(B) Priests (1:8-9,13)

(a) Call to repentance (1:8,9b,13a)

8 Wail like a **virgin** clothed with sackcloth For the groom of her youth.

8 Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth For the bridegroom of her youth.

8 "Grieve like a virgin, who, dressed in her mourner's clothes, cries out in memory of the man she was going to marry.

8 Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.

- "...virgin" - young virgin: betrothed; married (Deut 22:23; Matt 1:19)
- The term virgin here does not mean what we think of today; it refers to a young widow who has lost her husband in the first year of marriage

(b) Reason: to avert covenant curses (1:9a,13b)

9 The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off From the house of the LORD. The priests mourn, The ministers of the LORD.

9 The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off From the house of the LORD. The priests mourn, The ministers of the LORD.

9 Both grain offering and wine offering have been removed from the LORD's Temple; the priests and ministering servants of the LORD are mourning."

9 The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn.

- One of the reasons that they must mourn is that there is no offering remaining for the Temple
- There is no meal offering because the cattle and sheep are dying due to lack of grain. There is no drink offering because the vines have all been eaten up.

- The grain offerings required flour and oil (Num 28:5), and the drink offerings necessitated wine (Ex 29:40; Num 28:7)
- As a result, the priests, who are responsible for making these offerings and who are sustained by these offerings, are also to lament

(C) Farmers (1:10-12)

(b) Reason: to avert covenant curses (1:10,11b,12)

10 The field is ruined, The land mourns; For the grain is ruined, The new wine has dried up, Fresh oil has failed.

10 The field is ruined, The land mourns; For the grain is ruined, The new wine dries up, Fresh oil fails.

10 "The fields lie in ruins and the ground is dried up. Indeed, the grain is ruined, the new wine has evaporated, and the olive oil has run out.

10 The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth.

- Joel again describes the totality of the devastation, resulting in a cessation of the joy of harvest

(a) Call to repentance (1:11a)

(b) Reason: to avert covenant curses (1:10,11b,12)

11 Be ashamed, you farm workers, Wail, you vinedressers, For the wheat and the barley; Because the harvest of the field is destroyed.

11 Be ashamed, O farmers, Wail, O vinedressers, For the wheat and the barley; Because the harvest of the field is destroyed.

11 Be dismayed, you farmers! Cry aloud, you vintners, for the wheat and barley, because the harvest in your fields has been lost.

11 Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished.

- Joel has spoken to the drunkards, he has spoken to the priests, and now he will speak to the farmers

12 The vine has dried up And the fig tree has withered; The pomegranate, the palm also, and the **apple** tree, All the trees of the field have dried up. Indeed, joy has dried up From the sons of mankind.

12 The vine dries up And the fig tree fails; The pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree, All the trees of the field dry up. Indeed, rejoicing dries up From the sons of men.

12 The grapevine is shriveled and the fig tree is withered, along with the pomegranate tree, the palm tree, the apple tree and all of the cultivated trees. Truly, joy has evaporated

from Adam's children."

12 The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.

- "...apple" - *tappuwach*, the Hebrew is generic, including the orange, lemon, and pear tree

A Call to Mourn and Repent

13 Put on *sackcloth* And mourn, you priests; Wail, you ministers of the altar! Come, **spend the night in sackcloth**, You ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the drink offering Have been withheld from the house of your God.

13 Gird yourselves *with sackcloth* And lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the drink offering Are withheld from the house of your God.

13 "Put on your mourning clothes, you priests; and cry aloud, you ministering servants at the altar! Come! Stay the night in mourner's clothes, you ministers of my God, because the grain offering and the wine offering is held back from the Temple of your God.

13 Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in *sackcloth*, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God.

- "...spend the night in sackcloth" - Joel called on the priesthood to lament publicly by girding themselves with sackcloth

— The reason is because there was no more drink offerings or meal offerings for the Temple

(D) People (1:14-18)

(a) Call to repentance (1:14)

14 Consecrate a fast, Proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders *And* all the inhabitants of the land To the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD.

14 Consecrate a fast, Proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders *And* all the inhabitants of the land To the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD.

14 Set apart time for a fast! Call a solemn assembly! Gather the elders and everyone living in the land to the Temple of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD!"

14 Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,

- The priests were to call a "solemn assembly" of the elders and inhabitants of the land

— They were to gather at the Temple to fast, put on sackcloth, and cry out to Jehovah to see if He will respond

— The clear implication is that, because there was true repentance, the Lord did respond

The previous passage spoke of the historic invasion of locusts. This will now give rise to a prophetic invasion: an invasion of demons.

(b) Reason to avert covenant curses (1:15-18)

15 Woe for the day! For **the day of the LORD** is near, And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

15 Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

15 Oh, no! For the Day of the LORD approaches, and like destruction from the Almighty, it will come!

15 Alas for the day! for the Day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

- "...the Day of the LORD" - here the day of the Lord is obviously one of destruction, though elsewhere it also refers to a day of blessing

— The eschatological day of the Lord that the prophets anticipated includes both judgment (in the Tribulation) and blessing (in the Millennium and beyond)

— Here Joel spoke of an imminent day of the Lord; it was coming on Judah relatively soon (Cf. Is 13:6; Ezek 30:2-3; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:7-13)

- Having described the devastation caused by the locusts and pointing out that this was the worst that had ever occurred until that day, Joel now indicates that as bad as it was in their day, a day is coming when things will get even worse.

— A locust plague was not only an evidence of God's judgment (Cf. Deut 28), but in the past it had been a harbinger of future worse destruction

— A locust plague had preceded the plagues of darkness and death in Egypt (Cf. Ex 10-11). Thus, rather than seeing the locust plague as the end of the people's troubles, Joel saw it as a prelude to something worse.

"The Day of the Lord"

The Day of the Lord is one of the most misunderstood terms and yet one of the most important in Scripture. Joel was the first to use it, and he makes very clear what the Day of the Lord is. After him, all the other prophets had to do was to speak of "that day" and it was understood as to what they were referring.

The term "the day of the Lord" occurs prominently here in the prophetic writings, and it is a major theme of prophetic revelation (Cf. Amos; Zephaniah). When used generally, this term refers to any period of time in which God is dealing with people in dramatic, direct ways. It usually describes God's dealings with Israel, but it is also used of His dealings with other nations: Edom (Obadiah), and Assyria and Babylonia (Isaiah). It is always associated with

judgment and or blessing. It may refer to the past, the immediate future, or the distant (eschatological) future.

The *technical* sense of the term is more common in the Prophets. As a technical term, it refers to Israel's eschatological future that will include both judgment and blessing. The Jews thought the period of judgment would precede Messiah's coming. It did precede His first coming, but it will precede His second coming as well. We know this by comparing what the prophets said with what was fulfilled at Jesus' first coming and what has yet to be fulfilled at His second coming.

Synonyms for Day of the Lord

1. Day of Trouble
2. Day of Vengeance
3. Day of Wrath
4. Day of Their Calamity
5. Day of Christ
6. Day of the Lord's Anger
7. His Day
8. Day of Darkness
9. Day of Clouds and Thick Darkness
10. In the Wrath of the Lord of Hosts
11. Day of His Fierce Anger
12. Day of Distress
13. Day of Indignation
14. Day of Destruction
15. Day of Battle and War
16. Day of Thy power
17. Day of Grief and Desperate Sorrow
18. Day of the Lord's Sacrifice
19. Day of Trouble and Distress
20. Day of Trumpet and Alarm
21. Day of Wasteness and Desolation
22. Day of His Coming
23. Day of Our Lord Jesus Christ
24. Wrath of the Lamb
25. Great Day of His Wrath

16 Has food not been cut off before our eyes, *and* Joy and rejoicing from the house of our God?

16 Has not food been cut off before our eyes, Gladness and joy from the house of our God?

16 Isn't our food supply cut off right in front of us, along with joy and gladness from the Temple of our God?

16 Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God?

- Joel described the effects of the recent locust plague to encourage his hearers to gather for prayer and fasting. He suggested that similar conditions would accompany the day of the Lord that he had just predicted.

17 The seeds have dried up under their shovels; The storehouses have become desolate, The grain silos are ruined, Because the grain has dried up.

17 The seeds shrivel under their clods; The storehouses are desolate, The barns are torn down, For the grain is dried up.

17 Seeds shrivel within their furrows, the storehouses lie empty, and granaries stand in ruins because the grain has withered.

17 The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered.

- The devastation will also cut off food supplies for the people

18 How the animals have groaned! The herds of cattle have wandered aimlessly Because there is no pasture for them; Even the flocks of sheep have suffered.

18 How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander aimlessly Because there is no pasture for them; Even the flocks of sheep suffer.

18 Oh, how the livestock groan! The herds of cattle wander about because they have no pasture. Even flocks of sheep suffer!

18 How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.

- The crop devastation will lead to a devastation of the livestock because they will have nothing to eat

(E) By Joel (1:19-20)

(a) Call to repentance (1:19a)

(b) Reason: to avert covenant curses (1:19b-20)

19 To You, LORD, I cry out; For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.

19 To You, O LORD, I cry; For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.

19 To you, LORD, I cry out, because fire has devoured the open pastures, and has set all the cultivated trees ablaze.

19 O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field.

20 Even the animals of the field pant for You; For the stream beds of water are dried up, And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

20 Even the beasts of the field pant for You; For the water brooks are dried up And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

20 The livestock also cries out to you, because their water sources have evaporated and because fire has consumed the open pastures.

20 The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

- Whereas in the previous invasion everything was destroyed by locusts, this invasion sees everything devastated by fire

Verses 15-20 describe the results of a second invasion without describing the invasion itself. In 2:1-11, Joel begins to detail the account of the invasion.

The Book of Joel makes two major points:

1. God is in control of world events. Nothing happens anywhere in the world that is outside of God's control; nothing that happens to a believer is outside of God's control.
2. God responds to repentance. Where there is true repentance, God will respond accordingly.