**Joel 1:1-2:17**

**The Place of the Passage**

The book of Joel opens with a description of the aftermath of a terrible locust plague. The prophet Joel, in light of the devastation left by the plague, calls God’s people to grieve and lament the destruction. This destruction and lamentation provide the occasion for Joel to warn of an invading army that will come from the north and, like the locusts, will bring about devastation to the land and people. Joel’s warning of the invading army is a call to Judah to repent and turn back to the Lord, who is gracious and merciful and may relent of the impending judgment.

**The Big Picture**

God is bringing judgment on Judah; however, it is not too late to repent, turn back to God, and receive his mercy.

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

An Invasion of Locusts

**2**Hear this, you elders;
    give ear, all inhabitants of the land!
Has such a thing happened in your days,
    or in the days of your fathers?

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

**4**What the cutting locust left,
    the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
    the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
    the destroying locust has eaten.

**5**Awake, you drunkards, and weep,
    and wail, all you drinkers of wine,
because of the sweet wine,
    for it is cut off from your mouth.

**6**For a nation has come up against my land,
    powerful and beyond number;
its teeth are lions' teeth,
    and it has the fangs of a lioness.

**7**It has laid waste my vine
    and splintered my fig tree;
it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down;
    their branches are made white.

**8**Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth
    for the bridegroom of her youth.

**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.

**10**The fields are destroyed,
    the ground mourns,
because the grain is destroyed,
    the wine dries up,
    the oil languishes.

**11**Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil;
    wail, O vinedressers,
for the wheat and the barley,
    because the harvest of the field has perished.

**12**The vine dries up;
    the fig tree languishes.
Pomegranate, palm, and apple,
    all the trees of the field are dried up,
and gladness dries up
    from the children of man.

A Call to Repentance

**13**Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests;
    wail, O ministers of the altar.
Go in, pass the night in sackcloth,
    O ministers of my God!
Because grain offering and drink offering
    are withheld from the house of your God.

**14**Consecrate a fast;
    call 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.

**15**Alas for the day!
For the day of the Lord is near,
    and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

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

**17**The seed shrivels under the clods;
    the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are torn down
    because the grain has dried up.

**18**How the beasts groan!
    The herds of cattle are perplexed
because there is no pasture for them;
    even the flocks of sheep suffer.

**19**To you, O Lord, I call.
For fire has devoured
    the pastures of the wilderness,
and flame has burned
    all the trees of the field.

**20**Even the beasts of the field pant for you
    because the water brooks are dried up,
and fire has devoured
    the pastures of the wilderness.

### The Day of the Lord

**2:1**Blow a trumpet in Zion;
    sound an alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
    for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near,

**2**a day of darkness and gloom,
    a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains
    a great and powerful people;
their like has never been before,
    nor will be again after them
    through the years of all generations.

**3**Fire devours before them,
    and behind them a flame burns.
The land is like the garden of Eden before them,
    but behind them a desolate wilderness,
    and nothing escapes them.

**4**Their appearance is like the appearance of horses,
    and like war horses they run.

**5**As with the rumbling of chariots,
    they leap on the tops of the mountains,
like the crackling of a flame of fire
    devouring the stubble,
like a powerful army
    drawn up for battle.

**6**Before them peoples are in anguish;
    all faces grow pale.

**7**Like warriors they charge;
    like soldiers they scale the wall.
They march each on his way;
    they do not swerve from their paths.

**8**They do not jostle one another;
    each marches in his path;
they burst through the weapons
    and are not halted.

**9**They leap upon the city,
    they run upon the walls,
they climb up into the houses,
    they enter through the windows like a thief.

**10**The earth quakes before them;
    the heavens tremble.
The sun and the moon are darkened,
    and the stars withdraw their shining.

**11**The Lord utters his voice
    before his army,
for his camp is exceedingly great;
    he who executes his word is powerful.
For the day of the Lord is great and very awesome;
    who can endure it?

### Return to the Lord

**12**“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,
    “return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

**13**    and rend your hearts and not your garments.”
Return to the Lord your God,
    for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
    and he relents over disaster.

**14**Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
    and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
    for the Lord your God?

**15**Blow the trumpet in Zion;
    consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly;

**16**    gather the people.
Consecrate the congregation;
    assemble the elders;
gather the children,
    even nursing infants.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
    and the bride her chamber.

**17**Between the vestibule and the altar
    let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep
and say, “Spare your people, O Lord,
    and make not your heritage a reproach,
    a byword among the nations.
Why should they say among the peoples,
    ‘Where is their God?’”

**JUDGMENT FOR SIN.** God’s holiness[2](https://www.esv.org/Joel%2B1/#joel-amos-and-obadiah-week-2-locusts-and-armies-fn2) and perfect character demand that same perfect morality from all people. When we fail to obey God’s demands, that disobedience—sin—earns God’s judgment. Just as a violation of civil law earns the penalties of the law, so do violations of God’s character and laws earn his judgment and penalties. Sometimes, as in the case for Israel during the ministry of the prophet Joel, such judgment comes in this life, with tangible consequences for sin, such as locust plagues or invading armies. On the other hand, it sometimes seems that the disobedient do not suffer judgment in this life. Nevertheless, through consequences in this life or in the life to come, God always judges sin, and all people will one day stand before him and receive from him according to what they have done, “whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10).

**REPENTANCE.** Repentance is a change of heart and mind over one’s attitude toward God or one’s actions; it is a turning away from sin and a turning toward God. Accordingly, repentance involves more than just an external confession of guilt or expression of regret; rather, this inward change of heart and mind must result in a grieving over the wrong committed, a hating of the offense, and an earnest desire for the mercy and forgiveness of God. Such repentance necessarily results in changed behavior. See Jeremiah 31:18–19 and 2 Corinthians 7:10–11.

**THE DAY OF THE LORD.** The “day of the Lord” is a frequent theme in the books of the prophets. It variously heralds a day in which God judges unfaithfulness among his people; a day in which God comes to judge the nations; and/or a day in which God establishes his throne and rules over the nations, saving his people. In the New Testament, this same theme is taken up to describe the return of Christ Jesus.