

II. *The Day of the LORD Is Coming!*

12-Dec-04 Joel 2:1-17 Robertson Chapter 2

Theme: The Day of the LORD is an opportunity for repentance and returning to the merciful and gracious God.

Key Verses: Joel 2:1-2 ¹Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the LORD is coming, For it is at hand: ²A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, The like of whom has never been; Nor will there ever be any such after them, Even for many successive generations.

Review

Last week, we looked at the first chapter of the prophecy of Joel. **This first chapter is comprised of two sections: the announcement of the great locust invasion (1:2-14), and an intensifying of that locust invasion connected with the Day of the Lord (1:15-20).** A locust invasion is a serious matter in that part of the world, even worse than a direct hit by a Category 5 hurricane. This natural disaster brought about by God affects every one of God's people. Joel calls the drunkards and farmers and priests and people to mourn, for temporal pleasures, and financial security, and even religious comforts have been stripped away. Joel culminates the first section by commanding the priests to gather the congregation to cry out to the LORD.

In the second section, we see the destruction as an example of the great and terrible Day of the LORD. It is a day in which the Lord comes to judge His people. All of creation is impacted when the Lord comes. **What is the proper response on the Lord's Day, on the day in which the Lord comes? It is to cry out to God in prayer.** That was the command of Joel 1:14, and that is the example of the prophet in Joel 1:19-20. Joel cries out to God. **Every Sunday is the Sabbath day – the Lord's Day. It is the special day of the week in which the Lord draws close to His people as they gather in worship. What is your response to coming into the presence of the Lord on His holy day?** Do you cry out to Him in repentance, in confession, in praise, in thanksgiving? The Scriptures continually say that the Day of the Lord is at hand. It is at hand today.

Introduction

Today we will be looking at the third and fourth section of Joel's prophecy. **The third section (2:1-11) continues to intensify the themes we've already encountered in chapter 1: the day of the locust and the Day of the LORD. The fourth section (2:12-17) is the pivotal section of the book; it is the plea for repentance that begins to reverse the terrible judgments of the first three sections.**

Exposition

A. The Army of Destruction (2:1-11)

This section describes a great and terrible invasion by an army of destruction. Commentators wrestle with the connection between this section and the previous ones. It is describing the same locust invasion, or a different one? Is it describing an invasion by a human army (such as Babylon)? Is it somehow a combination of the two (the locusts point to a greater tragedy to come)? Certainly the poetic intensity has increased dramatically from chapter 1. I

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believe that **the language here first speaks of the locust invasion of chapter 1. However, since the prophets often speak on more than one level, there is a good possibility that Joel is using the locusts to prefigure a future invasion of a human army as well.** Finally, the imagery of Joel chapter 2 is picked up by the book of Revelation, and **this apocalyptic language is a harbinger of the coming final Day of the LORD.** So as we go through the text this morning, be aware of the multiple perspectives of the prophet's message.

One final introductory remark: as we find in many Biblical passages, **this section can be arranged chiasmically. The center of the chiasm is the terror which descends upon the people when the Day of the LORD comes.**

- a day of Yahweh approaches: large and mighty army comes (2:1-2)
- b effects of locust invasion: before them (2:3)
- c military likeness of locust march: they are like ... (2:4-5)
- d CENTER: reaction of terror in land (2:6)
- c' military likeness of locust march: they are like ... (2:7-9)
- b' effects of locust invasion: before them (2:10)
- a' day of Yahweh will be great: Yahweh's army is large and mighty (2:11)

1. The Alarm Sounds (2:1-2a)

a. *The Trumpet (2:1a)*

Te raa, te raaaa, te raaaaaa! The ram's horn (*shofar*) is blowing! Can you hear the trumpet call? Do you know what it means? To arms, to arms! The enemy is coming!

Joel starts out the section by alerting us to the coming danger. Like a sentinel on the walls, Joel is the appointed watchman to sound the alarm. And he is speaking on behalf of the Lord Himself. Who else would call out the alarm on "My holy mountain" of Zion? **Do you see the irony? God sounds the alarm against ... against Himself!** For what is the alarm warning about? It is warning of the coming of "the Day of the LORD." **The Lord Himself is coming in judgment upon His people. And yet He warns them.** That is what the books of the prophets are all about.

God sent His messengers the prophets to warn the people of God about their sin and urge them to repent before the Lord came in judgment upon them. Did God's people listen? For the greater part – no. We'll see a biographical response to Amos' message in a few weeks. The prophets of God were often ignored, or ridiculed, or persecuted. The greatest prophet of all – Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate – was stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, bruised, rejected by men, and crucified to death.

b. *The Day of the LORD (2:1b-2a)*

Let's take a closer look at the Day of the LORD. Last week I talked about it being the day in which God comes, to bless and restore His people, or to judge His people or the nations. The Day of the LORD is most often expressed in fearful terms, because it a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The language that Joel uses here is reminiscent of the appearance of God at Mt. Sinai during the Exodus.

Exodus 19:16-20 ¹⁶Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a *thick cloud on the mountain*; and the *sound of the trumpet was very loud*, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. ¹⁷And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸Now Mount Sinai was completely in *smoke*, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. *Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace*, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. ¹⁹And when the *blast of the trumpet* sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. ²⁰Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

When God comes to meet with His people at Sinai, there is the sound of the trumpet, there are thick clouds and smoke. It is a terrifying experience. The people are trembling with fear. And yet God is not coming in judgment (at this time). He is coming to enter into covenant with His people. When the glory and holiness of God comes to Isaiah, Daniel, and John it is a frightening thing. Isaiah says, “Woe is me for I am undone!” (**Is. 6:5**). Daniel’s vigor turns to frailty, and he collapses face first into a deep sleep (**Dan. 10:8-9**). John falls at the feet of the glorified Christ as one who is dead (**Rev. 1:17**). These three were blessed with comforting words when they came into the Lord’s presence, and still they trembled. **How much more terrifying is the prospect of the Lord coming in judgment?**

The commentator Prior makes some helpful comments about the multiple perspectives of the Day of the LORD: **“The day of the LORD, for Joel, applied to what was happening then, what was about to happen soon, and what eventually would happen when God called the nations to account. This triple perspective holds good for the entire biblical account of the day of the LORD, New Testament as much as Old. Any way in which God significantly moves in our lives may properly be called the day of the LORD. There are, also, major events which are defining moments of truth, in which God’s verdict on a particular country, city or system is made plain. This, too, is the day of the LORD and it is invariably a time of judgment. But there is one great day, a day which is fixed by God, and is known only to God, when the whole world will be summoned before his throne. He will then make the ultimate decisions about every person’s eternal destiny. The O.T. eschatological expression “the Day of the Lord” is appropriated by Paul and made Christological. It is still “the Day of the Lord”, but the Lord is none other than Jesus Christ. The day of the Lord is any day God steps into history to do a special work, whether of judgment or deliverance.”**

So, as we think about the Day of the LORD, try to keep those three perspectives in mind. First there is the ordinary coming of God into our lives. This most often happens every Sabbath Day – the Lord’s Day – in which we are called to gather in a sacred assembly for worship in the presence of God. That is a Day of the LORD. Then there are the periodic, special times of judgment when God comes to hold sinful people and nations to account. The Assyrian captivity of Samaria in 722 BC, the Babylonian captivity of Judah in 586 BC, and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD are examples of God’s judgment on His own people. The fall of pagan empires is the Day of the LORD upon the nations.

That final Day of the LORD is the return of our Savior Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate coming of the Lord. This is what Paul writes about in 1 Thessalonians:

1 Th. 4:15-5:11 ¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until *the coming of the Lord* will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words. ¹But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. ²For you yourselves know perfectly that *the day of the Lord* so comes as a thief in the night. ³For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then *sudden destruction* comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. *And they shall not escape.* ⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. ⁵You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. ⁶Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. ⁸But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For *God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,* ¹⁰who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. ¹¹Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Paul encourages us to be prepared for the second coming of Christ, for the final Day of the LORD. **That Day will be a day of wrath and sudden destruction for those who are in darkness, but will be a day of salvation, rejoicing, and eternal life for all those who are in Christ.**

Which Day of the LORD perspective is in view here in Joel 2:1-11? Is it the routine Day, is it the Day of periodic judgment, or is it the final Day of consummation? I think it is at least a Day of special judgment, but in a way it foreshadows the final consummation.

2. *The Army Advances (2:2b-9)*

From verse 2b through verse 9, we have a description of the advancing army of destruction. In highly poetic language, the army of locusts is described. The initial description in verse 2, "The like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations," reminds us of Joel's initial announcement in 1:2-3 – "Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children and their children another generation" (1:2b-3). **This locust army is unprecedented in its size and destructive capability.**

Verse 3 describes their relentless advance. They are like a forest fire that consumes everything in its path. They turn the Garden of Eden into a desolate wilderness, eating every living thing in their path. **Verses 4 and 5 describe the locust army in apocalyptic terms.** Notice the very evocative terms to describe the locusts. They are "like" horses in appearance. They make a noise "like" chariots. Earlier in **Joel 1:6** they were described as having the teeth and fangs of a lion. The book of Revelation picks up the same description.

Rev. 9:7-9 ⁷The shape of the *locusts was like horses* prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. ⁸They had hair like women's hair, and *their teeth were like lions' teeth.* ⁹And they had

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breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the *sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots* with many horses running into battle.

If you remember the description of a locust plague I read last week, you'll agree that this description accurately describes the havoc created by an immense locust swarm. **Verse 6 is the center of the chiasm of this section, and rightly describes the reactions of the people to the locust swarm.**

Verses 7-9 give a further description of the locust invasion, this time focusing on the behavior of the individual locusts, their invincibility, and their ability to invade every nook and cranny of the city. A closed window or door will not prevent the ingress of these insects into your home. Robertson writes: "No defense can stand against this penetrating invasion. Resistance is utterly futile. Nothing can keep them back. They have the run of the city. Like the plagues on Pharaoh in Egypt, these locusts accost men in the privacy of their own homes. When God's judgment comes, no one escapes."

3. The LORD Controls (2:10-11)

The climax of the locust invasion occurs in verses 10-11. **Verse 10 contains apocalyptic language of the heavens and earth being shook and heavenly bodies being extinguished. Compare this to verse 2 and remember what happened at Mt. Sinai.** When Mt. Sinai was covered with smoke, it became dark and the heavenly bodies were occluded from view. Furthermore, the very creation trembled: "the whole mountain quaked greatly" (Ex. 19:18b). While this language seems extreme, in a sense it is a poetic rendition of what actually happened when the Lord came to Mt. Sinai, and it is thus a picture for us of what happens when the Lord comes. As Robertson puts it: "God's coming in judgment disturbs the very foundation of nature's order."

James Jordan points out in *Through New Eyes* that the **heavenly lights are given as signs and are also established as rulers of the sky (Gen. 1:14-18). As such, they often symbolize ruling powers or nations. When the prophets see the heavenly lights being extinguished, they are usually referring "to the collapse of some particularly nation."** For example, Isaiah 13 contains very similar language to that found here in Joel chapter 2:

Is. 13:9-11 ⁹Behold, the *day of the LORD comes*, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰*For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine.* ¹¹"I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

Although this sounds like the destruction of the world, in context it is a word of judgment against Babylon (13:1). It is the destruction of Babylon which is being foretold, as Is. 13:17ff. make clear. Jordan says: "What Isaiah 13:10 is saying is that Babylon's lights are going to go out. Their clocks are going to stop. Their day is over, and it is the Day of Doom for them. And, since these astral bodies symbolize governors and rulers, their rulers are going to have their lights put out as well."

So what does that mean for us here in Joel 2:10? Well, applying the same principle, **it appears as if God is threatening the nation of Judah with extinction.** We know that did not happen via a locust invasion, but it did eventually happen via a human invasion – via the very same

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Babylonians of whose destruction Isaiah foretold. Joel will use very similar language two more times in his short prophecy to describe the Day of the LORD (2:30-31; 3:15-16), so we will have further opportunities to explore this concept.

In case there is any confusion about the source of the army of destruction, verse 11 makes it clear. The Lord is the commander of this army. His camp is great. His word of judgment is being executed by the locust invaders. It is the Lord's Day which is great and very terrible. Who can stand before the Lord in the wrath of His judgment? Who can endure it? **The locust invasion that Joel has described now in three successively more intense sections is under the sovereign control of the Lord. The day of the locust points to the Day of the LORD.**

B. The Hope of Deliverance (2:12-17)

Now we come to the central section of this short prophecy. In our overall structure, it is the hinge or the turning point. **The first three sections have spoken of judgment. But it is not too late. There is still time for repentance. The trumpet has blown in 2:1, but it is not the last trumpet to blow (1 Th. 4:16). There is still time, if the people of God act now.**

1. *Assurance by the Prophet (2:12-14)*

a. *The Call to Repentance (2:12-13a)*

“Now, therefore,” begins our new section. “Based on everything you know from the first three sections of Joel, it's time to respond. There is no time to delay.” **The most amazing thing about this call to repentance is that it comes directly from the LORD Himself. The same God who sounded the alarm, the same God who captained the invading army, is the same God who calls His people tenderly back to Him.** “Turn to Me with all your heart. Return to Me. Return to the LORD your God.” Even though the people have sinned, even though they are estranged from God and have had their fellowship, their communion broken, God is still their God. He is the LORD – Yahweh – the covenant God.

The people of God are called by God to “turn” and “return.” This is the essence of repentance. It is a turning away from sin and a returning back to God. They are called to forsake their sinfulness with true contrition. It is not simply an external, superficial repentance that is in view here. For an example of that, see Hosea 6:1-2. No, they are called to turn with “all your heart.” They are called to “rend your heart and not your garments.” In Old Testament times, tearing your clothes was a sign of sorrow or mourning. Joel is not interested in the external expressions of sorrow. The people of God are called to display true contrition in their hearts for their sin. Hubbard points out that “rend your hearts” means ‘change your whole attitude’, with a result akin to the broken, contrite heart of **Psalm 51:17** or the circumcised heart of **Deuteronomy 10:16** and Jeremiah 4:4.

Psalm 51:17 ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

Deuteronomy 10:16 ¹⁶Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

b. *The Reasons for Repentance (2:13b-14)*

We are next given two reasons for the people's repentance. The first reason for repentance lies in the mercy and graciousness of God. Joel takes us back to Mt. Sinai in verse 13 when he recites the attributes of God. Remember, just after the golden calf incident, Moses had asked to

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see God's glory. God told Moses that no one could see His glory and live, but that he would put Moses in the cleft of the rock and that Moses could see the backside of His glory. That's the context for **Exodus 34:6-7**. God demonstrates His glory to Moses by proclaiming His attributes:

Exodus 34:6-7 ⁶And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Notice how Joel adds a phrase not found in Exodus 34: "And He relents from doing harm." Likely Joel is referring to how Moses interceded with God not to destroy all the people after the golden calf incident. **Joel is reminding us that God has a long history of forgiving sinners and restoring them to fellowship.** So take the opportunity which God is offering to repent and return.

Robertson puts it this way: "Repent because the unchanging nature of God has been revealed as one who restores sinners who return to him. He is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and great in his kindness. If he were known only as a wrathful judge, no one would have a reason to repent. But at Sinai his nature was revealed in its graciousness even after Israel had sinned with the golden calf."

The second reason to repent is a little edgier – a little less certain. "Who knows if He will turn and relent?" doesn't conjure up the same level of assurance. It's a reminder that we are not to presume upon God's merciful and gracious offer of repentance and restoration. God is not an automatic forgiveness machine. Joel holds out hope that forgiveness is available and that the disaster will be averted. But averting the disaster is only a possibility. God could still choose to chastise His forgiven saints. Prior comments: "Even repentance from a contrite heart cannot guarantee a positive response from God: we are still entirely dependent on his grace. One of the balancing acts in Christian prayer is to combine faith with humility, to ask with confidence but to refrain from insisting on what we want."

What is the desired outcome of God turning and relenting from His announced judgment? Restoration of the grain and drink offerings. Remember that the locust plague cut off the people from the right worship of the Lord because the various prescribed offerings could not be made (1:9, 13). They were separated from God. While restoration of these simple offerings doesn't sound like a big deal – it is. **It is nothing less than an announcement of restoration of fellowship with God.** The people will be back in communion with God; the covenant relationship will be righted. The sin will be forgiven and the people will be able to renew their worship of God in a proper manner.

2. Assembly by the People (2:15-16)

So, Joel has given us the call to repentance and the reasons for it. Our repentance is based on the mercy and grace of a forgiving God, a God who restores His sinful people to fellowship and communion with Him.

Next, Joel issues a series of seven staccato commands in verses 15-16. In order for the congregation to repent, they must first assemble together. They are called to worship by the very same trumpet that sounded the warning blast in the opening verse of this chapter. The next commands (consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the people or elders) are the same

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commands Joel had issued to the priests in chapter 1 (1:14). Notice how the entire congregation is gathered together from the eldest to the youngest, the entire people of God are called to assembly. In chapter 1 (1:8), the bride was grieving for her dead bridegroom; here in 2:16 the bride and her living bridegroom are called to leave their honeymoon and assemble with the rest of God's people. They are not excused from the call to gather.

God issues the same commands to us every Lord's Day. On the Day of the LORD – Sunday – we are called to gather in sacred assembly, from the eldest to the youngest. There are no exemptions. Prior says: "We come because He calls us together. We come because we believe that He will be there also. The important thing is to come with expectancy, setting ourselves apart from everyday and extra-special events in order to be together in one place as the people of God."

3. *Action by the Priests (2:17)*

Finally, Joel calls upon the priests, the religious leaders, to lead by example. The priests are the ones who enact the seven commands of verses 15-16. They are the ones that call the people and gather the entire congregation in a sacred assembly. But beyond being meeting organizers, the priests must lead the people in repentance. Their position between the porch and the altar of the Temple is significant. The altar is the place of sacrifice, of atonement for sin. The porch is the vestibule or entry into the Temple, which is the dwelling place of God. Their position between the altar and the porch signifies their mediatorial position. Joel calls the priests to fulfill their mediatorial role by weeping over the congregation's sin and by calling out to the Lord in prayer.

It's interesting that even here specific sins are not identified in the prayer. Again, I believe this gives each of us the opportunity to "fill in the blank" with our own particular sins and needs. However, we can join in with the priests of Joel's day and pray that God spare us and that God be glorified in the process. God's mercy upon His people reflects the glory and majesty of God. His goodness to us is a testimony of His character.

Conclusion

Remember what God told Moses:

Exodus 34:6-7a ⁶And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."

God is a merciful, gracious, and longsuffering God who forgives our sin. He will forgive our sin if we come to him in repentance, confess the sin, forsake it, and return to Him. That's what the Day of the LORD is all about for the Christian. God comes close by and inspects His people. On the Lord's Day, He calls us into His presence, He forgives our sin, He accepts our praise, He hears our prayers, He receives our worship and gifts, He equips us through His preached Word, and He sends us back out in the world to live as His holy people.

But don't forget the rest of what God told Moses:

Exodus 34:7b "... by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

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God is not a cream puff or a pushover. False repentance or no repentance just doesn't work. God will not overlook sin. Sin must be dealt with. For the Christian, sin has been dealt with by the finished work of Christ. **For the non-Christian, it's a different story. The Day of the LORD for the unbeliever is a day of terror and of judgment. When the Lord comes, he comes to punish and destroy. "For the Day of the LORD is great and very terrible, who can endure it?" (2:11).**

Praise God that Jesus Christ was able to endure the Day of the LORD on our behalf. He is the one who took upon Himself the terror and the judgment and the wrath of God for the sins of His people. That is all the more reason for us to be continually turning to God and returning to God in thanksgiving for our salvation and in repentance for the sins we commit which break our fellowship with the living God.

The Day of the LORD is an awesome thing. In the next two weeks we will continue to explore this topic further, but in closing, I just want to encourage everyone to approach this Lord's Day, and every Lord's Day, with the respect it is due. The Day of the LORD is coming. It is at hand.

Next week: Lesson 3 – The Spirit Is Coming! – Joel 2:18-32 – Robertson Chapters 3-4

Close in Prayer.