

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: The Day of the Lord and the Locust Army

Joel 1:1–2:17

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal stakes of this lesson are high because Joel is one of the great wells from which later Scripture draws the theme of the Day of the Lord. The teacher must help students see that the locust plague is presented as a genuine historical judgment, not a mere metaphor, and that God uses real losses to summon real repentance. At the same time, the phrase the Day of the Lord must be handled with care. Throughout the prophets it names any decisive moment when God draws near to judge and to save, and it reaches its great fulfillment not in a future earthly political kingdom or a literal thousand-year reign, but in the coming of Christ, the inbreaking of the gospel age, the establishment of the Lord's church, and the final judgment. Guard the class explicitly against premillennial and dispensational schemes that turn Joel into a blueprint for end-times geopolitics. Acts 2 will show in the next lesson that Peter read Joel as already being fulfilled in his own day.

The second aim is formation of the heart. Joel's deepest word is not about insects or armies but about returning. God says, even now, return to Me with all your heart, and rend your hearts and not your garments. This is the church-of-Christ conviction that repentance is personal, genuine, and whole-hearted, never a matter of outward display or inherited guilt automatically washed away, but a real turning of the will toward God. The teacher should aim to leave students not merely informed about the Day of the Lord but moved to examine their own hearts, to wake from spiritual numbness, and to come home to the God who still calls the gracious and merciful invitation across the ruined field.

Question 1

Student Question:

According to Joel 1:1–4, how does the prophet describe the locust plague, and what does it tell us that he identifies these events as something to be told from generation to generation rather than a chance misfortune?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joel opens with the briefest of introductions. We are told only that the word of the Lord came to Joel the son of Pethuel. We do not get a king's name, a date, or a setting, which is unusual among the prophets. What we do get immediately is urgency. Joel turns to the oldest men in the community and asks whether anything like this has happened in their days or in the days of

their fathers. The question is rhetorical and the answer is no. This is something to be told to the children, and by them to their children, and on to a third generation.

The fourfold description in verse 4 has occasioned much discussion. The cutting locust, the swarming locust, the hopping locust, and the destroying locust may name four stages in the life cycle of the same insect, or four successive waves, or simply a poetic piling up of terms to convey total devastation. The point is plain regardless. Whatever one wave left, the next consumed. Nothing green survived.

Notice that Joel treats this natural catastrophe as something laden with meaning, worth preserving and passing down. He does not say the locusts came because of random weather patterns and leave it there. He insists the event must be remembered and interpreted. This is the prophet's instinct, to read the hand of God in the events of history and to refuse to let suffering be meaningless.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joel presents the plague as a real historical event, not merely a symbol; the prophets read God's providence in actual history (Amos 4:6–11).
- The command to tell it to the children establishes that God means painful experiences to instruct future generations (Psalm 78:1–7).
- Church-of-Christ teaching affirms that we do not claim to read God's secret purposes behind every event, yet Scripture does teach us to let hardship turn us toward God rather than away.
- Caution against the opposite error of treating all calamity as direct divine punishment of specific sins; Joel speaks as an inspired prophet, which we are not.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Joel insist the locust plague be told from generation to generation, and what does that say about how God uses memory?
- What is the difference between reading God's providence in history and presuming to know His secret reasons?
- When has an unwelcome event in your life carried a lesson you needed to pass on to others?

Question 2

Student Question:

Joel calls the drunkards, the farmers, the priests, and the whole land to wake up and grieve (Joel 1:5–13). In what areas of your own life have you been spiritually asleep or numb, and what would it look like for you to wake up?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joel now begins to summon different groups in the community to mourn, and the order is revealing. He starts with the drunkards, telling them to wake up and weep because the new wine is cut off from their mouth. The pleasure-seekers feel the loss first, because their comforts are gone. Then he moves to the farmers and vinedressers, those who labored over the fields and watched their work destroyed.

The imagery intensifies. A nation has come up against the land, strong and without number, with the teeth of a lion. The vine is laid waste and the fig tree splintered, the branches stripped white. Joel even calls the land to mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth, a picture of raw and personal loss.

Crucially, the grain offering and drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord (verse 9). The disaster has reached the altar. Worship itself is interrupted because there is nothing left to bring. This detail moves the crisis from economics to covenant. The relationship between God and His people, expressed in the daily offerings, has been disrupted, and the priests are told to mourn.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joel calls every layer of society to wake up and grieve; spiritual numbness is a danger for the comfortable and the busy alike.
- The cutting off of the offerings shows that the deepest loss is not material but the disruption of fellowship with God.
- The drunkards feel the loss first because their joy was anchored in something perishable; misplaced comforts collapse first under judgment.
- Mourning here is not despair but the appropriate response to sin and loss that should drive a person back to God.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Joel begin his summons to mourning with the drunkards, and what does that reveal about misplaced comfort?
- What does it mean that the disaster reached all the way to the altar and interrupted worship?
- Where in your life have you grown numb to things that should grieve you?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Joel 1:13–14 the prophet commands the priests to call a solemn assembly and gather the elders and all the people to the house of the Lord. What does this teach us about the place of corporate, gathered worship and repentance, and why can private feeling never fully substitute for the assembly of God's people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 13 and 14 form a hinge in the chapter. Having described the devastation, Joel now issues a clear command. Gird yourselves and lament, you priests. Wail, you ministers of the altar. Then comes the central directive: 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.

This is not a call to private grief alone. It is a call to gathered, corporate repentance. The whole community is to come to one place, the house of the Lord, and together turn to God. The priests lead, but everyone comes. There is something irreducibly congregational about biblical repentance and worship. The people of God deal with God together.

This pattern carries forward to the Lord's church. We are not merely a collection of private believers who each manage our own spirituality. We are an assembly, called together to worship, to confess, to encourage, and to seek God as one body. The solemn assembly of Joel finds its echo in the gathered church of the New Testament.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joel commands corporate, gathered repentance at the house of God, not merely private feeling (compare Hebrews 10:24–25).
- The priests lead the assembly, but all the people come; spiritual leadership and congregational participation work together.
- Private devotion is essential but cannot substitute for the gathered worship of God's people.
- The pattern points forward to the assembling of the Lord's church on the first day of the week.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Joel call for a gathered assembly rather than only private repentance?
- How does this passage challenge a purely individualistic view of faith?
- What role does the gathered church play in your own walk with God?

Question 4

Student Question:

Joel says the joy of mankind has dried up because the harvest is destroyed (Joel 1:11–12, 16). Where have you allowed your gladness to depend on harvests that can be eaten in a night, and where should a Christian's deepest joy be anchored?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In the midst of the lament Joel cries out, alas for the day, for the Day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. This is the first sounding of a phrase that will dominate the rest of the book and echo through the whole of Scripture. The Hebrew behind destruction

from the Almighty contains a deliberate wordplay, shod from Shaddai, the ruin that comes from the All-Sufficient One.

The Day of the Lord is one of the great theological themes of the prophets. At its core it names any decisive moment when God draws near to act, to judge, and to save. The locust plague is a small-scale, present experience of that day, a warning tremor of the greater visitation to come. Joel uses the near disaster as a window onto the ultimate reckoning.

Joel then returns to the immediate scene. Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed shrivels under the clods, the storehouses are desolate, the granaries are torn down. Even the beasts groan and the herds wander in confusion because there is no pasture. All creation feels the weight of the judgment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Day of the Lord is introduced as a day of reckoning before it is a day of comfort; it begins as warning.
- The locust plague functions as a present, partial experience of the larger Day of the Lord still to come.
- Joy and gladness are said to wither from the house of God; true joy is bound up with right relationship to Him.
- Even the animals and the land suffer, showing the wide reach of judgment and the goodness of God's created order disrupted by sin.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Joel use a present disaster as a window onto a greater day of God's visitation?
- Why is the Day of the Lord a day of reckoning before it is a day of comfort?
- What does it mean that joy and gladness dry up from the house of God?

Question 5

Student Question:

Joel 1:15 first sounds the phrase the Day of the Lord and links it to destruction from the Almighty. From the way Joel uses this phrase here and in chapter 2, how would you explain what the Day of the Lord means, and why it is a day of reckoning before it is a day of comfort?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 1 closes with Joel himself turning to God in prayer. To you, O Lord, I cry, for fire has devoured the pastures and flame has burned all the trees of the field. Even the wild beasts pant for water because the streams have dried up. The prophet does not merely command others to pray; he models it. He cries out personally to the only One who can help.

This is an important pastoral pattern. Joel has spent the chapter calling priests, farmers, drunkards, elders, and the whole land to lament. Now he leads by example. The man who summons others to repentance is himself bowed before God. There is no hypocrisy of demanding from others what one will not do oneself.

Joel's prayer also reveals the right direction of the heart in crisis. When everything is stripped away, there is one place to turn. To you, O Lord, I cry. The disaster does not drive Joel to despair or to bitterness against God; it drives him into God's presence. The locusts have done their deeper work in at least one heart already.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joel models personal prayer, not merely commanding it of others; godly leaders practice what they preach.
- Crisis rightly received drives the believer toward God rather than away from Him.
- The prophet's cry shows that lament and prayer belong together; we may bring our grief honestly to God.
- The stripped-away comforts leave one thing standing, the Lord Himself, the only refuge in the day of trouble.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that Joel cries out to God himself rather than only commanding others to pray?
- When trouble strips your comforts away, which direction does your heart instinctively turn?
- What does honest lament before God look like in your own prayer life?

Question 6

Student Question:

Joel 2:1 commands the watchmen to blow the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm. Who in your life has sounded the trumpet of warning for your soul, and how have you responded when someone loved you enough to warn you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 2 opens with a startling command. Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain. The trumpet, the shophar, was Israel's instrument of warning and of summons. It gathered the assembly and it called the watchmen to arms. Joel sounds it now because the Day of the Lord is coming, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

The imagery deepens the dread. Like blackness spread upon the mountains comes a great and powerful people, the likes of which has never been seen and will not be seen again for

generations. Before them a fire devours, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them and a desolate wilderness behind. Nothing escapes.

Many readers connect this army imagery with the locust swarm of chapter 1, now described in heightened, almost apocalyptic terms; others see a human army following the locusts. Either way, Joel's point is that this is no ordinary trouble. It is a foretaste of the Day of the Lord, and the only fitting response is the alarm of the trumpet calling people to attention and to repentance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The trumpet in Zion is both a warning of judgment and a summons to assemble; the same call that alarms also gathers God's people.
- The Day of the Lord is consistently described as darkness, not the bright political triumph some imagine.
- Joel intensifies the locust imagery into an overwhelming army to convey the seriousness of God's visitation.
- The contrast of Eden before and wilderness behind shows how thoroughly sin and judgment can lay waste what God made good.

Discussion Prompts

- What two purposes does the trumpet in Zion serve, and how are they related?
- Why does the Bible repeatedly describe the Day of the Lord as darkness rather than mere triumph?
- Who has sounded a warning trumpet for your soul, and how did you respond?

Question 7

Student Question:

Joel 2:1–11 describes an overwhelming army with the Lord at its head, an army that runs like horsemen and climbs the wall like soldiers. How does Joel hold together two truths here, that God uses real instruments of judgment and that He Himself stands sovereign over them, and why does this guard us from both fatalism and false security?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 4 through 11 paint the advancing army in vivid, terrifying detail. They have the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run. With the rumbling of chariots they leap on the tops of the mountains. They charge like mighty men and scale the wall like soldiers, each marching in line without breaking ranks. They burst through the weapons and are not halted. The picture is of an unstoppable, disciplined force.

The cosmos itself reacts. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. This is the language of upheaval, the sky going dark, the ground shaking, the ordered world coming undone before the advance of judgment.

Then comes the decisive line in verse 11. The Lord utters His voice before His army, for His camp is exceedingly great; he who executes His word is powerful. Here is the heart of the matter. This is the Lord's army. The locusts, the soldiers, the whole advancing host, however we identify them, move at His command. He stands at the head of the column. The question Joel forces is the closing one: the Day of the Lord is great and very awesome; who can endure it?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joel holds two truths together: God uses real instruments of judgment, and He Himself remains sovereign over them.
- The cosmic upheaval imagery, sun and moon darkened, recurs in the New Testament for God's decisive acts (Acts 2:20; Matthew 24:29).
- Naming this the Lord's army guards against fatalism, because God is in control, and against false security, because none can endure His day in their own strength.
- The question who can endure it sets up the gracious turn in verse 12; the answer is not human strength but repentance and mercy.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Joel hold together God's use of instruments and His own sovereignty over them?
- Why does calling this the Lord's army protect us from both fatalism and false security?
- How would you answer Joel's question, who can endure the Day of the Lord?

Question 8

Student Question:

In Joel 2:12-13 God says, return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments. What is the difference between an outward show of religious sorrow and a genuinely broken heart, and which one is more natural to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After all the darkness, verse 12 turns on two words: yet even now. Even now, declares the Lord, return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. In the very face of the advancing day, the door of mercy stands open. God does not want to destroy these people; He wants them back. The judgment was always aimed at repentance.

Then comes one of the most piercing lines in all the prophets. Rend your hearts and not your garments. The tearing of one's clothing was a customary sign of grief in Israel. But God will not be satisfied with torn cloth over an unbroken heart. He wants the inner reality, not the outer gesture. A man can ruin his clothes and never change his life. God asks for a torn heart, a will genuinely turned from sin toward Him.

This is the doctrinal center of the whole passage. Repentance is not an outward performance, not a ritual that automatically secures forgiveness, and not the cancelling of some inherited guilt. It is a personal, deliberate, whole-hearted return to God. Joel grounds the call in God's character: 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. Repentance is possible only because God is the kind of God who welcomes the returning.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Return to Me with all your heart defines genuine repentance as a personal, whole-hearted turning, not a partial or outward one.
- Rend your hearts and not your garments distinguishes true contrition from religious display.
- Repentance is grounded in God's revealed character as gracious, merciful, and slow to anger, not in human merit.
- Church-of-Christ teaching: forgiveness flows from genuine repentance and God's grace, never from mere ritual or the automatic removal of inherited guilt.
- The word even now teaches that the door of mercy stands open right up to the day of reckoning, but not forever.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between rending your garments and rending your heart?
- Why does Joel ground the call to repent in the character of God rather than in fear alone?
- Which is more natural to you, the outward show of sorrow or the inward breaking of the heart?

Question 9

Student Question:

Joel locates the whole locust crisis under the banner of the Day of the Lord (Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 11), a recurring biblical phrase that culminates in God's decisive visitation in Christ, the gospel age, and the final judgment. Drawing the threads together, how should we understand the Day of the Lord, and why must we reject the idea that Joel is predicting a future earthly political kingdom or a thousand-year reign rather than God's redemptive reign begun in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joel presses the call to repentance into concrete, corporate action in verses 15 through 17, echoing chapter 1. Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, even nursing infants. No one is exempt. Even the bridegroom is to leave his room and the bride her chamber. The most joyful and private occasion in life yields to the urgency of seeking God together.

The priests, the ministers of the Lord, are to weep between the vestibule and the altar, the very heart of the temple, and pray, Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach. The concern is not merely for their own relief but for God's honor among the nations: why should they say among the peoples, where is their God?

This closes the first half of Joel with the people on their knees and the question hanging in the air. Will God hear? Will He relent? The passage ends at the very edge of mercy, the assembly gathered, the priests pleading, the trumpet sounded. Everything now waits on the response of God, which the next lesson will reveal as a flood of grace. The structure itself preaches: judgment announced, repentance commanded, mercy awaited.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Genuine repentance issues in concrete action, including corporate fasting, assembly, and prayer, not mere private sentiment.
- No one is exempt from the call to seek God; even infants and newlyweds are gathered, underscoring its urgency.
- The priests' plea is rooted in concern for God's honor among the nations, not merely personal relief.
- The passage deliberately ends at the edge of mercy, teaching that repentance casts itself on God's grace and waits on Him.
- The recurrence of the gathered assembly reinforces the congregational shape of biblical repentance and worship.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Joel gather even infants and newlyweds for the solemn assembly?
- How does concern for God's honor, not just our own comfort, shape true repentance?
- What would it look like for your congregation to seek God together with this kind of urgency?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Joel 1:1–2:17 as a whole, from the stripped fields to the call to rend our hearts. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using this passage to form you right now, one place where He is calling you to wake up, turn, and return to Him with your whole heart.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Stepping back, we must give careful attention to the phrase that governs this entire passage, the Day of the Lord. Joel sounds it in 1:15 and again in 2:1-2 and 2:11, and it becomes the spine of his message. Across the prophets this phrase names any decisive moment when God draws near to judge His enemies and vindicate His people. It had a near fulfillment in the locust plague and the judgments of Joel's own era, and it points forward to God's ultimate visitation.

Here we must be doctrinally careful. The New Testament tells us plainly how Joel's Day of the Lord is fulfilled. In Acts 2, when the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost and the church is born, Peter stands and declares, this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, quoting the very next section of Joel about the Day of the Lord. The decisive Day of the Lord that Joel foresaw broke into history in the coming of Christ, the inauguration of the gospel age, and the establishment of the Lord's church, and it climaxes in the final judgment, which the New Testament also calls the day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10).

This means we must firmly reject the notion that Joel is predicting a future earthly political kingdom for national Israel or a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on an earthly throne. The premillennial and dispensational systems read Joel as a blueprint for end-times geopolitics, a coming Middle Eastern battle, a rebuilt temple, and a restored animal sacrifice. But Peter, guided by the Spirit, already located the fulfillment in the church age that began at Pentecost. The reign of Christ is a present reality; He sits enthroned now at God's right hand (Acts 2:33-36), ruling over His kingdom, the church.

So the Day of the Lord in Joel teaches us to live now under the lordship of the reigning Christ, ready for the final day, calling people to repentance while the door of mercy stands open. It is not a coded political timetable but a summons. The God who came near in the locusts came nearer still in His Son, and will come finally in judgment. The only safe place on that day is among His repentant, blood-bought people, the church.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Day of the Lord names any decisive divine visitation; it had near fulfillments and points to God's ultimate acts in Christ and the final judgment.
- Acts 2:16-21 settles the interpretation: Peter applies Joel's Day-of-the-Lord prophecy to Pentecost and the gospel age, not to a deferred earthly kingdom.
- Reject premillennialism and dispensationalism, which turn Joel into a blueprint for a future earthly political kingdom, rebuilt temple, and restored sacrifices.
- Christ reigns now, enthroned at God's right hand (Acts 2:33-36); His kingdom is the church, not a future thousand-year earthly throne.
- The final day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10) calls us to holy living and repentance now, while mercy is offered.
- The safe place on the Day of the Lord is among God's repentant people, those who have obeyed the gospel.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Acts 2 guide us in interpreting Joel's Day of the Lord, and why is that decisive?
- Why must we reject the idea that Joel predicts a future earthly political kingdom or thousand-year reign?
- If Christ reigns now and the final day is coming, how should that shape the way you live today?