

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos

Lesson 6: The Day of the Lord and the Locust Army -- Joel 1:1-2:17

Picture a morning in Judah when the sky should be bright and the vines should be heavy. Instead, the horizon turns dark. It is not a storm cloud. It is a living thing, a wing-beating, ground-covering wave of locusts that settles over the fields and begins to eat. By the time it lifts, the green is gone. The grapevine is bark. The fig tree is a skeleton. The grain that fed the family and supplied the altar is dust on the wind. Joel walks out into that ruined country and does something a prophet must do. He refuses to let the people treat the disaster as bad luck. He tells them to look up.

We are tempted to read a book like Joel as ancient history, the record of a calamity that happened to somebody else a long way away. But Joel will not let us keep our distance. He grabs the old men by the sleeve and asks whether anything like this ever happened in their lifetime or their fathers' lifetime, and then he tells them to make sure their children hear of it and their children's children after that. Joel believes that a real plague of insects has a message in it, and that the message is meant to travel down the generations until it reaches us. The locusts ate the harvest, but God meant the hunger to feed something deeper than the body.

Then Joel lifts his eyes higher still. Beyond the locust swarm he sees an army, and beyond the army a day, the Day of the Lord, a day of darkness and trumpets and trembling, a day when God Himself draws near. It is the kind of vision that could leave a person paralyzed with dread. Yet at the very center of it, Joel hears the voice of God doing something unexpected. God is not done with these people. He says, even now, return to Me with all your heart. The trumpet that warns of judgment is the same trumpet that calls a congregation to come home.

This lesson sits us down in the ashes of a real ruined field and asks an honest question. When life caves in, when the things we counted on are stripped away, do we go numb, or do we go to God? Joel is not interested in helping us manage a crisis and move on. He wants the locusts to drive us all the way back to the heart of the One who can make the years the locust ate count for something. So let us walk into the darkened field with him, and learn what it means to rend our hearts and not our garments, and turn to the Lord while He may still be found.

Group Discussion: Joel calls a real natural disaster a message from God and a summons to repentance. When something painful happens in our lives or our community, what keeps us from asking whether God is trying to get our attention, and how might honest spiritual reflection differ from blaming God or imagining we can read His secret purposes?

Personal Reflection: Joel asks the old men whether they have ever seen anything like this, and tells them to pass the story down to their children. What is one experience in your life where God got your attention through loss or hardship, and have you let that lesson shape the way you walk with Him now, or have you quietly filed it away and moved on?

Read Joel 1:1-2:17

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Amos 5:18–20, the Day of the Lord is darkness and not light for the complacent; Zephaniah 1:14–18, the great Day of the Lord near and hastening; Acts 2:16–21, Peter applies Joel’s Day-of-the-Lord prophecy to the gospel age inaugurated at Pentecost; 2 Peter 3:10–13, the Day of the Lord and the call to holy living; Joel 2:25, the promise that God can restore the years the locust has eaten

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com