

## The Impending “Day of the Lord” Joel 2:1-17

### **Slide 1**

Last week we learned that the people of Israel had just experienced a massive attack of locusts, followed by an extremely severe drought, and possibly even a fire.

The resulting devastation crippled the economy, causing incredible pain and suffering, not only for the people of the land but for the animals, too.

God led Joel to use these events to urge the people to pay attention to what He was saying to them through their contemporary circumstances.

Joel’s message was to cause them to repent and return to the Lord in total dependence upon him.

Joel identified the locust plague as the “Day of the Lord.” In Scripture, the “Day of the Lord,” was both, a day of judgment and blessing.

When a prophet used this term, it referred to either a contemporary day, an impending day, or the future, great “Day of the Lord.”

In this second chapter of Joel, he continued to refer to the locust plague, urging the people to be aware of the impending “Day of the Lord.”

On November 1, 1755, an earthquake struck Lisbon, Portugal. It occurred at 9:40 a.m. and lasted for six minutes. In those six minutes all public buildings and 12,000 dwellings were demolished.

Sixty thousand people died, including those who were killed as a result of the tidal waves and a fire which raged for six days.

Heavy damage also occurred in Fez, Morocco, to the south, and in Algiers, 700 miles to the east. On the coast, the tidal waves were sixty feet high.

At the island of Martinique, 3,740 miles away, when the waves passed ten hours later, the crest was twelve feet above normal.

There had been earthquakes before and there have been many since, but there were facets to this earthquake that haven't been present to the same degree either before or since.

For one thing, the first half of the eighteenth century had been a time of relative peace and prosperity in Europe, a condition particularly welcome following the religious wars of the seventeenth century.

Moreover, the era had been marked by a philosophy of optimism associated with the name of Gottfried Leibnitz (1646–1716), who had died about forty years earlier. Leibnitz stated that this was “*the best of all possible worlds.*”

He viewed evil as mere imperfection and argued that the best of all worlds proves the existence of a wise and benevolent Creator. His view had been popular among so-called “Christian” thinkers.

But then, optimism was shaken. How could God allow such an evil as the Lisbon earthquake? If God is good, He must have lacked power to prevent it; if He had power, He must not be good.

The people in Joel's day also believed that, because they were the people of God, nothing bad could happen to them.

Therefore, the locusts that devastated their land, their economy, and their livelihood was incomprehensible to them.

God used Joel to explain the meaning of the locusts to the people, to warn them of the impending “Day of the Lord.”

This approaching “Day of the Lord,” here in Joel 2, teaches us that God’s impending judgment may yet be averted by wholehearted repentance.

## **Slide 2**

Over the centuries, the people of God believed they were special and that nothing bad would happen to them.

Moreover, they also believed that nothing bad would ever happen to Jerusalem, which was situated on Zion, God’s holy mountain.

After all, God’s temple was there; that was where God’s presence resided on earth. Yet, God was warning His people that judgment against His own city and people was coming.

Joel 2:1, *“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the “Day of the Lord” is coming. It is close at hand.”*

Commentator O. Palmer Robertson writes, *“It is an established principle of God’s working in the world that God’s judgments begin with His own people, and these judgments are always imminent. No man ever has the right to presume that judgement for him will be delayed beyond the present day. Especially God’s own people must realize that judgment begins with them.”*

Robertson got his thoughts from 1 Peter 4:17–18, *“For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”*

There was an incident that took place in July, 2015, in Orange County, TX where a man was killed by an alligator.

Apparently, a man named Tommie Woodward, 28, and an unidentified woman were swimming in a bayou at Burkart's Marina.

Later, in the middle of the night, despite the printed warning signs that read, "No Swimming. Alligators," as well as the pleading of a marina employee that Tommie not go swimming, Woodward took off his shirt, removed his billfold and jumped in the water.

Almost instantly, he was dragged under the water and killed. His body was found several hours later.

What caught my attention about this story, and I am sure others as well, was that Woodward completely ignored the written signs as well as the verbal warnings. He defiantly jumped in the water, into danger, and to his death.

Joel's alarm here in verse 1 is like the posted and verbal warning signs at Burkart's Marina. Joel wanted the people of God to be aware that an impending "Day of the Lord" was coming.

Indeed, the "Day of the Lord" is near, and we had better be prepared for judgment because that judgment will begin with the people of God.

However, before Joel tells the people how to respond properly to the "Day of the Lord," he tells them about an invading army.

### **Slide 3**

In verses 2-11, we learn two things about this invasion. First, we're given an odd description of the army.

This has caused commentators to be divided about whether Joel was describing a future military army like the Assyrians or Babylonians or a plague of locusts.

I can see why they are conflicted. For example, in verse 2a Joel wrote, *“...a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.”* Then in verse 10b, *“...the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.”*

Unlike a human military army, a massive number of locusts can block the sun and cause it to be dark.

In fact, the plague of locusts in Egypt was described just like that in Exodus 10:15a, *“They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened.”*

But, more significant than a description of the army is an affirmation of the Lord’s control.

Joel 2:11, *“The Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty is the army that obeys his command. The “Day of the Lord” is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?”*

Robertson writes, *“The completeness of the penetration of this enemy into the city of the Lord might give birth to great doubt. How could this city truly be the Lord’s if its defenses can be overwhelmed by an invading army? Joel makes it explicit that the Lord is by no means separated from these happenings. As a matter of fact, God is in complete control of the events of this day.”*

Clearly the “Day of the Lord” is under God’s sovereign control. As Robertson writes, *“It is His command that stirs His army, which then arises out of His camp to execute His word on His day.”*

The question is: how should the people of God respond to an impending “Day of the Lord?” Which brings us to our next point and the goal of Joel’s prophecy, repentance.

#### **Slide 4**

God, speaking through Joel, says in verses 12-13a, *“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments.”*

Notice that true repentance is a matter of the heart. True repentance always affects the mind, heart, and will.

Now, there’s a genuine contrition that results in outward actions, which may include fasting, weeping, and mourning, but true repentance isn’t just saying we’re repenting; it involves a genuine change of heart.

Charles Spurgeon told of a woman who went to see her minister, saying she was a great sinner in whom he should take an interest. He suspected that her confession was not genuine.

So, he said to her, *“Well, if you are a sinner, of course you have broken God’s laws; let us read the Ten Commandments and see which you have broken.”*

He began to read, *“‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me.’ Did you ever break that?”* he asked. *“Oh, no,”* she said, *“not that I know of.”*

*“‘Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.’ Did you ever break that?”* *“Never, sir,”* she said.

*“Then ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.’”* She could not think that she had ever offended by taking God’s name in vain.

*“Remember the sabbath, to keep it holy.”* She never worked on Sunday. *“Honor thy father and thy mother.”* She did that.

So, it was with the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments. In the end, it turned out that what her minister suspected was true.

She didn't really consider herself to be a sinner; she was only "repenting" as a pious and praiseworthy thing to do.

Second, notice the incentives for true repentance. Joel 2:13b, *“Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”*

What a beautiful image of our gracious and merciful God! Too many people have a mental image of God sitting in heaven just waiting to judge and condemn people to hell, but that's not our God!

God constantly gives warnings to His people. He pleads with them to repent and return to Him.

He's gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents over disaster! What a wonderful God! But know this, God's people cannot presume on God's mercy.

That's why Joel wrote in verse 14, *“Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.”*

One commentator wrote, *“Repentance no more controls God than do the magic incantations of pagan priests.”*

And yet, while we may never presume on the Lord's mercy, there's no mercy unless we return to Him.

Too many people live their lives thinking when they face God they'll have a chance to plead for mercy. Let me tell you, by then it's too late. Now is the day of salvation!

2 Corinthians 6:2, *"For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."*

The Joel then gives the steps to true repentance.

Joel 2:15-17, *"Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare your people, Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"*

In this portion of Joel's text, he calls the entire assembly of God's people to repentance with seven commands.

- (1) *"Blow the trumpet in Zion"*
- (2) *"declare a holy fast"*
- (3) *"call a sacred assembly"*
- (4) *"Gather the people"*
- (5) *"consecrate the assembly"*
- (6) *"bring together the elders"*
- (7) *"gather the children, even nursing infants."*

Interestingly, none of these commands tell the people to deal with an invading army. Rather, they're essentially a call for the people to attend a religious assembly.

Not just any assembly, but an assembly where they're to cry out to the Lord seeking His forgiveness. Also, notice that everyone is to attend.

Even those who might be expected to enjoy their special night are required to give their hearts in repentance to God. Verse 16b tells us, *"Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber."*

Finally, Joel instructs the ministers to lead the people in repentance.

Joel 2:17, *"Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare your people, Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"*

James Montgomery Boice writes, *"This is the essential meaning of repentance.... Repentance comes from a Latin word (paeniteo) that refers to a change of mind, a change so basic that the direction of one's life is altered. You, today, are facing yourself, and your hope and confidence lie in your character and your good works. Behind you is the Lord Jesus Christ, despised and rejected by you. If you hear God's command to repent—if you are drawn by the sweet wooing of the riches of His grace—there will be an 'about face' that will change the direction of your walk forever."*

## **Slide 5**

### Conclusion

God led Joel to bring a fascinating message to the people against the backdrop of the locust invasion.

That contemporary "Day of the Lord" was intended to cause the people to examine themselves and see how they had drifted away from their God.

Joel wanted the people to pay attention to what God was saying to them through the locust invasion.

Today, I want to encourage you to pay attention to what God's saying to you through whatever difficulty, trial, or disaster you may be experiencing, be it a medical issue, a relational issue, a financial issue, or any other kind of issue.

The message of Joel to the people in his day is the same message God is telling us today, "*Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.*"