

Joel 1:2-14
The Day of the Lord: When God Invades

I. Structure

- A. **1A - Judgment on Israel: When locust invade (1:2-20)**
 - 1. **The people are called to mourn (1-14)**
 - 2. Lamentation (15-20)
- B. 1B - Judgment on Israel (2:1-11)
- C. 1C - Repentance (2:12-17)
- D. 1B²/2A - Yahweh Relents/Judgment on Nations (2:18-20)
- E. 1A²/2B - Yahweh Restores/Grace: Locust plague reversed (2:21-27)
- F. 2B² - Grace: The Spirit is promised (2:28-32)
- G. 2A² - Judgment on the Nations (3:1-21)

II. 2-14 — The people are called to mourn (Note: there is a systematic pattern throughout this section. Each new strophe begins with an imperative and a subject. E.g. “Hear this, you elders.”)

A. 2-4 — Elders:

1. 2-3 — Every generation should be told

The people are called upon to “hear” and to “give ear” to what’s just unfolded before their eyes. Both are imperatives and both emphasizing the same point, which makes the call to listen even more intense. Everyone is told to hear what is about to be said. The significance is implied by both the urgency of the imperatives, but also the breadth of those who are included.¹

Next, Joel raises the question, “Has such a thing happened in your days or in the days of your fathers?” The answer to this rhetorical question is, “no.” Nothing as significant has taken place in their memories. Joel calls them to respond by telling this to the next generation that will tell the next generation.

The title “elders” in this passage seems to relate to their age more than to a particular role. The context leads to this conclusion because the people are being asked to search their memories for anything like what they are about to see. Thus, the elders would have been around longer.

2. 4 — Everything is gone

What is the point of verse 4? Total devastation. The Hebrew language has at least 10 different words for “locust” which explains the variety here.² There are at least 6 different views of this verse, with some being that this is explaining 2 different generations of locust and their stages of life. Others just suggest that these are four different types of locust. It seems best to assume that Joel uses the four terms as roughly synonymous for effect. Regardless of what one decides, the point is that there is utter devastation. No one can escape. The four waves of locust and three verbs sufficiently demonstrate the point. There is nothing left. All their crops are gone.

¹ Garrett, 313.

² Garrett, 315.

Note: “A desert locust swarm can be 460 square miles (1,200 square kilometers) in size and pack between 40 and 80 million locusts into less than half a square mile (one square kilometer). Each locust can eat its weight in plants each day, so a swarm of such size would eat 423 million pounds (192 million kilograms) of plants every day.”³

B. 5-7 — **Drunkards:**

5 — Beginning with the verb “awake” the drunkards are called to mourn — to weep and to wail. Why would he address the drunkards? How might we describe a drunkards outlook on life? One suggestion is that they would have cared the least about religion and had little concern for daily events around them.⁴ Now, they were certainly paying attention. That he speaks to the drunkards is not his attempt to rebuke them for being drunk. That the people could get drunk demonstrates that they were enjoying bounty in the land. The wine that would have touched their lips has now been cut off, and the group of people that would characteristically care least about what’s going on around them are paying attention. How could this be? Joel provides an expanded view of the answer in verse 6.

6-7 — Notice the references to “my land,” and “my vine,” and “my fig tree.” What is the significance of this? Being that it's his land, vine and fig tree, demonstrates His connection to their fertility. Raymon Dillard writes, “The locust plague represents the undoing of the paradisiacal abundance of God’s garden.”⁵ In other words, the paradise that God had provided for Israel is gone.

Furthermore, consider the imagery given in verse 6, “...it’s teeth are lions’ teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness.” Locust don’t have teeth, nor do they have fangs, so why would he compare the locust to lions? This imagery of them pictures the ferocity by which they consumed the plants.⁶

7 — This is a vivid picture of the extent of the devastation. This kind of devastation is not easy to come back from. The trees would have to divert energy from making fruit to healing. The result is years of famine in the land.

C. 8-10 — **General public:**

8 — Consider the imagery at play here. The people are called to become like a virgin woman who is about to get married. The consummation of her marriage was soon to take place, but before it happens her groom dies. What should have been a time of great celebration now becomes a time of great mourning. Similarly, the harvest would normally have been a time of celebration, but here it is mourning because of the invasion of locust.

9 — Whereas in verse 5 the cutting off was from the lips of the drunkards, the grain and drink offerings are cut off from being offered to Yahweh. Consequently, the priests mourn, because the offerings have ceased and because they now grow hungry.⁷ This will be expanded on in verses 13-14.

³ <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/bugs/locust/>

⁴ Dillard, 258.

⁵ Dillard, 258. See also Isaiah 5:1-7 and Ezekiel 15, 17.

⁶ Dillard, 259.

⁷ Stuart, 243.

10 — The extent of the damage even results in the land mourning and thus is personified and given a response to the severity of the famine. Grain, wine, and oil are gone. Their food and their means of bringing offerings to Yahweh have been cut off.

D. 11-12 — Farmers:

11 — The next response comes from the farmers and vinedressers. They are called to “be ashamed” and to “wail” because of the devastation of the land. We need to try to understand how much time and energy goes into preparing for a harvest. The hours that go into tilling the soil, planting the crops, ensuring they are getting watered as they grow. The time spent carrying for the vine so that it can produce grapes. Hours upon hours along with sweat and toil had been given over to this work with hope of a harvest. But the harvest never came.

12 — As a result of the wide spread impact of the locust invasion, Joel comments that even the joy of the people has dried up. Where they should have had great joy because of the harvest, they instead are left with nothing. No joy. No food. They have nothing.

E. 13-14 — Priests:

So far we’ve seen four groups of people addressed and now Joel adds a fifth; the elders, the drunkards, the general public, the farmers and vinedressers, and now the priests. All of them have been followed by commands. In some cases there is one imperative, and in others there are several. What makes this section unique is that there are 5 imperatives for the priests in verse 13 alone, 9 if you include verse 14. I think Joel is increasing the intensity of the peoples response with this. He is calling everyone to wail and to mourn, but now he is directing the priests to lead the people in preparing the people to lament.

13 — This verse focuses in on their need to lament and wail as the others were called. However, there is greater intensity. Now they are to “Go in, pass the night in sackcloth.” You can feel the urgency behind his statement. At this point in their national history, having experienced such a significant devastation from the locust, they were on the precipice of national disaster that made the locus plague seem like bb guns compared to the atomic reality of “The Day of the LORD.”

14 — Their lamenting and wailing has now escalated to the point that every person, old and young are called to the house of Yahweh to cry out and weep. This was to be a time of fasting and lamenting.

III. Summary — The invasion of locust necessitates a response from the people. Their land is completely devastated which has caused great mourning and weeping. Though at first the mourning is because of their loss of wine, it turns into repentance to God. This means they recognize the Divine hand of God in what would appear as simply a “natural cause.” In God’s universe, there is no “natural cause” that does not take place without being part of His perfect will and according to His sovereign plan.

IV. Application

- A. Consider the elders, drunkards, farmers and vinedressers, the priests, and the general public. Before the locust plague came, did they assume that life was going to go on as usual? Did they assume that they would continue to enjoy the fruit of the land?
- B. What does this section teach us about the natural and character of God?
- C. What’s our hope?