

Joel 1:13-20
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

A. **2-4 — Elders:**

B. **5-7 — Drunkards:**

C. **8-10 — General public:**

D. **11-12 — Farmers:**

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 locust 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. 15-20 — Lamentation

A. 15-16 — More than just a locust plague

15 — All the mourning and all the lamenting over the locust plague did not compare to the mourning and lamenting that would come on the Day of the Lord. This Day would be unlike any other. Many call the locust plague a "harbinger" for the Day of the Lord. In other words, the locust plague, as devastating as it was, is actually pointing ahead to something much worse. Consequently, the locust plague is connected to the Day because of its role in announcing the consummation of the Day in the eschaton.

What is the impact of knowing that this Day is coming soon?

16 — Joel uses a rhetorical question in this verse, what is his point? The devastating impact of the locust plague was clear to all people, it couldn't be missed. In the same way, it would seem that we need to make sure we don't miss the connection between the locust plague and the coming judgment on the Day of the Lord.

What are the implications of there being no joy or gladness in the house of God? Because the locust plague had eliminated their food they had no means of bringing offerings before the house of God. Consequently, joy and gladness ceased because of this. Not only did this mean that the people could not bring offerings, but the priests who depended on those offerings would have nothing eat.

B. 17-18 — The extent of the devastation

17 — The locust invasion itself was devastating, but now it seems as though there is also a famine in the land. The locust plague might be connected to the famine in these verses. McComiskey writes this... *“Defoliation also has the effect of lowering the water table, increasing the dryness of the soil, and withering any vegetation for grazing that may have survived the locust.”*

One of the difficulties in verse 17 is the translation of the first line. It reads “The seed shrivels under the clods.” Though most translations have a footnote saying something to the effect of, “The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain,” I think its wisest for us to simply assume this basic translation. The difficulty is that three of the four words in this verse only occur once in the Hebrew Bible.

As a result of the devastation in the land, the storehouses and granaries have been torn down. There no longer is a need for them — they are desolate.

18 — There seems to be a natural progression from verse 17 to 18. 17 explains the absence of food, and verse 18 provides the animals response to its absence. The lack of food in the pasture for them to eat is directly correlated to the seeds that have withered as a result of the drought, which have not sprouted into grass for the animals to eat.

The animals depended on God's daily provision (Psalm 104:10-18). With all of those resources gone their response is to groan. In one sense it can be said that the animals themselves are lamenting over the disaster.¹ They are turning to God to come and restore His land. They are doing what the people should also be doing.

The phrase, “even the flocks of sheep suffer,” demonstrates that the animals that eat closer to the ground and are more suitable to survive in famine are also suffering.²

¹ McComiskey, 268.

² Garrett, 330.

C. 19-20 — Personal lamentation

19 — The priests and the people have cried out to Yahweh. The animals have groaned. Now, the prophet himself is lamenting. There is only one person to call to in times of difficulty, and Joel makes it clear that it is Yahweh and no other god.

The picture of a flame devouring and burning everything can be taken as a metaphor. It is possible that after the locust plague and the famine a fire began to burn as a result of the dry climate. However, it seems more likely that the point is that this flame represents the locust and the famine. How might you describe a forest after a forest fire?

20 — Once again we get a picture of the animals also seeking Yahweh. Because of the severe disaster they don't have water or food and so they look to their provider for help. The word "devoured" is the same word as "eaten" in verse 4. In this way the fire has consumed just like the locust has — once again, that may be because the fire is a metaphor for the locust invasion.³

IV. **Summary** - The locust plague has served a specific purpose; to bring both people and animal to Yahweh — to cry out to Him as the sole provider of all that they have. There was no specific sin to repent of, but they needed to have a repentant disposition and a clear understanding of who their deliverer is.

V. Application

- A. What does this section teach us about the natural and character of God?
- B. Why do "natural" disasters happen today? For Israel, this could be connected to the covenant curses (Deut 28:22-24, 38). However, when we see disasters take place today are we to consider them as acts of God's judgment?
- C. Have there been times in your life when you don't know why God is allowing something to happen?

³ McComiskey says that the locust plague moving through the fields and forests may have sounded like the onrush of a fire. The crackling and popping sounds we usually hear from a fire may have sounded just like a locust swarm devouring everything in sight. The beating of their wings may have created the sound and feel of the power of a flame as it rushes onto the next thing to burn. See 268.