

**Joel 2:1-11**  
**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. 1B<sup>2</sup>/2A - Yahweh Relents/Judgment on Nations (2:18-20)
- E. 1A<sup>2</sup>/2B - Yahweh Restores/Grace: Locust plague reversed (2:21-27)
- F. 2B<sup>2</sup> - Grace: The Spirit is promised (2:28-32)
- G. 2A<sup>2</sup> - Judgment on the Nations (3:1-21)

**II. 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 (Isaiah 6:4-5).

**III.1-11 — The Day of the Lord**

**A. 1-2 — A day like no other**

**1** — The similarity between chapter 1 and 2 is striking. In chapter 1:1 the elders are told, “Hear this you elders, give ear, all inhabitants of the land.” In 2:1 we see “Blow a trumpet in Zion, sound an alarm on my holy mountain!” In chapter 1 they are to listen to the locust event, but in chapter 2 they are to take action and prepare the people for the oncoming army. The blowing of the trumpet is their means of preparing for battle (Hosea 8:1), and we will see that it is also a means of calling a solemn assembly (2:15).

Because of what’s coming the people will “tremble.” What would cause a people to take such action and to respond in fear? The Day of the Lord.

Once again the Day of the Lord is framed in temporal language. It’s not an event that has already happened, per say, but it is something that is imminent — it could come any minute. If it was something so distant there would be no need to blow the trumpet or to sound the alarm. Similarly, there would be no need to run to the temple and cry out to God if it’s coming was so far in the future that there was no need to make changes in the present.

**2** — What will this day look like? It will be a day unlike any other that has been in all of history. Similar to 1:2, Joel is describing this event like something that has not taken place in all the generations that have been and all the generations to come.

The darkness and gloom are typical descriptions of the Day of the Lord (Isaiah 5:30; Jeremiah 13:16; Amos 5:18-20; 8:9; Zephaniah 1:15).

Some translations have, “As the dawn is spread upon the mountains” instead of “like blackness there is spread upon the mountains.” Those who translate “dawn” as “darkness” have emended the text. Though “dawn” seems out of place in the context, it was in the morning that armies would typically come.

Additionally, just as the dawn spread out on the mountains, so too this army would cover them.

## **B. 3-9 — A description of the army**

**3** — We've seen the imagery of the fire already. In 1:19-20 we find that a fire has devoured everything in its path. In that case we determined it best to take it as a metaphor of the locust invasion. Just like a forest fire leaves nothing but stumps and ashes, so this army destroys the landscape. Armies would often burn the fields and crops of land they were seeking to conquer.<sup>1</sup> Where there once was lush edenic gardens, now there is just desolate land. This is another instance of uncreation.

**4** — Joel begins to elaborate on the appearance of the army. Why would Joel compare them to horses, and in what way do they carry the appearance of horses? A horse is powerful with great stamina. A war horse is accustomed to battle, and fearless of men. Garrett adds this, "Thus the foe has the 'appearance' of horses in the sense that they unnerve the opposition in the same way that foot soldiers react when they see a cavalry charge."<sup>2</sup> Consider the army of Rohan charging the orc army. Even the orcs who seemed to be fearless showed signs of fear as the calvary rushed upon them and trampled them.

**5** — There are three thoughts expressed here about their appearance. First, we see that they make the sound of rumbling chariots as they cross the mountains. Second, like the crackling of a fire they devour the stubble. Third, they are described as a powerful army ready for battle. As is shown in verse 2, they cover the ground with blackness in their multitudes. But they are powerful in more than just numbers, they are powerful as soldiers marching to the orders of Yahweh.

Joel is engaging our minds in many ways throughout this section. We've seen a picture of what the scene might look like, but we are also hearing the sounds of what the army would sound like.

**6** — The army of the Day of the Lord will have a powerful affect on the people. Upon seeing this massive, intimidating, and dark army, people will be in anguish and will grow pale in fear. There isn't some warrior who will stand up against this army as one who is fearless. The point is that there is no one, no matter how brave, that will not turn pale at the sight of them. They will incite fear in the hearts of all men, even the bravest.

**7** — They are fearless at the presence of danger. They risk their lives by charging ahead and scaling walls without consideration of the consequences. They don't turn back or quiver in fear. They are resolute in their missions and purpose.

**8** — They don't get in one another's way. They operate in unity and with structure. Meaning, they are marching under the leadership of another. They are being directed and organized and are able to press forward without hinderance. They are unaffected by the attack from weapons.

**9** — Since fear is not an issue for them they are able to jump into the battle, overwhelm the city and all the houses because they are not concerned about dying. They don't care about their lives, but are driven by a purpose to destroy. This army is inhuman in its character. They function under the power and

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<sup>1</sup> Garrett, 337.

<sup>2</sup> Garrett, 338.

protection of a greater One who is directing them to bring destruction on those who have rejected Yahweh.

Additionally, this army has now penetrated the homes of the people. Like a thief, they have entered the windows. This may imply that the soldiers on the walls have died and there is none left to defend the citizens of the city.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, there is no place to hide.

### **Is this a locust army or a human army?**

1. In the Hebrew language the word translated “like” can be used to describe what something is, rather than just what something is like. For example, Joel 1:15, “For the day of the LORD is near, and *as* destruction from the Almighty it comes.” The term “as” is the same term “like” in these verses. In the case of 1:15, the DOL is destruction from the Almighty, not just something that is like destruction from the Almighty in the sense of a simile.
2. There is no question that Joel wants us to see both images of a human army and a locust invasion. Garrett writes this, “It is as if we see the locust of chap. 1 ‘morphing’ into soldiers and calvary before our eyes.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, there is a lot of intentional overlap between the imagery of both.
3. The locusts did actually come, this army was near but never arrives (2:20)
4. Furthermore, locust would not come from the North, but human armies used by Yahweh against his people would often come from the North (Jer 1:14-15; Ezek 26:7).<sup>5</sup>

### **C. 10-11 — Who can endure it?**

**10** — This army doesn’t just impact humans it causes even the earth and the heavens to tremble. I don’t think that Joel wants to imply that this army caused the sun and moon to darken and the stars to withhold their shining. It seems better to understand that this is an aspect of the Day of the Lord. This verse could be summarized as “The world has come to an end.”<sup>6</sup> All that was certain has been taken away. The shining of the sun, moon, and stars has been removed. Just like the locust plague has taken away everything that the people were living on and were counting on in the harvest, so it is here. We expect that the sun, moon, and stars will continue to shine as if life will always go on as we know it. But the reality is that nothing is for certain.

**11** — Our minds are confirmed, as we read this last verse, that Yahweh is leading His army. The army that would cause great fear to the people is lead by Yahweh Himself.

The rhetorical question could not be more fitting. Since all the people’s faces grow pale and even the earth and the heavens tremble, it would be right to conclude that no one can endure this great and mighty day.

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<sup>3</sup> Garrett, 341-342.

<sup>4</sup> Garrett, 339.

<sup>5</sup> Chisholm, 58.

<sup>6</sup> Garrett, 342.

IV. **Summary** — The locust plague in chapter 1 has provided a taste of what is to come. Using locust-like metaphors, Joel points to an even greater army that should strike fear in the hearts of all who hear of it. This army is unstoppable and is going to accomplish the purpose that its commander has intended — Yahweh is at the head directing it where it should go, bringing judgment on the people.

V. **Application** —

- A. **Consider the last line, “For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?”  
What should be our response to this?**
- B. **What effect should the imminency of the Day of the Lord have on us?**
- C. **What do we learn about the character of God?**