

Joel 2:12-17
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. **Summary** — We can't forget where we have come from. In chapter 1 we saw the locust invasion swarming, devouring, and destroying everything in sight. The people were driven to mourning and despair as they watched all that they depended on burn up in front of their eyes. As if Joel was standing in the middle of a locust swarm, with locust buzzing around his head, he described the great and powerful army of the Day of the Lord.

This army was an army like no other. An army that reminded us of the Orc army in Lord of the Rings — so vast, so dark, and seemingly endless. The army in the Day of the Lord was different, though. This was an army sent by Yahweh for His divine and glorious purposes. This army was invincible in all that it did, and it was fearless in pursuing God's purpose and plan. There was no where for anyone to escape and the only response one could make to this day was to say, "Who can endure it?" For no one could.

III. 2:12-17 — Return to Yahweh

A. 12-13a — Yahweh Offers a Way

12 — Yahweh speaks by explaining that there is no better time to come in repentance than now. The nature of the Day of the Lord is that it is imminent. This is just as true for Israel in the days of Joel as it is for us today. The consummation of the Day of the Lord is approaching us.

What kind of repentance is Yahweh calling them too?

- 1. Directed toward Yahweh, "return to me" — For a people that is living in a land of pagan idolatry with gods everywhere, it is important for them to admit that there is only one they should be returning to.
- 2. With all their heart — This is what Moses called them to do from the beginning (Deut 6:4-9). They need to come with complete devotion to God.
- 3. With fasting, weeping, and mourning — Though these were external demonstrations of repentance, they were a result of internal repentance.
- 4. Repentance from the heart — What is the difference between superficial repentance and repentance from the heart?

How is this kind of repentance possible?

B. 13b-14 — Repentance is possible because of the character of God

1. **13b** — Now for the second time Israel is called to return to the Lord. As we've already seen this is directed toward Yahweh versus any other god of the land (especially Baal). The phrase "the LORD *your* God" tells us that Joel has the covenant in mind,¹ and this is the God they made that covenant with.

What keeps people from turning to God in repentance?

2. 13c — Why Return? Because of the character of God. He is...

- a) Gracious and merciful - This is often the way that God is described (Ps. 86:15; 103:8).
- b) Slow to anger - literally, long of nostrils.
- c) Abounding in steadfast love - The term "steadfast love" is the term *hesed*, referring to covenant keeping love.
- d) Relents over disaster - Yahweh is not a vengeful God who is just looking for an opportunity to destroy or punish people. He isn't haphazardly pouring out his wrath on people. Yahweh is not capricious and heartless toward those whom He punishes. This tells us much about His character.

In summary, all of these things communicate that *"they aren't dealing with just any God, but with Yahweh, whose very name has always been associated with his compassion and willingness in response to human contrition (e.g., Jonah 4:2), to forestall the harm he would otherwise have brought."*²

3. **14** — **Does Joel promise that if they will repent God will relent from disaster?** There is an important truth for us to grapple with here; there is no assumption that repentance necessitates God relenting of disaster. That means that we cannot force God to respond the way we wish through a formula. He is completely free to have mercy on those he wants to have mercy, and He is just as free to bring judgment despite an act of contrition.

The Priests were called to mourn in 1:13 because they could not bring offerings to God. A sign of God's blessing and reversal of judgment would be for them to have offerings to bring to the house of God.³ Once again, we see this is the "LORD *your* God."

C. 15-17 — A Necessary Response

1. **15** — When we heard the sound of the trumpet blast in 2:1 it was to warn the people that an army was approaching. Israel was never told to call out the troops because it would have been pointless against the invaders. So they were called to tremble before them. Now Joel uses the trumpet blast again, this time to call the people to respond in repentance.

¹ Chisholm, 59.

² Stuart, 252.

³ Garrett, 347.

In staccato fashion, Joel lays out the imperatives for them to follow. This string of imperatives (Blow, consecrate, call, gather, consecrate, assemble, and gather) conveys intensity and the serious nature of what's at stake. It's as if they were saying, "Stop everything! Waste no time! Do this!"⁴ The imminence of the Day of the Lord and the open door of repentance that Yahweh was offering produced an intense response to embrace the mercy and grace of their covenant keeping God.

2. **16** — Joel introduces a merismus, which is when two antithetical parts refer to the whole. Elders and nursing infants are the antithetical parts, while the point is that every person of all ages needs to be present at this assembly.⁵ Even the groom and bride are called out of their wedding chamber⁶ to attend this assembly. All of this demonstrates how serious they are taking the call to return and repent.
3. **17** — The priests are called to weep between the vestibule and the altar, but what does this mean? McComiskey says that this "was essentially a mediatorial position, between the altar where sacrifice was made and the dwelling of God."⁷

The content of their prayer is that God would spare them and protect His own reputation. If Judah was destroyed, the nations would be questioning the presence of God.⁸

IV. Application —

- A. Though we are not facing the same army that Judah was, the ultimate consummation of the Day of the Lord is still before us. What should be our response to that day?
- B. In what ways does the character of God on display in this passage encourage you?
- C. When we walk with others who need to seek repentance, what do we learn from this passage about repentance that could inform our conversation with them?

⁴ Stuart, 253.

⁵ An example is Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

⁶ The "room" and "chamber" are referring to the same room since this is a synonymous parallel.

⁷ Dillard, 283.

⁸ There is some discrepancy over the translation "a byword among the nations." Some translate it, "reproach, that the nations should rule over them." Both options could work, however, the first seems to fit the context best.