

“Lament & Repent” (Joel 2:1-17)

1. Judgment Looms (1-11)

- a. Sound the Alarm (1)
 - i. Still reeling from the plague, God warns that it is about to get worse!
 - ii. For Judgment is coming and it is “at hand”
- b. An Ominous Army (2)
 - i. Gloom and darkness looms.
 - ii. Unprecedented Peril.
- c. An All-consuming Army (3-6)
 - i. They will consume all in their path. As if the locusts were not enough...
 - ii. Some (rather convincingly) have proposed that the whole of Joel’s judgment descriptions are indicative of a literal invading nation. Furthermore, in *Revelation’s* imagery, John’s vision includes mention of locusts who do not eat the vegetation but do their damage directly to unrepentant mankind (Rev. 9:3-4, 10).
 - iii. This army is not unlike the locusts who devoured the entirety of crops in that they come as an ominous cloud covering the land and consuming all that was good leaving only desolation and causing anguish.
 - iv. You must best choose which is the metaphor. For if taken in a wooden literal sense, warning would become parody. The metaphors have sharp teeth so to speak. E.g. Consider **Further Study**: Invaders
- d. An Undeterred Army (7-9)
 - i. Utterly disciplined are the agents of the Covenant LORD (CL). When God deploys an agency, such cannot be thwarted or overcome.
 - ii. They will penetrate the superficial walls of insulation and reach their determined objective.
 - iii. O. Palmer Robertson articulated: “Sometimes it appears that the forces of evil march onwards and upwards unhindered. Such circumstances can be perplexing to the people of God. But so long as the wicked serve the Lord’s purposes, they will remain invincible even in the face of God’s own people.”¹ We can often trace certain “plagues” with evil arbitrators and their policies, but isn’t even such an agency of divine judgment? Blessed is the nation whose God is LORD ... Ps. 33:12-19.
- e. An Invincible Agency (10)
 - i. Their indestructibility is obviously not due to their innate power but their almighty Commander.
 - ii. These described theophanies correlate to others Israel experienced. “The language here is reminiscent especially of various theophany texts (Judg. 5:4–5; Ps. 18:7–15; 68:8; 97:2–5) and also of other day of the Lord passages (Is. 13:10, 13).”² Most memorably is that manifestation (theophany) of Mount Sinai accompanying the giving of the Covenant (cf. Exod. 19:16-20). Here they accompany the judgment for its blatant/continued violation.
- f. The Immutable Arm (11)
 - i. God is merely executing “His word.” He promised such would occur when they *would* disobey.
 - ii. But Good News to us – He is immutable in all attributes. As well as being immutably righteous and faithful – He is also immutably merciful, thus calling for repentance →

¹ Robertson, O. P. (1995). *Prophet of the Coming Day of the Lord: The Message of Joel* (p. 47). Evangelical Press.

² Ogilvie, L. J., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1990). *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Vol. 22, p. 239). Thomas Nelson Inc.

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2. Call to Repentance (12-17)

a. “Rend Your Hearts” (12-13)

- i. God is not interested in ritual rites but transforming resolve. It was cultural practice to tear ones garments in lament.
- ii. God wants us to cut away our hearts from the desires of the world/flesh not just rip our garments apart in sorrow for our losses. Robertson wrote of Judas’ vs Peter’s remorse: “True repentance always must involve a turning upwards towards God rather than inwards towards oneself. After his betrayal of Christ Judas was ‘seized with remorse’ for his crime. But he destroyed himself because he turned in upon himself rather than outwards towards the Christ he had betrayed (Matt. 27:3–5).”³
- iii. Repentance is not a ‘one and done’ thing. It is a continual circumcision of the heart from this selfish world and even our selfish flesh. Such is why the Prophets continually called for a “return” to the LORD e.g. Jer. 24:7; Lam. 3:40; Hos. 6:1; Neh. 1:9; Zech. 1:3.
- iv. Furthermore, see Mat. 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:38 re: John, Jesus, & Peter preaching repentance.

b. “Who knows”? (14)

- i. Only the CL knows what will happen but you can know that if you repent, He will redeem (Read Mat. 11:20-30).
- ii. Joel’s prophesy describes the blessing as being afforded the opportunity to give the CL an offering. He supplies the prescribed offering. They did not have even the grain for offering the most affordable sacrifices, but He will provide Himself a sacrifice (as Abraham promised Isaac). And that sacrifice was Jesus’ holy body on the Cross. We come to God and can only offer true worship in spirit and in truth through Christ.
- iii. The remedy to our plight is repentance not human contrived worship (Jn. 4:23). God did not promise anything but demonstrated His mercy on Nineveh (Jonah 3:9-10).
- iv. Who knows? The thief didn’t know but expressed repentance and found out God could enact mercy because of Jesus’ great sacrifice. “At Golgotha, darkness covered the earth because of the Lord’s righteous judgements on sin. Yet his love for rebellious sinners could not have been made more clear (sic) than when the freshly crucified Son of God assured the thief who repented: ‘Today you will be with me in paradise’ (Luke 23:43).”⁴
- v. True revival sees repentance before praise. We cannot worship God in praise until we have been redeemed after our repentance (cf. Col. 2:12). →
- vi. And for this we were born and born again viz. to worship Him and enjoy Him forever.

c. Call for Contrition (15-17)

- i. V. 15. The Judgment alarm began with the call to blow the trumpet alert v. 1 and now with the call for repentance the trumpet sound of worship is blown v. 15.
- ii. This call was not a call to arms because there is no defense against the LORD’s army, whom or whatever the agency is. Only a call to worship could save them and something indispensable to worship had been forsaken.

³ Robertson, O. P. (1995). *Prophet of the Coming Day of the Lord: The Message of Joel* (p. 52). Evangelical Press.

⁴ Robertson, O. P. (1995). *Prophet of the Coming Day of the Lord: The Message of Joel* (p. 53). Evangelical Press.

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- iii. V. 16. As mentioned, redemption comes prior to praise (e.g. Israel redeemed and then given the Law in order to worship God in truth). But the necessary initial repentance is the first act of worship. God called His people – of whom had been rescued and to whom had been given His revelation – to return. How can we expect His Kingdom to come to earth as it is in heaven when the very people He commissioned to usher in the Kingdom have become hardened and unrepentant?
- iv. In the call to all His called out peoples, He mentions the newlywed couple and their consummation chamber. They are to come out from it in order to heed the trumpets alert to worship. Two possible meanings e.g. such newlyweds were exempt from public engagements yet this was critical. Another meaning could be to how Israel played the wife to Pagan gods and was therefore told to leave such a union of infidelity. As one commentator wrote, “*Room and chamber* are virtual synonyms for a nuptial tent within which the newly married couple were to consummate their marriage. The tent in which Absalom met David’s concubines may be an illustration of this (2 Sam. 16:22).”^{18 5}
- v. V. 17. The priests are instructed to lament in the sanctuary and petition for the people. And they are instructed to lament that the name of the LORD was a matter of most importance. How sad for God’s heritage to be a reproach to the nations who ruled over them with disdain for their God who had seemingly abandoned them. →
- vi. How sad it is to witness the decline of the Church who has become a reproach to society. They hold us and, by virtue, our God in contempt because we have so compromised repentance and failed to worship in spirit and truth.
- vii. God calls us to contrition. 2 Cor. 7:10 distinguishes Godly vs worldly repentance. A large portion of our worship is repenting. If we are worshiping in spirit and truth then we are being honest about our sins.

¹⁸ See W. R. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (1903), pp. 167–170, 291.

⁵ Hubbard, D. A. (1989). [*Joel and Amos: an Introduction and Commentary*](#) (Vol. 25, p. 63). InterVarsity Press.

Further Study:

Invaders

Surely these are not more locusts—there is nothing left for them to eat. This is a new threat and a new army. It is not insects but human warriors, and their target is not wheat, barley, or grapes so much as it is the city itself.

Many scholars maintain that these verses continue the account of the locust plague, but, as we shall see, evidence is overwhelmingly against this view. Chapter 1 consistently looks to the recent past, but 2:1–11 consistently looks to the future.¹ Attempts to account for this shift from the viewpoint of a “locust plague” interpretation of 2:1–11 are unsuccessful. J. L. Crenshaw, for example, contends that chap. 1 describes a recent locust attack but that 2:1–11 is a liturgical lament for such disasters in the *future*.² It is scarcely reasonable, however, to imagine that Israel had in its liturgical arsenal some kind of “lamentation for future locust plagues.” Both grammar and content demand that a significant shift has taken place: the prophet is looking ahead now, and he sees a human army on the horizon.⁶

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Worship is too often seen as merely an accompaniment of praise. One of my pet peeves is that we label music ministers “worship leaders.” Worship, in a simple definition, is anything we do appropriately in response to our Redeemer. Trusting God is worship, repenting is worship, confessing is worship, sacrifice and service is worship, studying and meditating on the Word is worship, and assembling, praying, proclaiming, and praising our awesome God is worship. And there are times, for all peoples of God, to return to Him in contrition so that they will be able to worship Him and thus magnify Him among the nations. Lately, there has been significant talk and experience of revival in our media. I can’t say how much is sensational and how much is of the Spirit but I can say the following: If there is any real revival to take place, it must be the prescribed response to God’s Word. The Spirit never acts apart from the Word (Jn. 16:13) but uses it to convict us of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn. 16:8–11) drawing us to the Word made flesh. Joel via the Spirit gave such a word to Israel viz. judgment looms; so repent and magnify the LORD.

¹ Many scholars have pointed out the preponderance of perfect forms in chap. 1 in contrast to the shift to the imperfect in chap. 2.

² J. L. Crenshaw, *Joel* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 129–30. Crenshaw correctly asserts: “That the two accounts cannot refer to a single locust attack is obvious from the tenses of the verbs, completed action in chapter one and future events in chapter two.” He then suggests that the two accounts are liturgical: “These two versions of accomplished and imminent disaster provide distinct circumstances for penitential action.” It is not clear to me whether Crenshaw believes that the liturgy of 2:1–11 originally existed separately from chap. 1 (he states that although it “possesses its own integrity, it still shares some expressions with what goes before”). Taken as a separate liturgy, no one would imagine that 2:1–11 had anything to do with locusts (but Crenshaw consistently interprets 2:1–11 as a locust plague, pp. 116–28). Be that as it may, Joel 1 prophetically calls the people to lament, but it is not itself a liturgy. Joel 2:1–11 is a cry of alarm over the coming desolation, but it too is no liturgy. Contrast the psalms of lamentation (e.g., Pss 44; 74), which are true liturgies.

⁶ Garrett, D. A. (1997). *Hosea, Joel* (Vol. 19A, pp. 333–334). Broadman & Holman Publishers.