

# (Joel) the Day of the Lord Brings Judah Low

by David Guzik

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*The book of Joel is a call to repentance and a warning of the Day of the Lord, a time of judgment and destruction, but also a promise of God's mercy.*

**Duration:** 50:22

**Scripture:** Joel 1:1-4, Joel 1:17, Joel 2:13, Matthew 6:33, Romans 2:4

**Topics:** "Divine Judgment", "Repentance Urgency"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the prophecy of Joel and the judgment that had come upon Judah in the form of a plague of locusts. He addresses the common question of why God allows calamities to happen and emphasizes the urgency of repentance. The preacher describes the people's reaction to the impending judgment, with faces drained of color and a sense of fear and urgency. He highlights the power and discipline of an army that is led by God, and warns that the day of the Lord is coming, a day of darkness and gloominess.

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## Transcript

Thank you that your word has something to say to us tonight. And even though the Prophet Joel spoke these words thousands of years ago, it wasn't he that spoke them, Lord. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit in every word, in every phrase.

Because this is your eternal word, which stands forever, we know that it will speak to us tonight. Thank you for the eternal relevance of your word. Make a lasting impact on us through it tonight, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's open up our Bibles to the book of the Prophet Joel, chapter one. Joel, chapter one.

As we begin tonight, we're going to spend two weeks in the Prophet Joel. Tonight, we'll go through the first chapter and part of chapter two. And next week, we'll conclude it.

Let's begin just by getting a running start, taking a look at Joel, chapter one, verse one. The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel. Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land.

Has anything like this happened in your days or even in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it. Let your children tell their children and their children another generation. What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten.

What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten. And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten. The Prophet Joel is one of the more obscure prophets among the minor prophets in the Old Testament.

Not obscure for what he said, because one of the most precious promises from the Old Testament prophets is quoted in the New Testament from the book of Joel, chapter two, in the book of Acts that Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost, and we'll deal with that in depth next week. But Joel is a bit obscure because we don't know much about him. We surmise that he spoke to the southern kingdom of Judah because that's the only area that he mentions.

He makes no mention at all of the northern kingdom. We also surmise that he ministered during a time when the royal throne, the institution of the monarchy in Judah was weak. He makes absolutely no mention of the king.

His focus is on the priesthood and his focus is on the people. It's hard to pin down the exact date of Joel's ministry, and scholars go back and forth and suggest this date or that date or the other kind of guesswork, but many scholars, and I'll put myself in agreement with these scholars, date this book to about the year 835 years before the time of Jesus Christ. Now, of course, this makes Joel what we call a pre-exilic prophet.

He spoke before the great exile that took away the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria and the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon. Of course, we remind ourselves that during this period in Israel's history, a civil war had divided the people of God into two nations. There was not one nation comprising 12 tribes.

Rather, you had the southern kingdom, called Judah, made up of two tribes, and then the northern kingdom of the ten northern tribes. Other prophets that ministered in this approximate period were Obadiah and Jonah and Hosea. They also ministered before the exile, as did Isaiah and Micah.

But Joel is one of the earlier prophets. Only Obadiah seems to have ministered earlier than him. But if we are accurate in dating Joel about the year 835 BC, it was a time of turmoil and transition in the southern kingdom of Judah.

It was the very end of the reign of the queen of Judah. Oh, did you know that the southern kingdom of Judah had a queen for a period of time? Her name was Athaliah. You see, she came to power in a curious way.

She came to power when her son, who was the king of Judah, her son, his name was Ahaziah, he was killed in battle after only reigning a year over Judah. And when he was killed in battle, after only a year of reigning, his mother, through brutality and intrigue, seized the throne for herself. And for six years, there was no king in Judah, but a queen, this woman named Athaliah.

Well, as you would suppose, she was a wicked, wicked woman. She killed all of her son's heirs. Her own relatives, her own grandchildren.

She wiped them out, except for one that she missed, because his nurse, or you would call him his babysitter, hid him and then took him for refuge into the temple. And that little boy named Joash grew up in the temple. Now, this one little boy who escaped grew up for six years.

And when he was seven years old in the temple, the high priest at that time, a man named Jehodiah, overthrew this wicked king, Athaliah. And she came with a show of force and with the army of Judah behind him. They violently overthrew her and killed her.

And he established the seven-year-old boy, Joash, as king over the nation of Judah at that time. You should know that during her six years as queen over Judah, Athaliah reigned wickedly. She was the granddaughter of the evil king Omri of Israel.

Now, if you want to know how bad Omri was, his son was Ahab, one of the worst, worst kings of Israel. So Athaliah was either the daughter of Ahab or his niece, because she was the granddaughter of Ahab's father. You see, Athaliah raised her own son Ahaziah in the wicked pattern of Ahab.

The Bible even tells us in 2 Chronicles 22 that she brought in the counselors to Ahab to be the counselors to her son Ahaziah. But when Ahaziah was killed in battle and she seized power, she set her other sons to evil, even desecrating the temple and its sacred things. Now, if it's true and if we're accurate in thinking that Joel prophesied at the end of this wicked woman's reign and at the beginning of the reign of the godly king Joash, even though he was only a seven-year-old boy, then so much of this book makes sense with the judgment that's pronounced upon Judah.

If you take a look here, it says, verse 4, with the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. With the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten. With the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.

Joel is not announcing a coming judgment of the Lord. Now, that's how most of the prophets work, don't they? They say, judgment's coming, you better repent. Now, Joel will do that later on.

But for right now, you know what Joel says? He says, look around you people. I'm not saying judgment is coming. I'm saying it's here.

Look around because a horrible swarm of locusts had invaded the land of Judah and it had laid it desolate. Now, we have no other historical record in the Old Testament, for example, in the book of 1 Kings or 2 Kings or 1 Chronicles or 2 Chronicles of this terrible plague of locusts. But we are familiar from history that this area of the world, every once in a while, every few generations, has a horrible plague of locusts that comes upon it.

The last one that we know of historically that came upon the region of Palestine or Judea in that area was in 1915. A devastating plague of locusts covered what is today modern day Israel and Syria. The first swarms came in the month of March and they came in clouds so thick that they blocked out the sun.

Now, the female locusts among the group immediately went down to the ground and began to lay eggs. And you know how many eggs a female locust of this type lays at a time? A hundred eggs at a time. And they said that in one square yard, the eggs were so dense that there were as many as 65,000 to 75,000 eggs laid in every square yard.

And after a few weeks, those eggs hatched. And there were even more locusts everywhere. Now, when that first plague of locusts came, that was just the beginning.

Because the real trouble started when the babies were born. Because those little baby locusts, when they first come out, like many insects, they're not the full grown animal. What they are, are little ants.

They look like little ants. And they sort of march along and eat everything in their sight. Everything.

They can't fly. And they sort of get along like hopping. They sort of hop along like fleas.

And they can march along 400 to 600 feet a day. And they destroy everything in their path. After two more stages of molting, they become adults who can fly.

And then the devastation continues. And it cycles through all again. It's a horrible plague.

And a terrible time like this must have come upon the nation of Judah. And Joel stands up and he says, Wake up, people! This isn't business as usual. This is something that you're going to be able to tell your children about.

That the times were so remarkably difficult that parents would tell their children, Hey, I lived through that plague of locusts. I saw it. And the children would be amazed because this kind of thing only comes along.

Every few generations, judgment had come upon Judah in this terrible plague. Every time something terrible happens, people ask questions, don't they? Why did that earthquake hit down in El Salvador and those people were killed? Why did this calamity happen here? That calamity there? God, where are you? What are you doing? It seems so unjust, God. Well, the prophet Joel will address those questions in the whole tenor and words of his prophecy.

Let's continue on here. Verse five. He says, Awake, you drunkards, and weep and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it's been cut off from your mouth.

For a nation has come up against my land, strong and without number. His teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a fierce lion. He has laid waste my vine and ruined my fig tree.

He has stripped it bare and thrown it away. Its branches are made white. You see what Joel says to the drunkards? He goes, Well, you guys better mourn because all the grapes are gone.

There's going to be no vintage from Israel in this year. Nothing with that year on the bottle, so to speak. Everything's gone.

The devastation that the locusts have caused. It's like a mighty nation has descended upon Judah and stripped away everything. I think it's interesting, though, if you look at verse seven.

Look at how God puts this. He has laid waste. Now, he, of course, is speaking of the swarm of locusts.

He's personifying it. He's saying he has laid waste my vine and ruined my fig tree. God looks over his and goes, You know what? They think it's theirs, but that's my vine.

That's my fig tree. Maybe that's something to remind ourselves of. When natural calamity comes, is that the earth belongs to the Lord.

He could do with it as he pleases. It's his vine. It's his fig tree.

It's his land. It's his water. It's his nation.

The earth is the Lord. Look at the mourning that comes in Judah because of the locust destruction. Verse 12, excuse me, verse eight.

Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn and minister to the Lord.

The field is wasted. The land mourns for the grain is ruined. The new wine is dried up.

The oil fails. Be ashamed, you farmers. Wail, you vine dressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished.

The vine is dried up and the fig tree has withered. The pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree. All the trees of the field are withered.

Surely joy has withered away from the sons of men. Joel tells the people of Judah that they should look at their condition and mourn with all the emotion, with all the passion of mourning of a young widow. Look at it there in verse eight.

He says, lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. He has in mind a woman who is betrothed, who's engaged. Now, in a legal sense, they were married, but they had not consummated the marriage yet.

And so she was still betrothed to her husband. The marriage had not yet been consummated, yet she was a widow because her engaged spouse, her engaged husband had died. How tragic.

And Joel says, this is how you should lament. They shouldn't receive this plague of locusts stoically with false bravado. Sometimes we're into that, aren't we? I don't know where we get it.

We get it from our upbringing. We get it from our culture. Maybe we just get it from the way we're wired.

But we think that, you know, when crisis comes and when calamities around and you feel the hand heavy upon you, it was time for the stiff upper lip, as the British would say. It's time to be stoic, to be Mr. Spock, showing no emotion one way or the other. Joel says, now is not the time for that.

Weep, wail, let it all out. I take comfort in this because Joel doesn't minimize the suffering at all. We oftentimes tell ourselves that we find a way to minimize the suffering, to tell ourselves little stories, to make it not so bad.

It's like when you go to the dentist. It's open wide. This may cause a little discomfort.

He's lying to you is what he's saying. He really means this is going to hurt and I am going to make you suffer. That's what he means.

But Joel deals with the suffering in the real way. And he says, we mourn, whatever, but let's turn back to the Lord. And he addresses every phase of society here.

Look at what he says. He says that the priests mourn, the land mourns. Be ashamed, you farmers.

Wail, you vine dressers. Surely joy has withered away. In this vivid and poetic language, the prophet Joel shows how the whole nation mourns the great destruction brought by the locusts.

He even says there that the grain and the drink offerings have been dried up. It says there in verse nine, I think it's remarkable because if we are talking about the correct historical context, and this is coming at the tail end of six years of wicked rain by Queen Athaliah, a woman who should no way should have been

leading the nation of Israel, the nation of Judah. She didn't belong there at all, but she didn't stop the temple ceremonies.

Oh, you could still go and offer a sacrifice if you had the wine to do it, which you don't now because it's all gone. You could still go and offer a grain offering on the Lord if you had the grain to do it, but you don't now. You see, she had the temple ceremonies continue even in her great rain of wickedness.

Friends, I think this reminds us of something that the only thing that could end those religious ceremonies was not the great wickedness of the queen or the wickedness of the people. The only thing that would stop the temple ceremonies was when there was nothing more to offer. You know, the devil doesn't mind religious ceremonies in and of themselves.

Sometimes people think that the devil's strategy is to eradicate religion all over the earth, not on your life. He likes religion as long as it can be divorced from real relationship with God. The devil is far more interested in corrupting true religion than in eliminating it.

Now, look at this verse 13. It gets even worse. We saw the horrible devastation of the locusts in this first half of the chapter.

If that's not bad enough, what comes on its heel? Terrible drought. Look at verse 13. Gird yourselves and lament, you priests.

Well, you who minister before the altar come lie all night in sackcloth. You minister to my God for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast.

Call a sacred assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord, your God, and cry out to the Lord. You see, Joel here calls the religious leaders of the land to lead the nation in repentance.

Judah needs to repent. Leaders, you get at it first. He tells the priest to gird yourselves for repentance.

Maybe you're familiar with the idea from other passages of scripture, what it means to gird yourself. You know, in that day, and of course, we're not there through the miracle of time travel, but you've seen the movies back then. They wear these long flowing garments, right? They wear long sort of robe kind of things.

And the problem with the long robe like that is that you can't do a lot of active work in it. And so if you're going to do a lot of active work, you got to get a belt and sort of bunch up your robe and then tie it around you. That tying around you is called girding yourself.

It means you're ready to work. You're ready for action. And what is the prophet Joel say here in verse 13? He says, gird yourselves and lament, you priests.

In other words, get ready to do the work of repentance. Prepare yourself to do it. And then he goes on in verses 13 and 14 to tell them exactly how to do it.

He begins in verse 14, consecrate a fast. Now, why would you fast in repentance? You know why it's showing God how important repentance is to you. You're making getting right with God so important to you that eating isn't important to you.

Have you ever been so obsessed with a problem or a need that just food does not interest you one bit? Your child got hurt and they're in the hospital. You're pacing the halls of the hospital there and the doctors and nurses are going in and out of the room and they speak in these hushed whispers that make you so concerned and your mind is filled with a thousand fears and thoughts. And the last thing in the world you think about is food.

You know, it's not like you're on some noble crusade to say, well, I'm not going to eat until my child's better. That's not it at all. You just don't care.

That kind of heart in agony over our sin is a mark of true repentance. Lord, I'm going to fast because food doesn't interest me nearly as much as getting right with you. Not only that, look at verse 14.

First, he says, consecrate a fast. Then he says, call the sacred assembly, call for God's people to come together and repent. And whoever has the heart to do it, let's come together and repent.

Let's pour out our hearts before God. And then he says in the next line, gather the elders, the leaders of the people should make a special point to be part of the work of repentance. And then he says, look at it there in verse 14.

Into the house of the Lord, your God come to the place where you should meet together with God. What better place is there to repent than right there in the house of the Lord? Let's come together in the house of the Lord and repent. And then I love the last line of verse 14 and cry out to the Lord.

Finally, repentance is just simply crying out to God and trusting that you will respond in mercy. God, we cry out to you. We don't look to ourselves.

We've lost all confidence in ourselves. God, our sin has made us lose every speck of confidence within us. Our only confidence, our only hope is within you.

You notice there back in verse 13. He says for the grain offering the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. When there was grain and wine to bring, the people still brought them.

Maybe they brought them just out of tradition. Maybe they brought him out of his sincere heart. But now there's no offering to bring to God.

This is how devastating the destruction has been upon the land of Judah. Verse 15. Alas, for the day for the day of the Lord is at hand.

It shall come as destruction from the almighty is not the food cut off before our eyes. Joy and gladness from the house of our God. The seed grain shrivels under the clods.

Storehouses are in shambles. Barns are broken down for the grain is withered. How the beast grown the herds of the cattle are restless because they have no pasture.

Even the flocks of sheep suffer your punishment. Oh Lord, to you I cry out for the fire has devoured the open pastures and a flame has burned all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field also cry out to you for the water brooks are dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures.

Here the judgment is not locusts coming down and bringing devastation upon the land. Here the judgment is drought. Look at it there in verse 20.

The water brooks are dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures. You know how it is in a time of drought when everything's so dry. A small fire starts and it sweeps like a wildfire throughout the countryside.

The prophet Joel after the destruction of the locusts, if that wasn't bad enough, then he can see the smoke from all the wildfires burning and how parts the ground is and the cattle and the sheep and they all suffer because of the drought. Why? Because look at it back at verse 15, because the day of the Lord is at hand. Now that phrase, the day of the Lord is something that you may be familiar with from past study of the Bible.

It's a very important phrase. And the idea behind this phrase, the day of the Lord, is that it's set off in opposition to or in contrast to the day of man. It's as if man has his day and then there's the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord is when he triumphs. It's when he reigns. It's when he exercises his will, even if it's over an unwilling man.

You see, in this sense, the day of the Lord was fulfilled when God brought this judgment upon the nation of Judah. And Joel said, this is the day of the Lord. It's the day when he's showing his strength, when he's flexing his muscles, so to speak.

It's not the day of man anymore. But in the ultimate sense, the day of the Lord is fulfilled when Jesus judges the earth and returns in glory. In a lesser sense, the time that Joel observed in the Judah experience at this time was the day of the Lord.

This is a lesser example of it. But the ultimate fulfillment is when God says, no, the day of man is over. Now it's my day.

And do you see how the devastation has come upon the land? Look at it there in verse 17, the seed shrivels. They have no pasture. The flocks of sheep suffer punishment.

The fire has devoured the open pastures. The water brooks are dried up. It's a vivid description of a devastating drought.

It affects everything in Judah. The smoke of the wildfires, you can almost smell them as Joel describes them. But if you notice here, verse 19, it's almost as if Joel is leading the priests or the people in prayer.

He says, oh, Lord, to you, I cry out. You see, in this time of drought, in this time of the plague of locusts, when this great natural disaster had come upon the nation of Judah, all they could do was cry out to God that they were powerless to fix the drought problem. You know, sometimes God puts us in circumstances that we are completely powerless to fix.

Now, I mean, completely so many of the problems in our life, we can fix them in some way or another, right? That difficult relationship that you have with somebody else, you can do something to fix it. You have some part in it. You're in a financial problem.

Well, spend less money or go out and get another job. You know, I mean, there's things you could do. You may not want to do them.

They may be unpopular solutions, but there's things you can do to fix it. What do you do to fix a plague of locusts? What do you do to fix a drought? You can't do anything, nothing. See, the only place they could do, the only place they had was to look up to heaven.

They could look no other place. Luke chapter 13, some people came to Jesus and they talked to him about a natural disaster that happened. A tower collapsed and it killed 18 people.

And they asked Jesus about this, you know, in the same sense, Jesus, why did this happen? You know, how come this earthquake, how come this tower collapsed? You know, instead of acting as if it were just an accident or blind fate or Jesus saying, wow, boy, those unlucky people. You know, Jesus used it as a wake up call for repentance. Jesus showed something very important in that example in Luke chapter 13.

He showed that the right question is not why did this disaster happen to them? That's why everybody wants to ask, isn't it? Well, why did this disaster happen? Why did the plague of locusts happen to them? Why did the drought happen to them? Why did the earthquake or the typhoon happen to them? Jesus brought it back to what the really right question is before God. The right question is, am I ready to face such a disaster in a fallen world? How do I know that the tower is not going to collapse on me? Or the plague of locusts isn't going to come upon me? Or the drought? Am I ready for it? Am I right with God? Friends, it's part and parcel of living in a fallen world. That's all there is to it.

In a fallen world, God has set into motion certain principles of cause and effect and in the natural order. And I'm not saying for one moment that God is powerless to stop those things, because he certainly is powerful to stop them as he would please. But as a normal operating course, God allows things to continue on.

And when the pressure in certain seismic plates builds up to a certain place, God oftentimes will not supernaturally say, well, I'm going to stop that. He'll allow it to continue on and the earthquake happens. It's because it's a fallen world, cursed by the sin and the rebellion of man.

So the question isn't why does this happen? The question is, are you ready for it? Is your life in a right place with God? Now, in the midst of this kind of difficult time, a lot of people would just sort of give sort of a bland word of encouragement. Don't worry, be happy. Tough times don't last.

Tough people do. Behind every cloud, there's a silver lining. Not Joel.

As we get into chapter two, you know what Joel's going to do? Look, and all this is about the present state. The plague of locusts was now. The drought was now.

You know what Joel says to these guys? You think that's bad? Wait till what's coming. Look at chapter two. Blow the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm in my holy mountain.

Let all the inhabitants of land tremble for the day of the Lord is coming. For it is at hand. Well, wait a minute.

I thought it was here. Joel says you haven't seen anything yet. It's coming.

Well, how close is it, Joel? It's at hand. How close is your hand to you? It's pretty close, isn't it? That's the idea. It's coming.

Look at it here. Verse two, a day of darkness and gloominess. A day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains.

A people come great and strong, the like of whom has never been, nor will there ever be again after them, even for many successive generations. A fire devours before them and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them and behind them a desolate wilderness.

Surely nothing shall escape them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses and like swift steeds. So they run with a noise like chariots over mountaintops.

They leap like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble like a strong people set in battle array. Joel is telling them. Yes, we've had the plague of the oldest.

Yes, we've had the drought come in our midst. But God's day is not over. We have not repented.

We have not gotten right with our God. And so more will come. And what what Joel envisions is a massive invading army coming upon the nation of Judah.

You know, the day of the Lord is a two edged sword. When we're right with God, we want the day of the Lord. We long for him to show his strength.

It's like God, show yourself strong. But when you're not right with God, the last thing you want to see is the strength of the Lord, because the strength of the Lord, you fear to work against you. And in Joel's day, Judah was not right with God.

And so the day of the Lord would be nothing but gloominess and darkness to them. He even points out there, if you notice, in verse two, he says, a people come great and strong. Now, it's hard to know from a historical context exactly which invasion Joel predicts.

You should know that a good number of commentators believe at this point that Joel was not describing an invasion of a literal army. They believe he's describing a subsequent plague of locusts, and he's calling them an army just in a symbolic sense. I agree that's possible, but I don't think that that's what Joel's talking about.

I think he's talking about a real army. And basically, he's saying to the nation of Judah, you had the plague of locusts. You had the drought.

But if you don't repent and lie to that, God's going to send something worse. He's going to send an invading army to overthrow you. And they'll leave nothing, nothing behind them that's unconquered.

But it's hard to know what invading army he means. Does he mean the Syrians? Does he mean the Egyptians? Does he mean the Babylonians? You know what? You know the reason why I think we don't know? I think we don't know because they've repented and God relented. The judgment never came.

You see, if we're talking about the historical context that I think we're talking about, at the end of Queen Athaliah's reign and at the beginning of King Joash's reign, King Joash was a godly king. And he reigned and he led the nation in national repentance. And so I believe God relented from this promised judgment.

And that's why we don't know specifically which nation God is talking about. But if they wouldn't have repented, God would have found somebody. Don't worry about that.

You know, the urgent nature of this prophecy, it says there in verse three, a fire devours before them and behind them a flame burns. If you hear that fire is coming, it gives you a sense of urgency. The urgent nature of this prophecy probably spurred Jehodiah to depose Queen Athaliah and set Joash on the throne.

I know I'm speculating a bit here, and so you can take this or leave this. But if you put yourself into the context, Queen Athaliah ruled for six years until Joash was seven years old and he was hidden away in the temple. Isn't that fascinating? The high priest raised him as a son and trained him in the ways of the Lord.

And then when he was seven years old, the high priest Jehodiah said, we're going to overthrow Queen Athaliah. Now, why did he pick them? Don't you think he would have normally waited until Joash was older? Why not wait till he's 12 or 13, or at least the age where they considered a boy becomes a man? Why the urgency to do it when he's seven years old? I'll tell you why. I think he heard the prophecy of Joel and he said, this judgment is coming.

We've got to do something and get this wicked woman off of the throne. I know that Joash is only seven years old and I would have waited longer, but we can't wait anymore. This prophecy showed him that it had to be done immediately and the nation needed to be led in repentance.

You see the urgency behind this beginning here, verse six. Before them, the people writhe in pain. All faces are drained of color.

They run like mighty men. They climb the wall like men of war. Everyone marches in formation and they do not break ranks.

They do not push one another. Everyone marches in his own column. And when they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down.

They run to and fro in the city. They climb on the wall. They climb into the houses.

They enter the windows like a thief. The earth quakes before them. The heavens tremble.

The sun and moon grow dark and the stars diminish their brightness. The Lord gives voice before his army for his camp is very great. For strong is the one who executes his word.

For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible. Who can endure it? Now, again, you see in this description of what the army does. It could be a poetic description of an army of locusts.

Or it could be the description of a fearsome and terrible army, such as the army of the Assyrians, which decades later came down upon the northern kingdom of Israel. With a chilling, poetic flair, Joel described the discipline and the effectiveness of this army. He said they do not break ranks.

Everyone marches in his own column. You see this army and they're so disciplined. They're so efficient that they go and nothing will stand in their way.

No army of Judah can defend against them. They keep ranks and they work with energy. He says that they run to and fro in the city.

Because of this, they'll bring a devastating attack upon an unrepentant Judah. Could I sort of go off on a tangent here? Now, if we consider the people of God to be like an army, you could say that based on some of the military images that Paul sprinkled through his letters. I think this passage right here shows you two ways that the people of God can be an effective army.

What are the two qualities that made this army that Joel spoke about so fearsome? Well, number one, they marched in ranks. They kept order. When the people of God keep order, when they keep ranks, they say, well, this is my position.

I'm going to march in this position and we're going to keep ranks. Well, then they're a mighty army. Then the other thing is when they have energy.

Look at it there in verse nine, they run to and fro in the city. They've run on the wall. They climb in the houses.

They enter at the windows like a thief. Well, a lazy army isn't going anywhere, is it? But the army has energy that has a desire to work, to go out there and do it. Well, then every soldier serves with energy, and that army is fearful to behold.

But you could talk all day long about the army and how disciplined and how great they are. But look at the real source of power, I should say, for this army. It's in verse 11.

It says, the Lord gives voice before his army. His camp is very great. See, as impressive as that army is, Joel doesn't want you to forget that its real power lies in that God has sent them.

They're going to be God's tool of judgment against Judah unless they repent. You get the picture here? Joel's not cheering them up with a, well, I know the plague of locusts and the drought were bad, but cheer up. No, he's saying, I know it was bad, but if we haven't repented yet, worse is going to come.

So look at it here now, verse 12. It's a dramatic call to repentance. Now, therefore, says the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning.

So rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord, your God, for he's gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. And he relents from doing harm.

Who knows if he will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God, blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children in the nursing bays. Let the bridegroom grow from his chamber and the bride from her dressing room. Let the priest who minister to the Lord weep between the porch and the altar.

Let them say, spare your people, O Lord, and do not give your heritage to reproach that the nation should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? See that dramatic call in verse 12. Now, therefore, God says, I like the therefore.

Listen, because I've warned you of this coming judgment, therefore, repent. You see, God's people should repent. Because they know it'll go badly for them if they don't.

It's not bad to say, I want to repent so that it won't go badly for me before God. Some people might think that that's a bad motivation, that you should just repent saying, well, God, even if you send me to hell, I'll

repent. That's a very noble heart, more noble than I have.

I'm perfectly willing to say, God, spare me from hell. I repent. It's not less valid because we've been scared in repentance.

No, the important thing is to come back to the Lord and to turn to him in sincerity. And God tells them how to do it in sincerity. First of all, if you look at it there in verse 12, he says, turn to me.

Sincere repentance is to turn to God and therefore away from your sin. And you can't turn to God and simultaneously face your sin. The idea is that, you know, you see the army and the marching drills and the sergeant.

There they are. They're all lined up. And the sergeant says about face.

And what do they all turn around? Well, you're facing your sin at one moment. And then God says about face and you turn around and now you're facing it. You're facing the Lord.

You've turned from your sin. You're not facing your sin anymore. Sincere repentance turns to God.

We would like to avoid that if we could, right? We'll say, well, Lord, I'll tell you what. I'll keep my sin in my peripheral vision over here and I'll keep you in my peripheral vision over here and I'll just kind of keep both of you. I've got very wide peripheral vision.

Lord says, no, no. Turn to me. Turn your back on your sin.

Next, if you see in verse 12, he says, turn to me with all your heart. Sincere repentance is done with all your heart. I know some people who are tormented by this because they wonder if they can give God all their heart.

They say, well, what if there is some recess of my heart that I don't know about that I haven't given him and that I haven't given him all my heart? Well, I would simply say this. Give him all that you can. Give them everything that you know.

And God will reveal more to you later that you give to him later. But give him all that you can. All your heart.

We also see in verse 12 that sincere repentance is marked by action, he says, with fasting. And it's also marked by emotion, with weeping and mourning. Now, not every act of repentance will include fasting and not every act of repentance will include weeping.

But if action and emotion are absent from repentance, then it's not repentance at all. Kind of an easy breezy. Well, Lord, I'm sorry, whatever.

Parents, you know what this is like with your children, right? Johnny, you pulled your sister's hair. Say you're sorry. Sorry.

The words are there, but not the heart, right? This is what he's getting at when he says in verse 13, what a beautiful phrase. So rend your heart and not your garments. You see, one expression of mourning in Jewish culture is tearing the clothes.

Clothes were valuable in that day and age. You know, they were hard to make and expensive. And you're you didn't have a whole closet full of clothing.

I mean, the average person would have one, maybe two changes of clothes. And that was about it. And so if you tore your clothes, it was a big deal.

You see, when you tore your clothes on purpose in mourning, you said, I am so overcome with grief that I don't care if my clothes are ruined and if I look bad. But you see, the problem is that if you can tear your clothes without tearing your heart. And Joel says, you've got to have this heart repentance before the Lord.

That's what really pleases God. Charles Spurgeon tells a story of a woman who came to see him, and she said that she was in great sorrow and great mourning over her sin. What a great sinner I am, she told Mr. Spurgeon.

But for some reason, Spurgeon suspected that she wasn't really sincere in her repentance. And so he said, well, if you're a sinner, then, of course, you've broken God's laws. Let's read the Ten Commandments and see which ones you've broken.

And so they started at the first, you shall have no other gods before me. And so Spurgeon said, well, have you ever broke that commandment? She said, oh, no, not that I ever know of. Well, then number two, you shall not make any graven image.

Well, did you ever break that one? He asked the woman. No, not that one. And as you might suppose, they went through all 10 commandments and the woman could not find a single one that she ever thought that she broke.

You see, what Spurgeon suspected was true. As sort of like a religious way of putting on an image, she was willing to say, oh, yes, I'm a sinner. Oh, yes, I need to repent.

Well, then what is the specific sin that you need to repent of? Well, I don't know. That's not much of a sinner, is it really? You see, you can make a show of repentance because you think it's expected of you. And that's not real repentance.

Real repentance is when you rend your heart, you tear your heart before God. So, God, I see the dirt and the filthiness of my sin. And I'm so sorry.

I feel so weak, so powerless before my sin. I need to save your God. I can't stop sinning in my own power.

I need you. I am undone. Now, here's the precious answer to our repentance.

In the middle of verse 13, return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. And he relents from doing harm, you know, knowing the goodness and the mercy of God. It's another motive for true repentance.

We come to confident that he's going to heal confident that he's going to forgive and that he may relent from the judgment he's announced. We don't repent before God with the idea of, well, God is so mean that if I don't repent, he's going to squash me like a bug. No, we say God is so gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great kindness.

It'll spare me from what I deserve if I turn back to him. Remember that Romans 2, 4 says that it's his goodness that leads us to repentance. But you see, real repentance doesn't act as if business is as usual.

Look at it here. He says in verse 16, let the bridegroom go out from his chamber and the bride from her dressing room. Well, it's the same pattern of repentance mentioned previously in Joel chapter one.

But now he adds the ideas of the bridegroom and the bride. The idea is that in these images, it's God's people cannot carry on business as usual when they're in a time of repentance. You know, usually the bridegroom belongs in his chamber and the bride belongs in her dressing room, but not now.

It's time to repent. True repentance doesn't carry on business as usual. Matter of fact, the priests have to lead the way.

Verse 17, let the priest who minister to the Lord weep between the porch and the altar. Oh, the leaders of God's people can't come before and say, well, they must repent. Oh, what a wicked attitude of heart to have among God's leaders.

Oh, you people, you must repent. You know, the problem is you all, you're a bunch of sinners and you must repent. Now, if the leader's heart can't be broken as well and say we must repent, I must repent, then he's not fit to be a leader among God's people at all.

See the word there in verse 17, the prayer. Spare your people, oh Lord, and do not give your heritage to reproach. It's a rich prayer of repentance.

It's as if the priests are praying with a thought. How can we persuade God to have mercy on us? How can we how can we get him to do it? First of all, you say spare us, Lord. You know, when you say spare, it implies that we deserve judgment, but they're pleading for mercy.

And he says, spare your people, Lord. Remember us, we're your people. We belong to you.

And finally, they do not give your heritage to reproach. This tells God that that mercy unto his people, Lord, it'll bring you glory among the nations. This is we want your glory.

That's why you should show mercy to us. And finally, we'll conclude with verses 18 through 20. Then the Lord will be zealous for his land and pity his people.

The Lord will answer and say to his people, behold, I send you grain and new wine and oil, and you'll be satisfied by them. I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations, but I will remove far from you the northern army and drive him away into a barren and desolate land with his face toward the Eastern Sea and his back toward the Western Sea. His stench will come up and his foul odor will rise because he has done monstrous things.

You see, Judah could know that when God's people sincerely repent, he notices from heaven his zeal and his pity are then turned for his people. Many promises to restore new wine, oil. He'll remove far from them the northern army.

God promised to restore not only material prosperity, but to defeat the mighty army from his north from the north. God would return to his people and turn his attention away from his people and now to this mighty army and defeat them. Well, time escapes us tonight.

It would be gratifying to go on. It would be a nice night to make a two hour study and finish the whole book of Joel. But you haven't prepared for it, and neither have I. Friends, we see the urgency of true repentance, don't we? It's so easy to be seduced into a repentance that's just a formalized kind of thing.

Just to show, because we know it's the right thing to do. Sort of in school where you give the answers that you know the teacher wants to hear, even though you don't believe it yourself. Our God deserves better than that from us.

So let's pray together and ask him to work within us a genuinely repentant heart. Lord, we come before you and we ask God that you work within us this miracle of repentance. We know that it is a miracle, Lord, that it is a gift from you.

We ask God that your spirit would deal with our hard and cold hearts. With our stiff necks, with our sinful hands and eyes, and that you'd give us a heart to truly repent, make us truly sorry for our sin. Not just sorry that we got caught.

Not just sorry that it's ended in a bad result. Sorry that we've offended such a great loving God. Give us your heart regarding our sin.

Just to grieve as you grieve. Lord God, we rend our hearts before you. Call upon you and say, won't you restore? We return unto you, Lord.

Won't you return unto us and pour out the riches of your spirit? You promised such beautiful restoration unto your repentant people. Let us be those who see it and walk in it and live it, Lord. Help us to live in a state of repentance.

Not merely see it as a preliminary formality. Love you and praise you tonight, Lord. Thank you for your word to us through the prophet Joel.

In Jesus name. Amen.

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