

### *The Day of the LORD for Judah*

Joel 2:1-17

In Joel chapter one he addressed the current crisis of the devastating locust plague. In Joel's second chapter he uses language that evokes the memory of the locust invasion which Judah had just experienced and weaves together the horrors of the past and the dark anticipation of the future (1:15) through the use of a double figure—an invading army of locusts and an invading northern army (2:20). The locust plague of chapter one served as a warning of an even greater impending judgment when the enemy would not be armies of locusts, but armies of men!

This concept of further judgment also led Joel to unveil God's intention for the *last days*—when God will manifest the full revelation of His wrath. This ultimate and final Day of the LORD will be a day when God will judge all nations and people of the earth (Joel 3:1-16).

**Open Your Heart:** We are deeply grateful O LORD, for the rich perspective You have given us through the prophets regarding Your sovereign plans and purposes and how they intersect with the lives of Your people and the nations surrounding them. Open our hearts now that we may be changed people through our encounter with Your Holy Word.

**Begin by reading Joel 2:1-11.** Keep in mind that the descriptions in chapter 1 were literal. In chapter 2 this literal description is suddenly heightened by the use of stirring imagery using similes. The locusts begin to take on overtones of even greater invaders. Joel was probably envisioning the Assyrian invasion of Judah (701 B.C) and the Babylonian exile of Judah (605-586 B.C.), which were yet to come.

With terror in his voice Joel issues a call to sound the alarm in Jerusalem. The trumpet was the ancient equivalent of a modern air raid siren.

1.
  - a. What is the significance and purpose of the commands in Joel 2:1?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What does 2:11 add to this picture? Is the LORD fighting for or against His people?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2.
  - a. How is the Day of the LORD for Judah portrayed by Joel in verse 2a?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Compare Joel's description with other manifestations of the day of the LORD depicted by the Minor Prophets. See Amos 5:18-20 and Zephaniah 1:14-15.

3. What do you learn from Joel 2:2b about the enemy army—its arrival and advance?

4. What city was this gigantic army coming to attack?

In reference to Joel 2:2b: The Assyrians had long been known as the most ruthless and barbaric people of the ancient civilizations. They took their warfare seriously; in fact they studied war techniques like a science. They had the most advanced weapons of their time. When the Assyrians attacked their enemies with these awesome weapons of war it caused almost as profound a reaction as the atom bomb has in our time.

**Reread** Joel 2:3 and 2:10. Notice how Joel uses the phrase *before them* to introduce each new facet of devastation.

5. In a powerful picture of contrast, Joel describes the army's effect on the land in Joel 2:3b. Rephrase this dramatic image in your own words.

6. **Thoughtfully reread** Joel 2:4-9 from several translations. This section describes the physical *appearance* as well as the *tactics* of this fierce army, using the double figure of the army of locusts and a real flesh and blood army. Record the facts and your insights below.  
Verses 4-5

Verses 6-7

Verses 8-9

Note: It is interesting that locusts look like tiny armored horses and they behave like them as well. Even their sounds are similar. Consider Job 39:19-20 and Revelation 9:7.

The scene pictured in verses 10 and 11 of the LORD going “before” the *enemy* explains the army’s sure success in executing judgment against Judah.

7. What are some of the dreadful fear-inducing signs and aspects of this imminent day of the LORD for Judah?

8. How does the concluding sentence of verse 11 sum up the thought of the entire section?

9. Have you ever felt that God was fighting against you for your good? Has He permitted you to experience defeat so you will return to Him? Explain.

### **The Merciful God**

With such impending judgments facing Judah the next section must have felt like a refreshing rain following a prolonged drought. The same LORD who thundered before His destroying army is now open to a change of action if the people will only return to Him in a spirit of true repentance.

**Read** Joel’s eloquent and effective pleas in 2:12-17 from the Amplified Version if possible.

The LORD begins His Divine invitation with the words “*Even now*” (2:12). Contemplate this phrase in light of the context in which it was spoken.

10. How do you respond to the amazing truth of God’s wrath and His compassion existing together in the same scene in Joel’s prophecy?

Against this backdrop the LORD impresses upon Judah the urgency of “returning to Him.”

11. What attitudes and actions will accompany genuine repentance according to verse 12?

**Heart Check:** Have you personally felt that deep conviction of sin that leads to spontaneous weeping, mourning and fasting?

### A Closer Look

A poignant image was employed by the LORD to convey what He was commanding the people to do in Joel 2:13. The classic cry of God through Joel is: “*Rend your heart and not your garments.*”

12. What would this phrase have communicated to the people within the culture of Judah?

As we see God calling the people of Judah to repentance it is appropriate for us to consider what it means to “rend your heart.” *The word “rend” means to “tear, wrench apart, break or split.” Consider each of these words in light of the act of repentance.* The tearing of clothes was a sign of repentance in Old Testament days, but Joel tells the people to tear their hearts. Authentic repentance begins with a torn heart—and it hurts—because it means exposing our egos, our ambitions, our priorities, our lusts, our hatred, our fears—and even the things we can’t see become visible as we come honestly before the One who loves us best. (Psalm 51:17; 32:1-6)

*Accept this holy invitation to tear your heart before the LORD today. Lay it down. Give it up. Let it go. Lay bare the pain of sin at its core by tearing your heart and allowing the Holy Spirit to renew and cleanse and heal and comfort you from the inside out.*

13. **Reread** verses 12-14. What is it about God that encourages people to repent and return to Him? How have you experienced God’s healing following an act of repentance?
14. In what way might God’s response to Judah be an example to you during a difficult relationship with a family member or a friend?
15. While Joel 2:12-14 speaks directly to individuals, verses 15-17 contain a moving appeal for a corporate expression of their sincere repentance. **Reread** verses 15-17. Sum up the main point of this section in one sentence.
16. In your group pray for each other’s specific requests in applying these life-changing truths.