***Joel***

**Chapter 2**

*An Army of Locusts*

**Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand— 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. 3 Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste— nothing escapes them. 4 They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. 5 With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. 6 At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. 7 They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course. 8 They do not jostle each other; each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. 9 They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves they enter through the windows. like thieves they enter through the windows. 10 Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 11 The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?**

**2:1-11** These verses are a continuation of the earlier vision, which foreshadows the character of the judgment at the end of time. (TLSB)

**2:1** *trumpet.* See v. 15. Made of a ram’s or bull’s horn, it was used to signal approaching danger (Jer 4:5; 6:1; Eze 33:3). Its sound brought trembling (from fear) to the people (see Am 3:6). (CSB)

*Zion.* See v. 15; 3:17. Here, parallel to God’s “holy hill” (see note on Ps 2:6), it refers to Jerusalem as the capital of the nation. (CSB)

The Temple mountain was the center of Jehovah's worship and the place of His presence in the midst of His people. (Kretzmann)

**2:2** *day of darkness.* Darkness is a common prophetic figure used of the day of the Lord (see Am 5:18, 20) and is generally a metaphor for distress and suffering (see Isa 5:30; 8:22; 50:3; 59:9; Jer 2:6, 31; 13:16; La 3:6; Eze 34:12). (CSB)

*dawn.* Usually suggests relief from sorrow or gloom, the end of darkness (cf. Isa 8:20; 58:8). Here, however, it is used as bitter irony, describing the locust infestation that spreads across the land like the light of dawn, which first lights up the eastern horizon and then spreads across the whole countryside. (CSB)

The wings of the locusts were reflecting the rays of the sun in a murky light before their immense numbers shut out the sun altogether. (Kretzmann)

**2:3–11** The staccato character of the poetry is appropriate for the imagery of war. (CSB)

**2:3** *Before them.* Joel creates a special impact by using this phrase three times (twice in v. 3 and once in v. 10), “behind them” twice (v. 3) and “At the sight of them” once (v. 6). (CSB)

Like the wildfires coming afterward (cf 1:19), locusts consume everything in their path. (TLSB)

*Eden.* See Ge 2:8, 15 (the garden before the fall); Ge 13:10 (the Jordan Valley before the destruction of Sodom); and Isa 51:3; Eze 28:13; 31:8–9, 16, 18; 36:35 (all of which describe a desert that has become like Eden). (CSB)

Compared to the desolation that Judah will become after the locusts and wildfires pass through, the land now seems lavishly abundant. (TLSB)

**2:4** *horses.* Whereas Job compared the horse to a locust (Job 39:20), Joel does the opposite. (CSB)

This compares the sound of the locusts to the din and destruction of charging chariots. (TLSB)

**2:5** NOISE…CHARIOTS – As war horses and chariots were often covered with armor, so the exoskeletons of the locusts give them the appearance of an armored force. (TLSB)

There is a strong similarity to all these rushing, pounding sounds in the movements of vast swarms of locusts. (Kretzmann)

Mountains, though barriers to ordinary horses and chariots, are no deterrent to locusts.

**2:6** *At the sight of them.* Parallels “Before them” (vv. 3, 10). (CSB)

*in anguish.* Because of the famine that the locusts will cause. (CSB)

People are so struck with dread and despair that the blood leaves their faces and they look pallid. (TLSB)

**2:7** SCALE WALL – It was and is vain to resist them by the means ordinarily used to stop the progress of an invading army. (Kretzmann)

The city walls are no obstacle to them. In fact, they will overrun Judah more quickly than a human army. (TLSB)

**2:8** PLUNGE THROUGH DEFENSES – Armies would clash as units in a great shoving match. The army that broke the other’s wall of shields and spears would win. (TLSB)

**2:9** *climb into the houses.* As in the Egyptian plague of locusts (Ex 10:6). Latticed windows with no glass would not stop them. (CSB)

Jerome writes concerning this phenomenon: "When the locusts come and fill the whole space between earth and sky, they fly in perfect order, as if obedient to a divine command, so that they look like the squares of a pavement. Each one holds its own place, not diverging from it even so much as by a finger's breadth. To these locusts nothing is impenetrable, fields, meadows, trees, cities, houses, even their most secret chambers." (Kretzmann)

**2:10** *earth shakes.* See Ps 68:8; 77:18; Isa 24:18–20; Jer 4:23–24; Am 8:8; Na 1:5–6. (CSB)

*sky trembles.* See 2Sa 22:8; Isa 13:13; Hag 2:21; Heb 12:26–28. (CSB)

*darkened.* Joel links God’s judgment through the locusts to the cosmic phenomena of the day of the Lord. (CSB)

These are signs in the heavens of the day of the Lord, as also predicted of the Last Day. (TLSB)

**2:11** Just as Isaiah saw the Assyrians (Isa 10:5–7; 13:4) and Jeremiah the Babylonians (Jer 25:9; 43:10) as the Lord’s instruments, so Joel sees the locusts as the Lord’s army (cf. Jos 5:14; Ps 68:7, 17; Hab 3:8–9)—the army of the Lord with which he will come against his enemies in the day of the Lord (see 3:9–11). This passage parallels Zep 1:14 (cf. v. 31; 3:14; Mal 4:1, 5). (CSB)

*thunders.* See 3:16. (CSB)

HIS ARMY – Ironically, the locusts rathr than the agelic hosts serve as God’s army. (TLSB)

*great … dreadful.* Two ideas often associated in the OT, though sometimes the Hebrew word underlying “dreadful” means “awesome” (see Dt 7:21; 10:21; Ps 106:21–22). The terms are frequently used to describe the day of the Lord (see v. 31; Mal 4:5). (CSB)

*Who can endure it?* See Na 1:6; Mal 3:2; Rev 6:17. There is no escape except in turning to God. (CSB)

It is evident that the entire description is incidentally symbolical of the great and mighty Judgment of the Lord, which, in its preliminary features, is seen in the Deluge, in the two destructions of Jerusalem, and in various other calamities and cataclysms, but which is destined to be immeasurably greater than man can conceive of when it actually comes to pass. Cf. Mal. 3, 2. This being true, the admonition of the prophet comes with particular force. (Kretzmann)

*Rend Your Heart*

**12 ‘Even now,‘ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.‘ 13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. 14 Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing— grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God. 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. 16 Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. 17 Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’‘**

**2:12** RETURN – Just as God’s people have turned away from the Lord in their hearts, so also they are to return to Him with sincerity and full conviction. (TLSB)

Three means of turning are recommended: Fasting, weeping, mourning, i.e., continued sorrow. (ACC)

**2:13** REND YOUR HEARTS – Let it not be merely a rending of your garments, but let your hearts be truly contrite. Merely external worship and hypocritical pretensions will only increase the evil, and cause God to meet you with heavier judgments. (ACC)

*gracious … abounding in love.* Recalls the great self-characterization of God in Ex 34:6–7, which runs like a golden thread through the OT (see note on Ex 34:6–7; see also Dt 4:31; Mic 7:18). (CSB)

It is God’s nature to forgive, thus, He forgives because of who He is, not in exchange for our repentance. (TLSB)

**2:14** WHO KNOWS – He may yet interpose and turn aside the calamity threatened, and so far preserve the land from these ravagers, that there will be food for men and cattle, and a sufficiency of offerings for the temple service. (ACC)

A BLESSING – In order to accomplish this, however, it was necessary that the people unite in a great service of prayer and supplication. (Kretzmann)

**2:15** *trumpet.* Not an alarm as in v. 1, but a call to religious assembly (see Lev 23:24; 25:9; Nu 10:10; Jos 6:4–5; 2Ch 15:14; Ps 47:5; 81:3; 98:6; 150:3). (CSB)

Let no time be lost, let the alarm be sounded. (ACC)

*fast … assembly.* See note on 1:14. (CSB)

Athanasius says, “When we fast, we should hallow the fast. For not all those who call upon God, hallow God, since there are some who defile Him, yet not Him – that is impossible – but their own mind concerning Him; for He is holy, and has pleasure in the saints. (TLSB)

**2:16** As with the call to mourning in ch. 1, no segment of the community was exempt. (CSB)

CONSECRATE – This entailed having the people prepare themselves for worship by abstaining from work, food, and sexual relations (1:14; Ex. 19:15). The people would also bathe and wash their clothes (Ex 19:14). (TLSB)

*assembly.* The Hebrew for this word refers to the religious community (see Nu 16:3; 2Ch 30:2, 4, 13, 23–25; Mic 2:5). (CSB)

*elders.* See note on 1:2. (CSB)

*chamber.* The place where the marriage was consummated. (CSB)

The fact that even infants in arms and bride and groom were included in the appeal of the prophet shows that the guilt was universal and beyond excuse. (Kretzmann)

**2:17** TEMPLE…ALTAR – The altar of burnt-offerings stood before the porch of the temple, 2 Chronicles 8:12, and between them there was an open space of fifteen or twenty cubits. It was there that the priests prostrated themselves on such occasions. It was into this place that the priests brought the sacrifice or victim of atonement; and where the high priest laid his hands on the head of the victim confessing his sins. (ACC)

This was the raised area between the great altar standing in front of the temple and the entrance tol the Holy Place. Note the intercessory role the priests should play. (TLSB)

*your inheritance.* Israel is God’s special possession (see Ex 19:5 and note; see also Ex 15:17; 34:9). Judah is to plead, not her innocence, but that God’s honor is at stake before the world (see Ex 32:12; Nu 14:13; Dt 9:28; Jos 7:9). (CSB)

*byword.* See note on 1Ki 9:7. (CSB)

*Where is their God?* A rhetorical question with sarcastic intent (see Ps 42:3, 10; 79:10; 115:2; Mic 7:10). (CSB)

This was bringing disgrace upon the holy name of the Lord. This is one of the strongest arguments which believers may advance in presenting their supplication before the Lord, namely, that the glory of His own name requires His looking upon His children in mercy, so that they may not be abandoned to the wiles of the enemy. (Kretzmann)

*The Lord’s Answer*

**18 Then the LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people. 19 The LORD will reply to them: ‘I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations. 20 ‘I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise.‘ Surely he has done great things. 21 Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice. Surely the LORD has done great things. 22 Be not afraid, O wild animals, for the open pastures are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches. 23 Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. 24 The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil. 25 ‘I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten— the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm— my great army that I sent among you. 26 You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed. 27 Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed.**

**2:18** Joel begins a new section by turning from the destruction caused by the locusts to the blessings God will give to a repentant people. (CSB)

*jealous.* See note on Ex 20:5. The Lord will respond to the prayer of v. 17 and arouse himself to defend his honor and have pity on his people. (CSB)

Joel’s prophecy sounds markedly more hopeful. The Lord promises to show compassion for His people, even as they prepare to suffer the natural consequences of their sin (cf Ezk 36:1-15). Though they richly deserve the impending punishment, the Lord will not allow the pagan nations to mock His people and so denigrate the name of Yahweh, the one true God. (TLSB)

**2:19** *grain, new wine and oil.* See note on 1:10. (CSB)

He will either prevent the total ravaging of the land, or so bless it with extraordinary vegetable strength, that ye shall have plentiful crops. (ACC)

**2:20** *northern army.* Since enemies in ancient times did not invade from the sea or across the desert, Canaan’s geographical location made her vulnerable only from the south (Egypt) and from the north (Assyria and Babylon). The hordes of locusts are pictured here as a vast army of Israel’s most feared enemies. (CSB)

That is, the locusts; which might enter Judea by the north, as Circassia and Mingrelia abound with them. Or the locusts may be thus called, because they spread terror like the Assyrian armies, which entered Judea by the north. See Zephaniah 2:13.”—Newcome. Syria, which was northward of Judea, was infested with them; and it must have been a northern wind that brought them into Judea, in the time of Joel; as God promises to change this wind, and carry them into a barren and desolate land, Arabia Deserta. “And his face toward the east sea,” i.e., the Dead Sea, which lay eastward of Jerusalem. “His hinder part toward the utmost sea,” the western sea, i.e., the Mediterranean. (ACC)

*stench.* Because the locusts are now dead. (CSB)

After having been drowned by millions in the Mediterranean, the reflux of the tide has often brought them back, and thrown there in heaps upon the shore, where they putrefied in such a manner as to infect the air and produce pestilence, by which both men and cattle have died in great multitudes. (ACC)

**2:21–23** As there was a threefold call to grief (1:5, 8, 13), so there is a threefold call to joy: The land (v. 21), the wild animals (v. 22) and the people (v. 23) are called on to rejoice in the Lord’s bounty. (CSB)

**2:21** GREAT THINGS – God will foil the locust hordes by the breath of His mouth, carrying them away in a powerful wind (v. 20). Then the people will exalts in the Lord’s great things, i.e., His mighty deliverance (cf Is 25:9). (TLSB)

**2:22** The wild animals now find green open pastures (cf. 1:19–20). The same land, with its trees (see 1:7, 12, 19) that the locusts and drought had devastated, is now productive. (CSB)

Just as the land and its animals were subjected to this plague because of the people’s sin, so also the plants and animals share in this deliverance. (TLSB)

**2:23** *autumn rains in righteousness.* See NIV text note. The religious sect at Qumran (which produced most of the Dead Sea Scrolls; see “The Time between the Testaments,” p. 1437) hailed their most revered teacher of the law, whom they called the “Teacher of Righteousness,” as the fulfillment of this prophecy. The immediate context, however, seems to support the translation in the NIV text. (CSB)

Literally, "a teacher for righteousness,'' or "rain in just measure," the meaning of the Hebrew word being in dispute to some extent. (Kretzmann)

By sending badly needed rainfall instead of a locust invasion, the Lord powerfully vindicates those who placed their faith in His goodness. These rains refer to the seasonal pattern of precipitation, on which Judean agriculture was completely dependent. When the spring and fall rains came in sufficient amounts, the people received a powerful reminder of God’s trustworthiness. (TLSB)

**2:24** *threshing floors.* See note on Ru 1:22 – (Harvesting grain in ancient Canaan took place in April and May (barley first, wheat a few weeks later; see 2:23). It involved the following steps: (1) cutting the ripened standing grain with hand sickles (Dt 16:9; 23:25; Jer 50:16; Joel 3:13)—usually done by men; (2) binding the grain into sheaves—usually done by women; (3) gleaning, i.e., gathering stalks of grain left behind (2:7); (4) transporting the sheaves to the threshing floor—often by donkey, sometimes by cart (Am 2:13); (5) threshing, i.e., loosening the grain from the straw—usually done by the treading of cattle (Dt 25:4; Hos 10:11), but sometimes by toothed threshing sledges (Isa 41:15; Am 1:3) or the wheels of carts (Isa 28:28); (6) winnowing—done by tossing the grain into the air with winnowing forks (Jer 15:7) so that the wind, which usually came up for a few hours in the afternoon, blew away the straw and chaff (Ps 1:4), leaving the grain at the winnower’s feet; (7) sifting the grain (Am 9:9) to remove any residual foreign matter; (8) bagging for transportation and storage (Ge 42–44). Threshing floors, where both threshing and winnowing occurred, were hard, smooth, open places, prepared on either rock or clay and carefully chosen for favorable exposure to the prevailing winds. They were usually on the east side—i.e., downwind—of the village.) (CSB)

**2:25** See 1:4. (CSB)

It has already been remarked that the locusts not only destroyed the produce of that year, but so completely ate up all buds, and barked the trees, that they did not recover for some years. Here God promises that he would either prevent or remedy that evil; for he would restore the years that the locusts, cankerworm, caterpillar, and palmerworm had eaten. (ACC)

**2:26** *wonders.* God worked wonders for the people when they were in Egypt (see Ex 7:3), and now will work wonders in restoring the devastated land. (CSB)

NEVER…BE ASHAMED – This phrase, repeated in v. 27 for emphasis, assured God’s people that their enemies would never get the final word. Ultimately, this promise looks forward to the abundance of the consummation of the messianic age, when God will make permanent provision for both earthly and spiritual needs. When Christ returns to usher in the fullness of th new heaven and earth, hunger and death will no longer exist. (TLSB)

**2:27** *Israel.* Probably refers to all God’s people, with no distinction between the northern and southern kingdoms, as also in 3:2, 16. (CSB)

*I am the Lord your God.* This clause recalls the covenant at Sinai (see Ex 20:2).

*there is no other.* See note on Dt 4:35. (CSB)

The Lord is the only God and Savior of Israel. (TLSB)

*The Day of the Lord*

**28 ‘And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. 30 I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 31 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 32 And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.**

**2:28–32** Quoted by Peter at Pentecost (Ac 2:16–21), but with a few variations from both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT). (CSB)

**2:28** *afterward.* In the Messianic period, beyond the restoration just spoken of. (CSB)

The earthly abundance the Lord promises His people will be accompanied by spiritual outpouring as well. (TLSB)

*pour out my Spirit.* See v. 29; Isa 32:15; 44:3; Jer 31:33–34; Eze 36:26–27; 39:29; Zec 12:10–13:1. (CSB)

This was fulfilled on Pentecost (Ac 2:1-33) Ambrose says, “Who, then, can dare to say that the substance of the Holy Spirit is created, at Whose shining in our hearts we behold the beauty of divine truth, and the distance between the creature and the Godhead, that the work may be distinguished from its Author?...[God] said not Spirit but My Spirit.” Melanchthon states, “The fact that He uses the word “My” shows that it was not some created movement which had been sent, but something of the essence of God. Further, it is necessary that He be a distinct person…and yet is no the Father.” (TLSB)

*all people.* All will participate without regard to sex, age or rank; and then Moses’ wish (Nu 11:29) will be realized (cf. Gal 3:28). Peter extends the “all” of this verse and the “everyone” of v. 32 to the Gentiles (“all who are far off,” Ac 2:39), who will not be excluded from the Spirit’s outpouring or deliverance (cf. Ro 11:11–24). (CSB)

*prophesy … dream dreams … see visions.* See Nu 12:6. (CSB)

This speaks of the great possibilities of the Lord's work and the energy for carrying out the plans of the Lord coming to them and urging them forward with irresistible power, the barriers of both sex and age being removed, except as limited in other parts of the Scripture. (Kretzmann)

**2:29** SERVANTS…MEN AND WOMEN – All social distinction are being abandoned in the New Testament era as far as the work of the Church is concerned. This prophecy was fulfilled, so far as its beginning is concerned, on the great Day of Pentecost, as Peter also states in the introduction to his powerful sermon held before the astonished inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem, Acts 2, 17-21. But this event by no means exhausted its wonderful promises; for the Spirit of the Lord is being poured out on the members of the Church of the New Testament today and will continue to be given to all true believers until the end of time. But this great and wonderful deed of the Lord is placed side by side with His judgment upon the nations. (Kretzmann)

**2:30–31** These cosmic events are often associated with the day of the Lord (see Isa 13:9–10; 34:4; Mt 24:29; Rev 6:12; 8:8–9; 9:1–19; 14:14–20; 16:4, 8–9). (CSB)

**2:30** *blood.* From war. (CSB)

*fire … smoke.* Signs of God’s presence (see Ge 15:17 and note; Ex 19:18). (CSB)

**2:31** *blood.* The moon will become blood-red. (CSB)

DREADFUL DAY OF THE LORD – Cosmic disturbances will serve as unmistakable signs on the Last Day, when Christ come to judge the world. In anticipation of that final day, however, the Lord periodically sent similar signs while revealing judgment on His enemies and saving His own people, e.g., the heavenly disturbances and earthquake on Good Friday. Similar phenomena also accompanied Jesus’ earthly ministry (Mt 28:2; Jn 12:27-32). These powerfully foreshadowed the ultimate “great and awesome day of the Lord.” (TLSB)

**2:32** *calls on the name of the Lord.* Worships God (cf. Ge 4:26; 12:8) and prays to him (see Ps 116:4). (CSB)

*saved.* Delivered from the wrath of God’s judgment (see Mt 24:13). (CSB)

The Gospel-message proclaimed in and by the Church of God is bringing redemption and the assurance of eternal life to all believers. (Kretzmann)

*as the Lord has said.* Perhaps Joel is recalling the Lord’s covenant with David (see 2Sa 7; Ps 132:13–18). (CSB)

*survivors.* See Zec 13:8–9; 14:2. (CSB)

This is the remainder according to the election of grace, the people whom the Lord has chosen from all nations of the earth. This glorious promise is held out to this day to all who turn to the Lord in repentance and faith, confessing His name as the only Savior and fervently calling upon Him for deliverance from all evil, especially that of the body of sin. (Kretzmann)