

Joel

Chapter 2

The Day of the LORD

Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations. 3 Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. 4 Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run. 5 As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle. 6 Before them peoples are in anguish; all faces grow pale. 7 Like warriors they charge; like soldiers they scale the wall. They march each on his way; they do not swerve from their paths. 8 They do not jostle one another; each marches in his path; they burst through the weapons and are not halted. 9 They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls, they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. 10 The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. 11 The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; 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," it refers to Jerusalem as the capital of the nation. (CSB)

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)

great and powerful people. Another personification. Locusts are so numerous that they blacken the sky and bring as much devastation as an invading army. (TLSB)

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 *rumbling...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)

2:6 *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 the wall* – The city walls are no obstacle to them. In fact, they will overrun Judah more quickly than a human army. (TLSB)

2:8 *jostle one another* – 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 up into the houses*. As in the Egyptian plague of locusts (Ex 10:6). Latticed windows with no glass would not stop them. (CSB)

Nothing will keep them out, so their invasion will be total. (TLSB)

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 *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)

his army – Ironically, the locusts rather than the angelic hosts serve as God's army. (TLSB)

executes His word. God sends these locusts in order to judge Judah's unfaithfulness. (TLSB)

great and very awesome. 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)

Question is also posed in Na 1:6 and Mal 3:2. Ultimately, only those who trust in the Lord's promised Messiah will be spared when God's judgment is revealed. (TLSB)

2:1–11 The locust hordes that God threatens to unleash on Judah will be as devastating as the invasion of a human army. The scorched earth Joel describes continues to have relevance today, with natural disasters and warfare looming ever larger. We do well to place our trust in the world's only hope, the Creator and Redeemer of all. Through His Son's death and resurrection, God promises to raise us from the dead and give us eternal life in a new heaven and new earth. • Heavenly Father, help us to see the Day of Judgment as the revelation of our final deliverance, and our last day here as the portal that leads to ineffable joy and splendor; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)

Return to the LORD

12 “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; **13** and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. **14** Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? **15** Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; **16** gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. **17** Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, “Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, 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)

2:13 *rend your hearts and not your garments*. The Lord wants inner sincerity, not just outward show (Ps 51:17). Chem: “What is the rationale for true conversion? He adds, ‘Do not rend your garments,’ as the hypocrites do, but ‘rend your hearts,’ that is, let your conversion be a genuine one and show this by the fruits worthy of repentance” (*LTh* 2:642). (TLSB)

gracious ... abounding in steadfast love. Recalls the great self-characterization of God in Ex 34:6–7, which runs like a golden thread through the OT (see 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*. Chem: “In the area of temporal punishments we must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and let God be free either to punish or withhold punishment, totally or in part” (*LTh* 2:642). (TLSB)

turn and relent. God's real purpose in sending this disaster is to work repentance in His people, so that they might receive forgiveness and avert disaster. (TLSB)

leave a blessing behind Him. Along with the Lord's mercy comes every other blessing, among them sustenance and protection. (TLSB)

a grain offering. Offering such sacrifices to God would acknowledge Him as Creator and Provider of all good things. (TLSB)

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)

fast ... assembly. 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)

assemble. 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)

gather the children, even nursing infants. This sacred purification included everyone, regardless of age or circumstances. (TLSB)

Let the bridegroom ... bride. Even newlyweds were to postpone their honeymoon in order to observe this sacred fast. (TLSB)

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

The wedding canopy. (TLSB)

2:17 *Between the vestibule and the altar*. The raised area between the great altar standing in front of the temple and the entrance to the Holy Place. Note the intercessory role the priests should play. (TLSB)

your heritage. Israel is God’s special possession (see Ex 19:5 and 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)

A covenant name for God’s people (Dt 4:20; Ex 34:9). This title was a special basis of confidence for Israel (Ps 94:14; 37:18; Mi 7:14, 18) and so was often invoked in prayer (Dt 9:26, 29; Ps 28:9; 33:12). (TLSB)

reproach, a byword. If the Lord does not spare His people, the surrounding nations will ridicule them, saying, “Where is their God?” Such taunts imply that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is not powerful. (TLSB)

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

2:12–17 In light of the impending locust plague, Joel urges the people to repent of their sin and return to the Lord, offering the hope that He might yet relent and hold off the disaster. When our own sins likewise kindle God’s wrath and threaten to bring us under His judgment, consider the question posed by Joel: “Who can endure the awesome day of the Lord?” Thanks be to God, we have a Savior, our risen Lord Jesus Christ, who has already endured God’s wrath and judgment for us. • “Jesus Christ, our blessed

Savior, Turned away God's wrath forever; By His bitter grief and woe He saved us from the evil foe." Amen. (LSB 627:1) (TLSB)

The LORD Had Pity

18 Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. 19 The LORD answered and said to his people, "Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations. 20 "I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things. 21 "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things! 22 Fear not, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and vine give their full yield. 23 "Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. 24 "The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. 25 I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. 26 "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. 27 You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

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. 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)

2:20 *northerner.* 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)

Most logically refers to the threatening locust swarms. In later centuries, enemy armies from Syria, Assyria, and Babylon would sweep down from the north. (TLSB)

parched and desolate land. The desert, where the locusts cannot harm Judah's people. (TLSB)

vanguard ... eastern sea. The foremost ranks of the locust swarm are driven into the Salt Sea. (TLSB)

rear guard ... western sea. Rearmost ranks of locusts are driven into the Great Sea. (TLSB)

foul smell. Because the locusts are now dead. (CSB)

Smell of drowned locusts washed up on the shore. (TLSB)

he has done great things. This characterization of the locusts is ironic, since their swarms can only do “great things” in the sense of massive destruction. God, on the other hand, can do “great things” to save and preserve life (v 21). (TLSB)

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 exult 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 *early rain for your vindication.* 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.* (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 winnowers’ 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)

vats. Containers in which new wine and freshly pressed olive oil were stored. Their fullness would reflect God’s overflowing grace. (TLSB)

2:26 *wondrously.* 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 the 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)

there is none else. The Lord is the only God and Savior of Israel. (TLSB)

2:18–27 Along with dire predictions about a locust plague and famine, Joel assures the people that the Lord will not abandon them or allow them to be mocked by their pagan neighbors. To be sure, the Lord will not tolerate rebellion, and He fully expects us to sincerely repent of our sins. Nevertheless, when we return to the Lord, He is faithful and just and forgives us of all our unrighteousness. • O Lord of heaven and earth, turn us from ingratitude and sinful self-sufficiency. By Your Holy Spirit, move us to acknowledge You as the source of every good and perfect gift, especially the forgiveness of sins. Then we shall never be put to shame. Amen. (TLSB)

The LORD Will Pour Out His Spirit

28 “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. 29 Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. 30 “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 32 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those 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 flesh. 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)

God’s judgment affected the entire nation of Judah (v 16). His promised future blessings will extend to all nations. No one is excluded on the basis of age, gender, or any other factor. Cyr Jer: “Let neither the rich be puffed up, nor the poor dejected, but only let each prepare himself for reception of the Heavenly gift” (NPNF 2 7:129). (TLSB)

prophesy ... dream dreams ... see visions. Knowing and communicating God's will. This ability is only given by God. See p 1493. *dreams ... visions.* Revelatory dreams and prophetic visions show God's will. God fulfilled this promise in numerous unmistakable ways at the beginning of the age of the Church (e.g., Ac 7:55–56; 9:1–16; 10:1–33; 16:6–10; 18:9–10; 23:11). (TLSB)

2:29 *male and female servants.* Joel emphasizes that the spiritual gifts God pours out will extend to all people, both men and women. Cf Ac 21:8–9. (TLSB)

in those days. Ter: "It was characteristic of Him (only) to wait patiently for the fulness of time, to whom belonged the end of time no less than the beginning" (ANF 3:436). (TLSB)

pour out. The Spirit is given by pouring, rather than specifying immersion. (TLSB)

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)

great and awesome 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)

Mount Zion ... Jerusalem. Though this promise was originally directed to the Judean people of Joel's generation, Jesus extended it to all, including Gentiles, through His apostles (Ac 2:38–39; 10:43). (TLSB)

escape. Spared from condemnation on the Day of Judgment. (TLSB)

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)

The saved are those who have been called by God's grace and delivered by Him. (TLSB)

the LORD calls. He chooses them by grace. The climactic promise of this wonderful section is that all those called by the Lord are given the gift of faith. (TLSB)

2:28–32 After the devastation wrought by the threatened locust plagues, the Lord promises to pour out His life-giving Spirit. His purpose in so doing is to deliver the gifts of salvation. Knowing that the Lord’s judgment may come anytime, we should remain ever watchful and strive to be ready for that day. By His grace, the Lord enables us to do this very thing, as we call on Jesus’ name and trust that He shall save us.

- Heavenly Father, the day is quickly approaching when You shall judge all people. Because we cannot stand before You on the basis of our own strength or works, we pray that You would move us to trust in Your promised Redeemer, in whose name we will be saved. Amen. (TLSB)