

JOEL



Read Joel 1

The prophet poetically describes a locust plague so devastating as to result in a nationwide famine. Even the daily offerings and libations in the temple have ceased. The priests and ministers mourn and do penance. The elders and people gather in prayer. Along with the prophet, even the wild animals cry to God for deliverance.

Reflect: What is the most devastating natural disaster that I can recall learning about? What has been my own experience with one or more natural disasters?

Pray: Lord, help me to recognize my connectedness with all people and with all of your creation. Keep me conscious of how easily I myself could face devastating circumstances.

Act: Today I will identify and learn more about one area devastated by some disaster. I will join with the people there in prayer and will make some contribution to relief efforts.

1 The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel:

Lament over the Ruin of the Country

- 2** Hear this, O elders,
give ear, all inhabitants of the land!
Has such a thing happened in your days,
or in the days of your ancestors?
- 3** Tell your children of it,
and let your children tell their children,
and their children another generation.
- 4** What the cutting locust left,
the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.
- 5** Wake up, you drunkards, and weep;
and wail, all you wine-drinkers,
over the sweet wine,
for it is cut off from your mouth.
- 6** For a nation has invaded my land,
powerful and innumerable;
its teeth are lions' teeth,
and it has the fangs of a lioness.
- 7** It has laid waste my vines,
and splintered my fig trees;
it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down;
their branches have turned white.

- 8 Lament like a virgin dressed in sackcloth
for the husband of her youth.
- 9 The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off
from the house of the LORD.
The priests mourn,
the ministers of the LORD.
- 10 The fields are devastated,
the ground mourns;
for the grain is destroyed,
the wine dries up,
the oil fails.
- 11 Be dismayed, you farmers,
wail, you vinedressers,
over the wheat and the barley;
for the crops of the field are ruined.
- 12 The vine withers,
the fig tree droops.
Pomegranate, palm, and apple—
all the trees of the field are dried up;
surely, joy withers away
among the people.
- A Call to Repentance and Prayer**
- 13 Put on sackcloth and lament, you priests;
wail, you ministers of the altar.
Come, pass the night in sackcloth,
you ministers of my God!
Grain offering and drink offering
are withheld from the house of
your God.
- 14 Sanctify a fast,
call a solemn assembly.
Gather the elders
and all the inhabitants of the land
to the house of the LORD your God,
and cry out to the LORD.
- 15 Alas for the day!
For the day of the LORD is near,
and as destruction from the
Almighty^a it comes.
- 16 Is not the food cut off
before our eyes,
joy and gladness
from the house of our God?
- 17 The seed shrivels under the clods,^b
the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are ruined
because the grain has failed.
- 18 How the animals groan!
The herds of cattle wander about
because there is no pasture for them;
even the flocks of sheep are dazed.^c
- 19 To you, O LORD, I cry.
For fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness,
and flames have burned
all the trees of the field.
- 20 Even the wild animals cry to you
because the watercourses are
dried up,
and fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness.

- 2** Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sound the 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 spread upon the mountains
a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
nor will be again after them
in ages to come.
- 3 Fire devours in front of them,
and behind them a flame burns.
Before them the land is like the garden of Eden,
but after them a desolate wilderness,
and nothing escapes them.

^a Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Compare Gk Syr Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

Read Joel 2:1–27

The “day of the LORD” was a popular term for a time when God would vindicate his suffering people. Joel reversed this notion to include the time when God would punish his self-righteous and unrepentant people. Still, once the people turn and wholeheartedly repent, God promises to end the locust plague and restore his people, that they may know that their God is in their midst.

Reflect: As difficult times end and life returns to normal, as the rhythms of everyday life resume, it is so easy to let go of our consciousness of God’s presence. We need to be reminded that God has been with us and continues to be in our midst.

Pray: Lord, keep me conscious of your sustaining presence throughout the normal and mundane times of my life.

Act: Today I will look for God’s presence with me in each activity and each encounter.

- 4 They have the appearance of horses,
and like war-horses they charge.
- 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.^a
- 7 Like warriors they charge,
like soldiers they scale the wall.
Each keeps to its own course,
they do not swerve from^b their paths.
- 8 They do not jostle one another,
each keeps to its own track;
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
at the head of his army;
how vast is his host!
Numberless are those who obey his
command.
Truly the day of the LORD is great;
terrible indeed—who can endure it?
- 12 Yet even now, says the LORD,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
- 13 rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.
- 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;
sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
- 16 gather the people.

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Gk Syr Vg: Heb *they do not take a pledge along*

Read Joel 2:28–32

Joel's vision of the day of the Lord expands forward to a universal restoration of all things as they were in the beginning: children—male and female—prophesy, old and young see visions, even slaves, workmen and serving girls experience the outpouring of God's spirit. All who call on the name of the Lord shall be rescued.

Reflect: How important are distinctions to me? Of whom am I jealous or envious? Do I look down upon anyone?

Pray: Lord give me the humility to recognize and honor the real presence of your spirit in all the people I encounter and with whom I interact.

Act: Today I will look for and reverence God's spirit in those whom I least enjoy and appreciate.

Sanctify the congregation;
assemble the aged;
gather the children,
even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.

- 17 Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.
Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
"Where is their God?"

God's Response and Promise

- 18 Then the LORD became jealous for his land,
and had pity on his people.
- 19 In response to his people the LORD said:
I am sending you
grain, wine, and oil,
and you will be satisfied;
and I will no more make you
a mockery among the nations.
- 20 I will remove the northern army far from you,
and drive it into a parched and desolate land,
its front into the eastern sea,
and its rear into the western sea;
its stench and foul smell will rise up.
Surely he has done great things!
- 21 Do not fear, O soil;
be glad and rejoice,
for the LORD has done great things!
- 22 Do not fear, you animals 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 O children of Zion, be glad
and rejoice in the LORD your God;
for he has given the early rain^a for your
vindication,
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.
- 24 The threshing floors shall be full of grain,
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.
- 25 I will repay you for the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent against you.

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

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, the LORD, am your God
and there is no other.
And my people shall never again be
put to shame.

God's Spirit Poured Out

28a Then afterward
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 slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my
spirit.

30 I will show portents in the heavens
and on the earth, blood and fire and
columns of smoke. ³¹The sun shall be
turned to darkness, and the moon to blood,
before the great and terrible day of the
LORD comes. ³²Then 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.

Read Joel 3

Joel reflects the anger and desire for revenge of a defeated, down-trodden, and oppressed people. They long for the day when God will sit in judgment, restore their fortunes, and inflict the indignities and abuse that they have suffered on their oppressors.

Reflect: If I find this passage difficult, if I cannot share this intense anger, perhaps it is because I have not experienced the humiliation and pain of such people. Perhaps I belong to a nation against whom some would direct these words.

Pray: Lord, help me to join my prayer with those people everywhere who are being uprooted, whose land is being appropriated, whose children are being exploited.

Act: Today I will reflect upon the life circumstances of all those around the world whose labor provides the food that I eat, the things that I purchase, the resources that I use.

3^b For then, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ²I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations. They have divided my land, ³and cast lots for my people, and traded boys for prostitutes, and sold girls for wine, and drunk it down.

⁴What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads swiftly and speedily. ⁵For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples.^c ⁶You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, removing them far from their own border. ⁷But now I will rouse them to leave the places to which you have sold them, and I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads. ⁸I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away; for the LORD has spoken.

Judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat

⁹Proclaim this among the nations:
Prepare war,^d
stir up the warriors.
Let all the soldiers draw near,
let them come up.

¹⁰Beat your plowshares into swords,
and your pruning hooks into spears;

^a Ch 3.1 in Heb

^b Ch 4.1 in Heb

^c Or *palaces*

^d Heb *sanctify war*

let the weakling say, "I am a warrior."

- 11 Come quickly,^a
 all you nations all around,
 gather yourselves there.
 Bring down your warriors, O LORD.
- 12 Let the nations rouse themselves,
 and come up to the valley of
 Jehoshaphat;
 for there I will sit to judge
 all the neighboring nations.
- 13 Put in the sickle,
 for the harvest is ripe.
 Go in, tread,
 for the wine press is full.
 The vats overflow,
 for their wickedness is great.
- 14 Multitudes, multitudes,
 in the valley of decision!
 For the day of the LORD is near
 in the valley of decision.
- 15 The sun and the moon are darkened,
 and the stars withdraw their shining.
- 16 The LORD roars from Zion,
 and utters his voice from Jerusalem,
 and the heavens and the earth
 shake.
 But the LORD is a refuge for his people,

a stronghold for the people of
 Israel.

The Glorious Future of Judah

- 17 So you shall know that I, the LORD
 your God,
 dwell in Zion, my holy mountain.
 And Jerusalem shall be holy,
 and strangers shall never again
 pass through it.
- 18 In that day
 the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
 the hills shall flow with milk,
 and all the stream beds of Judah
 shall flow with water;
 a fountain shall come forth from the
 house of the LORD
 and water the Wadi Shittim.
- 19 Egypt shall become a desolation
 and Edom a desolate wilderness,
 because of the violence done to the
 people of Judah,
 in whose land they have shed
 innocent blood.
- 20 But Judah shall be inhabited forever,
 and Jerusalem to all generations.
- 21 I will avenge their blood, and I will
 not clear the guilty,^b
 for the LORD dwells in Zion.

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Gk Syr: Heb *I will hold innocent their blood that I have not held innocent*