

Joel 5: The Day of the Lord

Please read **Joel 2 v 1-11** and then pray;

Almighty God, speak to us through your holy Word which is living and active, and sharper than any double-edged sword, and prepare us for the Day of your coming, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

Today, as we begin our examination of Joel Chapter 2, we are coming face to face with the central tenet of Joel's prophetic message and challenge. If I were asked to identify *the one* main theological truth placed and fixed upon this prophet's heart and mind - it would undoubtedly be his message concerning **The Day of the Lord**. You cannot read, study or comprehend Joel without being touched by his piercing thoughts relating to **this Day**. Joel refers to the **Day of the Lord** on **5** occasions (1:15, 2:1, 2:11, 2:31, 3:14). Three of these are in chapter 2, and two of them, act as bookends (v1 & 11) to this distinct section of chapter 2 that forms our bible reading for today.

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 – Joel 2:1

The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it? Joel 2: 11b

This first section in Chapter 2 takes us back to the fearsome locust plague which has devastated the nation and brought it to its knees. Now Joel takes his description and understanding of this plague to *a new level* as he brings in the ultimate challenge of *the day of the Lord*. From this prophet's perspective, the locust plague can be seen as the day of the Lord, which is the day of God's visitation and intervention in judgement, but the locust plague also acts as a graphic and pertinent illustration of the *yet far greater and more dreadful Day of the Lord that awaits every one of us in the future*.

In other words, the locust plague is a **harbinger** or precursor to the greater day of the Lord yet to come. A "harbinger", according to the Oxford dictionary, is a person or thing that announces or signals the approach of another. A harbinger is a forerunner. In this case, the locust plague is acting as a harbinger that signals a yet greater and more fearsome Day of the Lord in the future, at the climax of world history.

This way of communicating is used by many of the prophets and by Jesus himself who was the ultimate and final Prophet of the Lord, the Word of God made flesh. In relation to the *day of the Lord*, an event could be seen as both **near and far, historical (about to take place or have taken place) and eschatological – yet to come in the far future**. In the case of Joel, the day of the Lord is near in terms of the locust plague but far in terms of a greater Day in the future. In the case of Jesus's and his substantial teaching about *the day of the Lord* (Matthew 24: 1-51, Mark 13: 1-36 and Luke 21:5-36), he speaks/prophesies **both** about the tragic and *imminent day* of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (in AD70), **and** the still greater *day of his own return, the return of the Son of Man in power and with great glory*. In both cases, in the teaching of Joel, and the Lord Jesus, the greater and far more dreadful and awesome day is the eschatological Day – the one at the very climax of history, which brings in the final judgement and destruction and the most glorious restoration of all.

In the OT prophets, the Day of the Lord is understood as a great day of both judgment and salvation, of destruction and restoration. It is decisively God's Day, the Day God acts in unmistakable power and glory, a Day of His personal arrival and intervention. There can be no mistaking the Day of the Lord and the adjectives "great" and "dreadful" are most apt. (2:11)

Joel once again hones in on the locust plague, and his vivid description of it in chapter 2 is designed to urge *a response of radical repentance*. He depicts the plague in terms of a *military invasion*. The locust

plague is “like” an army, and God is the General who leads (11). Much of the language is militaristic and speaks of the unstoppable invasion of the insect army.

At the break of dawn, rising up, suddenly coming up over the mountains, there arrives a vast, almost numberless army (2). The light is blotted out as it approaches through the air. There is already a sense of dread and alarm. The army moves in swiftly “like a wild fire” to devour the land and its vegetation. What had been like the garden of Eden now becomes scorched earth. The head shape of the locust strangely resembles that of a horse – and the millions of invaders gallop along like a well drilled cavalry. They charge together, in unison, scaling and breaching walls; they are remarkably disciplined – “never breaking ranks” (8). “Like thieves” they enter every place at will, and these hordes of munching locusts sound like a “crackling fire” as they totally devour everything in their pathway.

If you read modern descriptions of actual locust plagues – it is remarkable just how accurate Joel’s description is. It is a brilliant piece of writing designed to stir up deep concern, fear and respect for the devastating power of this kind of natural disaster. Such disaster or imminent disaster must alert people to serious and sincere repentance according to the prophet.

This was the *immediate* Day of the Lord for Joel. The Lord heads the army on this day. But what of the other Day of the Lord – the one in the future – the eschatological one - the one that Jesus also speaks about in detail and with such authority? In the NT, this awesome Day, which signals the end of “*this present age*”, and the start of the “*age to come*” is described in many ways including the following;

- The day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:2). He will come “like” a thief. (Joel uses the imagery of thieves when referring to the locust in 2:9)
- The day of the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:14, Matthew 24:42, 1 Corinthians 1:8).
- The day of Christ/Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6, 1:10)
- The coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:15).
- The day of God (2 Peter 3:12).
- The day of judgement (2 Peter 3:7, Acts 17:31)
- The day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30)
- The day of God’s wrath (Romans 2:5 and many verses in Revelation)
- The day he visits us (1 Peter 2:12)
- The Day (Hebrews 10:25, 1 Corinthians 3:13)
- That Day (2 Timothy 1:12,18, Matthew 24:36)
- The great day (Jude 6)
- The great and glorious day of the Lord (Acts 2:20)
- The last day (John 6:39,40,44,54, 11:24, 12:48). This is but one way Jesus refers to this day.

This is a pretty full list of the ways in which the day of the Lord is described in the NT. Other things which the NT teaches and emphasises clearly about the day of the Lord are that it will come suddenly and unexpectedly (Matthew 24:44). It will surprise and shock people; it will cause unprecedented, never to be repeated, terror and alarm. It will come like a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, Matthew 24:43). Many people will be caught totally off guard – with no oil in their lamps – according to Jesus’s parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25: 1-13). This is the day when Christ appears for **the second time** in history (Hebrews 9:28), but this time as **Judge**. This is the day when believers who are alive at the time of His magnificent return, will be “caught up” in the air to meet the returning Christ who is their Saviour. This is the day when the dead are raised for judgment. This is therefore the day of separation – sheep being separated from goats (Matthew 25:31f), wheat from weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43), good fish from bad ones (Matthew 13:47-52).

On the positive side, this great and dreadful day will signal the end of this evil age, the destruction of Satan, and all evil and injustice. The old order of things will be finished (with its sicknesses, pain, viruses, death, weeping and sorrow; Revelation 21:1-4). God will usher in the fullness of his Kingdom. His Kingdom will NOW COME fully and completely! (1 Corinthians 15: 24-25) There will be new heavens and a new earth, a new home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:12-13) God will come down and dwell with his people in peace and harmony, joy and love. (Revelation 21:3) The restoration and healing of all things will take place, and glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Prophets of the OT such as Joel and Isaiah foresaw this restoration and new creation – this paradise regained, this full and total redemption under God’s glorious sovereignty. The God who reigns and who created all things will miraculously, dramatically and decisively come and recreate all things, to the glory and praise of his Name. It will ALL happen **on the Day of the Lord**. This is why this is so supremely important. This is why Joel is important. He is the prophet “par-excellence” concerning the day of the Lord.

It is well worth observing how these “two” days of the Lord are connected by Joel in this second chapter; the day that was now upon them historically through the plague of locusts, and the day that was to come with the second coming of Jesus Christ. I will highlight 4 points of prophetic connection.

Firstly, there is what I will refer to as **the daunting arrival and appearing**. The picture Joel gives us at the start of chapter 2 is haunting and alarming, and it is meant to be so. *“Like dawn spreading across the mountains, a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old, nor ever will be in the ages to come.”* Here is the rising up, the coming and the arrival of the locusts. And with regards to the second coming of the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man? *“Look he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him: and all the people on the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be. Amen! I am the Alpha and the Omega says the Lord God, who was and is and is **to come**, the Almighty. (Revelation 1:7)* Or consider these words from Matthew’s gospel; *“At that time the **sign of the Son of man** will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24:30) Like dawn spreading across the mountains* – the locusts arrived, and so the Lord of glory will arrive at the last day.

Secondly, there will be the sounding of a **great trumpet**. *Joel exclaims; “Blow the trumpet in Zion: sound the alarm on my holy hill.” (2:1)* The trumpet here would be the famous ram’s horn that was sounded at the commencement of battles, or as a resounding call to worship, or as a call to take note of an important announcement. The name of the ram’s horn was the “shofar” and everybody took note when they heard it. And at the coming of the Lord Jesus? *“And he (Jesus) will send his angels with a loud **trumpet call**, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.” (Matthew 24:31)* In a large section of teaching to the Thessalonians about Christ’s return, Paul writes; *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the **trumpet call of God**, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1Thessalonians 4:16)* And in 1 Corinthians 15:51, Paul writes dramatically; *“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trumpet**. For **the trumpet will sound**, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”* Blow the trumpet in Zion cries Joel, sound the alarm on my holy hill.

Thirdly, there will be **the arrival of the Head of the army with his army! He will lead!** We are informed by Joel that *“the Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who **obey his commands**.” (Joel 2:11)* Just as *the Lord* led this army of locusts, so the Lord Jesus will lead his army at the last day, but this will be a mighty army of the angelic host. The angels are the ones who always do his bidding (Psalm 103:20-21), who obey his commands. Firstly, according to the imagery/symbolism of Revelation – Christ will come – the Rider upon a white horse. **Read Revelation**

19:11-16. In attendance with Him, will be his powerful angels. There are numerous references to the coming of the army of angels with Christ, and here is one from 2 Thessalonians 1:7. *“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.”*

Fourthly, the day of the Lord is accompanied with great, awesome and terrifying apocalyptic and cosmic signs and wonders. This is mentioned twice in **Joel 2** in separate contexts (**Joel 2:10, 2:30-31**). There will be a great shaking of the earth and the heavens, affecting the sun and the moon and the constellations. And at the return of Jesus? Our King of creation, who holds all things together is returning to judge, and his return is accompanied by these strange and fear-inducing signs. In Matthew 24:29, from the lips of Jesus; *Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn.*” Faces will turn pale in terror and astonishment (Joel 2:6 and Matthew 24:21).

Hopefully you can see how Joel links the locust plague with the even greater day of the Lord at the end of history. We are back with the doctrine of the **sovereignty of God** again, a major theme in Joel and the entire bible. God is God of all, and God of history. He created the world! He entered into the world in Jesus in to redeem it. **He will come again at “the end”** and bring into being the new heavens and a new earth – the home of righteousness – for his righteous, sanctified and glorified people.

This is why the bible again and again strongly exhorts us to be ready for the day of the Lord, the day of God’s decisive and unprecedented coming in Jesus Christ. The bible encourages you and I to be;

- Absolutely **ready** for it. This is going to happen. Just as Christ came once (historical) – so He will come again at the end of history (eschatological). Be ready for Him. Watch for His coming. Be ready through **repentance and faith**. Repent from all sin and evil, and place your faith in Christ who gave up his life for you on the cross. Be *dressed* ready for the eternal marriage feast with *his garment of righteousness wrapped around you*. Ensure your robes have been washed in the blood of Lamb and your name is in the Book of life. (Revelation 7:14, 19:8, 22:14) We have much more to learn about repentance and readiness for this great day next week as we move on to the next section which is all about true and active repentance (Joel 2:12-17) We must all turn back to God in repentance, and embrace by faith his salvation in Jesus before the advent of this decisive day of judgement, salvation and separation.
- Not only should we be **ready** and alert for this day – we should be **looking for it** and **hastening** it’s coming through our prayers and action, and through the sharing of the gospel. (2 Peter 3:12) We must pray regularly with all our hearts; *Your Kingdom come; your will be done*. We should constantly pray the very last prayer recorded in the bible; **“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”** (Revelation 22:20). Maranatha! Jesus will only return once the gospel has been taken to all nations, once the number of his people (his elect) is complete. We hasten the day of his coming through personal evangelism, through missions to the ends of the earth, bible translation and distribution, and constant compassionate outreach. We must scatter the seed of the word of the kingdom. Then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14, 1 Peter 3:8-9, 14-15).

As we come to the end of this brief survey of how the bible presents *the day of the Lord* through the prophet Joel and through the Lord Jesus and the writers of the New Testament, we can end by acknowledging that this **great and dreadful day** (Joel 2:11) will be a day of division and separation, and you and I must be on the right side of the divide. For some the day will be **great** and for others it will inevitably be **dreadful**.

If you have taken time to read the bible – it will be obvious which people will hate this day, and for whom it will be a dreadful day, a day of disastrous consequences, mourning and bitter regret. It will obviously be a dreadful day for hardened atheists, for those who have tirelessly reiterated their arrogant disbelief in God. Imagine arguing vociferously all your life that there is no God – only to be confronted by Him and His splendid glory on the last day. It will also be an agonising day for agnostics – those who have simply sat on the fence and been entirely non-comittal. It will be a bad day for the self-righteous who have never bowed the knee and gladly given their hearts to Jesus, and recognised their vital need for mercy. (Luke 18:9-14) It will be a dreadful day for all who are arrogant, boastful, proud and greedy. (Isaiah 2:12-17) It will be horrific for all godless, greedy and cruel dictators and totalitarian leaders who have oppressed and murdered the poor and innocent. It will be a bad day for all who live immoral lives and for all who have perpetrated and perpetuated injustice, abuse, immorality and cruelty. It will be a bad day for religious hypocrites. It will be a bad day for all who have actively sided with Satan, the occult, witchcraft, cults and false prophets/religion. The bible is clear about who will and who will not inherit the Kingdom of God. It stresses that people *must not be deceived* about this. (Ephesians 5:5-6, Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11, Revelation 21:8, 22:15)

On the other hand, the day of the Lord will be a great and glorious day for **all who have “called upon the name of the Lord”** for forgiveness, salvation and hope. (**Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, 38-39**) Have you done that? Have you personally called upon the name of the Lord Jesus who died and rose again for you? Are you dressed ready to meet God? According to the Lord Jesus himself, that day will be a fantastic day for the humble poor, the poor in spirit. It will also be a glorious day for all who have truly mourned and for the meek who will now finally inherit the earth; for those who have hungered after righteousness and justice in this evil and unjust age; for the godly peacemakers and reconcilers; for the pure in heart, and especially for the persecuted and those martyred for Jesus and for the sake of his Kingdom. Great will be their reward in heaven. (Mathew 5 v 1-12) The martyrs will be entirely vindicated and receive crowns of everlasting righteousness whereas persecutors will perish. The joy and vindication of the martyrs will know no bounds according to the book of Revelation. No longer will they cry out “How long?” Their waiting for justice will be over. It will be a great day of total redemption, restoration and liberation for all the children of God, and for the whole creation that has groaned and agonised under sin and curse for so long. (Romans 8: 18-25, Isaiah 65: 17-25)

May God guide us and keep us until this great day of the Lord dawns upon this decaying world– the day when the Lord Jesus Christ will finally and fully consummate His kingdom, and be acknowledged as the undisputed King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess His Lordship to the glory of God. (Philippians 2: 9-11). Nothing/no-one can thwart the plan of God who reigns over all creation and all history. The end is in His sight and in His power and under His authority.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for ever-more. **Amen.** (Jude 24-25)

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