

### A Description of the Day of the Lord

#### Joel 1:15-2:17

Joel 1:15-2:17 – *“Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand; It shall come as destruction from the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? <sup>17</sup> The seed shrivels under the clods, storehouses are in shambles; Barns are broken down, for the grain has withered.*

*<sup>18</sup> How the animals groan! The herds of cattle are restless because they have no pasture; Even the flocks of sheep suffer punishment. <sup>19</sup> O LORD, to You I cry out; for fire has devoured the open pastures, and a flame has burned all the trees of the field. <sup>20</sup> The beasts of the field also cry out to You, for the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the open pastures.*

**2** *Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, For it is at hand:*

*<sup>2</sup> A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; Nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations.*

*<sup>3</sup> A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; Surely nothing shall escape them. <sup>4</sup> Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run. <sup>5</sup> With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. <sup>6</sup> Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color. <sup>7</sup> They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; Every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. <sup>8</sup> They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. <sup>9</sup> They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; They climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief.*

*<sup>10</sup> The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. <sup>11</sup> The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it? <sup>12</sup> “Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” <sup>13</sup> So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; He relents from doing harm. <sup>14</sup> Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him—*

*A grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?*

*<sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; <sup>16</sup> Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber and the bride from her dressing room. <sup>17</sup> Let the priests, who minister to the LORD weep between the porch and the altar;*

*Let them say, "Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach,  
That the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"*

## Background Notes

"The Day of the Lord" is the theme of the prophecy of Joel. This term occurs frequently in the Bible. In general, a "day of the Lord" can refer to any time the Lord intervenes in the affairs of nations. It could be for blessing, or it could be for judgment.

The concept of the Day of the Lord is sometimes confusing, especially in the Old Testament, because there is both an historical aspect as well as an eschatological (future) aspect to the Day of the Lord. Some events predicted for the Day of the Lord have already taken place, but some won't be fulfilled until the End Times. Sometimes it's very confusing when the prophet presents both the historical and eschatological aspects to the Day of the Lord in the same passage, or moves from one to the other without telling us!

The best way to appreciate the prophets' view of the future is to consider what I call the "illustration of the mountain peaks." Imagine that you're driving west from Chicago to Colorado to do a little skiing in the Rocky Mountains. Looking west from the plains of eastern Colorado, off in the distance you'll see the Rocky Mountains silhouetted against the sky. They almost look flat - two dimensional against the sky, with no depth. You know there are foothills and high peaks with distances between them, but from your present perspective out on the plains, they're all fused together like a silhouette.

This "flat" view of the Rocky Mountains is very much like the view the Old Testament prophets had. To the prophet, the future events were all out there in the distance, like the mountain peaks in the distance, and the prophet saw them as somewhat fused together. He knew that these events in the future wouldn't happen simultaneously, just as we know there's distance between the various peaks of the Rocky Mountains. But the prophet gave his prophecy as though he was looking from the plains. Coming to the New Testament is like driving from the plains into the mountains and seeing the exact arrangement of the peaks. We have the New Testament perspective, so we can now see clearly what events have been fulfilled and what events are still future.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The day of the Lord was partially fulfilled in the past.

Verse 15: *"Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand."* Joel realized that the locust plague of chapter 1 had been a harbinger of the coming Day of the Lord. The locust plague was not the Day of the Lord, but it foreshadowed the Day of the Lord. It hadn't happened yet, but it was near. The Day of the Lord would involve the invasion of Israel by a military

army (Joel 2). Just as the locusts had devastated the land, so this coming powerful army would invade Israel and devastate the land: *“A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been.”*

Joel 1:16-20 is a further description of the terrible conditions that people faced because of the locust plague of chapter 1. There had been famine of both food and joy because of the locust plague (1:16-17). Fire had devoured the pastures because of the dry conditions left by the locust plague (v19-20). So all these sad conditions foreshadow the Day of the Lord, and Joel wanted to point out how much worse conditions would be during the future military invasion. Verse 15 warned that it was near. In chapter 2 Joel described the future military invasion of Israel.

Now the big question: Did the predicted military invasion of chapter 2 take place in past history, or is it yet to take place in the future? The answer to both questions is “Yes.” Many of the conditions described in the early part of chapter 2 were fulfilled in history, with the Assyrian invasion of Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC and the Babylonian invasion in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Certainly Joel’s prophecy of the day of the Lord has already been partially fulfilled in history, so the Day of the Lord was partially fulfilled in the past.

## **2. The Day of the Lord will be completely fulfilled in the future.**

As we read on in chapter 2 and into chapter 3, we find that there are a number of things mentioned which indicate that the day of the Lord is still future, or eschatological. Verses 10-11: *“The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. <sup>11</sup> The Lord gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?”*

This sounds very much like the conditions our Lord described in Matthew 24 about His return that is yet future. Matthew 24:20 - *“But I will remove far from you the northern army, and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea; his stench will come up, and his foul odor will rise, because he has done monstrous things.”*

Joel 2:30-31 says, *“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.”*

This also sounds very much like the prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel (Ezekiel 38-39 & Daniel 11). These prophets describe a future invasion of Israel by a northern army, and its defeat and removal by the Lord Himself.

Joel 3:2 - *“I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there.”* And verse 12: *“Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.”* Again, this is the same eschatological language that our Lord used in reference to His second coming in His Olivet Discourse, when He spoke of the future judgment of the nations in Matthew 25.

So all of these events that Joel associated with the Day of the Lord are yet future. The Day of the Lord is near and yet eschatological - in fact, most of the predictions in the Bible concerning the day of the Lord are yet to be fulfilled. The day of the Lord will be completely fulfilled in the future.

## Practical Application

### Rend your heart - not your garments!

This practical application comes right from Joel 2:13. In verses 12-17, Joel was calling for national repentance, just as repentance was made after the locust plague. But in Joel 2 the call for repentance was made in view of the judgment to come upon the nation through the invading enemy army.

Notice that the enemy was called "*the Lord's army!*" Question: How can an enemy army be called the *Lord's* army? Answer: God can use anything He wants, including enemy armies, to judge nations and discipline His people – both then and today. Are there any "enemies" that God is using right now in your life, in order to discipline you?

So a call for national repentance went out in view of the coming judgment (v12-13 and 15-17.) In that day, the sign of repentance was to tear your clothes - but sometimes tearing the garments was done just for outward show, and not because of true repentance of the heart. So Joel called upon the people to rend their **hearts** - not just their garments.

Today people can make a great outward show of repentance when there's no real repentance in their hearts. We're all familiar with public officials who say they're sorry for the scandals and troubles they've caused, but afterwards, their lives often show little or no true repentance.

Notice some signs of true repentance in these verses. True repentance means returning to the Lord your God based on **His** grace and mercy alone and not your own merits (v13). True repentance makes no claim on God, but says that God is right to judge (v14). True repentance is more concerned about the glory of God, and not our own reputation (v17).

Is there an area of your life about which you need to really repent - not just an outward show but real repentance? Rend your **heart** - not just your garments!