

What the Locust Left: Joel 1's Wake-Up Call to a Devastated Nation

Scriptures for Today

"" Joel 1:1-7

The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. 2 Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? 3 Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. 4 That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten. 5 Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. 6 For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. 7 He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white.""

Introduction – When God Sends the Swarm

The Book of Joel opens not with comfort but catastrophe.

In all the so-called "Christian" churches today, they only want comfort. They only want to preach the feel good parts of the Bible. But, if you read your Bible, you'll hit a huge section of Scripture that is not very comfortable.

Here in Joel, think about this. Everything green is gone. The crops are stripped, the economy is wrecked, and the priests have nothing left to offer at the altar. Nothing is left. They can't even make an offering to God.

At first glance it's just a plague of insects — but Joel says it's something deeper: **God shaking His people awake.**

Sometimes God has to strip the field before He can save the heart.

Historical Context: Joel prophesied to Judah — probably between the reigns of Joash and Uzziah — sometime before Assyria rose in power. Israel to the north has already fallen; Judah's still standing, but spiritually asleep. The locusts arrive like a living sermon.

What if the next crisis in your life isn't punishment — but preparation for something far greater? What if what God takes away is exactly what will save you? What if what you're going through is preparing you for far greater things? Keep the faith strong. Keep going. Fight through.

Verse 1 – The Word That Came

""Joel 1:1

The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.""

Every revival begins the same way — *with a word from God*. We see the word of the Lord come to Joel right here. This is how we know the book of Joel is Scripture.

Joel's name means "**The LORD is God.**" His father's name, **Pethuel**, means "**vision of God.**" Together, they tell the story:

When the Word comes, the vision is made clear. Before locusts ever touched the land, God touched a man to give warning. He still does that today — He raises up preachers to give warning before the storm comes.

Joel most likely is from Judah, but we don't know much about Joel. We don't know much about Pethuel. So that's a clue here to focus on the message from the Lord to Joel.

Verse 2–3 – Wake Up and Tell It

""Joel 1:2–3

Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? 3 Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.""

God says, "This isn't normal — and I don't want you to forget it." Imagine all of the things that God has done that we forget. For example, the rainbows you'll see in the sky. Don't forget what God did. Think of all the help He's given you when you needed it. Don't forget.

He calls the elders first, because wisdom has a duty: **to remember and to warn. He says, "Hear this, ye old men! And give ear!"** This isn't just to all the old men or elders, but it's to all the inhabitants of the land.

Why does God begin with the **old men**? Because in Israel, the elders were the keepers of memory. They were the living history books — the ones who had seen rain and drought, blessing and famine, revival and rebellion. When even the elders have no frame of reference for what's happening, you know God is sounding an alarm.

This wasn't just another bad harvest. This was something so shocking that God says, "Stop everything. Listen. Has anything like this ever happened before?" When the wisest men have no comparison, you're watching God's divine judgment unfold.

And then God commands them to *tell it*. Notice right there what's happening. "Tell ye your children." And their children. And their children. Not just to their children — but to their children's children. That's a **four-generation command**.

Judgment loses its power when memory fades. If one generation stops talking about what sin costs, the next generation will start playing with it again. We've had lessons in our life that we don't share. We need to start sharing these things. We need to teach our children.

If your kids only know about God's *love* and not His *justice*, you haven't told the whole story. Silence in one generation becomes sin in the next.

Don't just pass down stories of blessing — pass down stories of brokenness too. Write down what God brought you through. Tell your kids how mercy found you, and how judgment could've taken you. Because when a family forgets what God saved them from, they eventually go back to it.

Every generation either multiplies truth or magnifies tragedy — it depends on whether the elders speak or stay silent. We are to speak and tell the truth to our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

Write down what God brought you through. Don't let your kids grow up thinking grace is automatic. Tell them about the tough times and what God did for you.

Verse 4 – The Layers of Loss

""Joel 1:4

That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.""

Take a close look again. You see four waves — four destroyers — each leaving less than the last. This isn't just a description of bugs; it's a **portrait of spiritual devastation**. I want you to see this deeply today.

When God wants to show how sin strips life bare, He paints it with locusts. Let's break down the swarm that we see here. Remember, they are coming to destroy in four phases.

1. The Palmerworm – The Gnawer (Hebrew: *gazam*)

This one starts small. It chews at the tender shoots — the *beginnings* of growth. That's what sin does at first — it looks harmless, barely noticeable. But it always starts by gnawing away at the roots of conviction.

Let's say I had a young plant here with chewed leaves. The palmerworm eats quietly — that's compromise. The decay you excuse before destruction begins. When you begin to compromise, that's what this represents. An example: "Well, it's okay if I miss church today. I'll go next time." That's just a little bit of compromise. But you missed something big. That hurts. What's next?

2. The Locust – The Swarming Devourer (Hebrew: *arbeh*)

Now the swarm hits. These are the destroyers that fill the sky, moving in chaos and noise. This stage represents **open rebellion** — when sin no longer hides. Like Pride month. They do it all out in the open. They show the little children all their sins and the pride they have in those sins.

The locust devours what the palmerworm only weakened. It's what happens when secret sin becomes public shame.

How many homes have gone from one person's quiet compromise to a full-blown generational collapse? And the children continue in it. And the grandchildren continue. It's a curse that can be broken. You can be the one to break it for your family, for the children, for the grandchildren.

3. The Cankerworm – The Creeper (Hebrew: *yeleq*)

This one crawls and latches on. It eats the bark, the stems, the structure. Do you see what's happening here? Now, even if the leaves grow back, the tree can't bear fruit. This is the stage of **corruption** — when sin eats into institutions, systems, churches, and nations.

The public schools are an example. They were started to help children learn the Bible and to hear the truth. But now that truth is gone and the Bible is far gone from the public schools. Now it's just pure corruption. Without God in the schools, imagine what would happen. But now you don't have to imagine, you can see it with your own eyes.

We have children from the public schools that want to come in here and start fights between adults. You're not bringing that trash in here. The manipulation. I don't think so. You can take it somewhere else. Not happening here. I'll drop that in a split second. And let me tell you something. If you want to get my wife involved in your elementary school fights, you're going to make me angry. Get that cankerworm trash out of here and don't ever bring it back.

The cankerworm isn't loud, but it's lethal. That's what happens when moral decay becomes normal. You think it's okay. It's quiet. For example, no discipline in the public schools. The kids get to do whatever they want all day long.

Then they go home and do whatever they want all the time. Then they come in here and think they're going to run things at church too. Not happening. If you want to cause trouble here, there will be consequences.

4. The Caterpillar – The Consumer (Hebrew: *chasil*)

Finally, the fourth wave comes. The caterpillar comes — not like our modern butterfly larvae, but a stripping locust-like insect that leaves nothing behind.

This is **total ruin** — when the soul, family, or nation is spiritually barren. Nothing green. No fruit. No shade. Just dust. When we allow people to continue in sin, and don't compel them to make changes, this is what happens.

A Godly family home that turned to sin and didn't kick it out. Let's say there's a man in the family who won't work, who continues in sin, who wants to be a bum, wants to get drunk, wants to do drugs, wants to fornicate, won't come to church, feeds off everyone else, and runs his nasty mouth to people. And you help him continue in this. NO, YOU KICK HIM OUT.

Do you really want to invite total ruin to the entire family? Do you want that man to take the entire family down?

Imagine an awesome garden that gets overtaken by these 4 waves of insects. Nothing is left. “That’s what the devil leaves when he’s done — form without life.” The life is gone.

Think of this spiritually. Each swarm builds on the last — like waves of judgment or backsliding:

1. **Palmerworm** – *Private sin*
2. **Locust** – *Public rebellion*
3. **Cankerworm** – *Institutional corruption*
4. **Caterpillar** – *Total destruction*

What God gave as a garden ends as a grave. That’s not just an agricultural disaster — that’s what happens when a nation rejects God’s Word. And that's what's happening in this country. But look how it started: with each individual, then moved to individuals getting together in public rebellion, then entire institutions and nations, and then total destruction.

In other words, the caterpillar is on its way for this country. America isn’t dying from lack of money — it’s dying from **locusts of morality**, one swarm after another:

- First came disbelief — people stopped trusting God’s Word.
- Then came indulgence — people lived for pleasure instead of purity.
- Then came distortion — truth was twisted to fit desire.
- And now comes destruction — the harvest of everything sown in sin.

Ask yourself this: “What’s been eaten in my life that only God can restore? What part of me did the palmerworm start chewing that the caterpillar finished?”

Because the same God who allowed the locusts in Joel’s day still says in Joel 2:25 — “I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.” God can fix things. You simply have to trust Him.

Verse 5 – The Drunkard's Awakening

""Joel 1:5

Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.""

Notice who God is calling out first here. AWAKE YE DRUNKARDS! He says to weep and howl.

Who is God calling first? He's calling the pleasure-seekers first. People who seek pleasure constantly. Here's an example for you: Marijuana smokers. You want that feeling. That feel good dopamine rush. You want that high. You're hooked on the pleasure. But it's all fake. It's actually destroying you. I can see it with my own eyes. God's calling you out today. RIGHT NOW.

AWAKE, YE DRUNKARDS! Let's say you don't like hearing that today. Let me think for a second. Do I care if you don't like hearing God's words? No, I don't care. I'm going to tell you the truth and maybe, just maybe, you'll WAKE UP out of that trance the dope has you in. Cry, weep, howl. God wants you to WAKE UP.

To a nation of indulgence, God removes indulgence. The "new wine" — the fresh juice from the latest harvest — represented **comfort, celebration, and control**. But now it's *gone*. No vineyard. No harvest. No more pretending that everything's fine.

God takes away the bottle so He can give back the blessing. He cuts off what intoxicates to restore what sanctifies.

Wine here doesn't just symbolize alcohol — it's a picture of **pleasure, distraction, and self-medication**. Israel was drinking to forget, not to rejoice. That's why God says, "*Awake.*" Sin always puts people to sleep before it destroys them.

God didn't tell them to *stop drinking* first — He told them to *wake up*. Because before repentance comes **sobriety of spirit** — the ability to see what you've really lost. Drugs and alcohol cause you to lose everything.

Look, I don't say this so you can ignore this and move on. Ask: What 'wine' have I been living on that's keeping me from God? What do I reach for instead of prayer? What numbs me instead of changing me? What is taking me down? If you'll let Him take the cup, He'll give you a crown.

Verse 6–7 – The Enemy Behind the Swarm

""Joel 1:6–7

For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. 7 He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white.""

Here the imagery shifts — the locusts turn into an **army**. Joel uses **two overlapping pictures** — the **locust swarm** and a **foreign army** — and deliberately blurs the line between them. The locusts that began as a natural disaster in verses 4–5 now become symbolic of an invading force.

God is showing that what *looked* like insects was actually **judgment wearing nature's mask**. “A nation is come up upon my land” — God calls the locusts *a nation*. He uses that word intentionally because they march like trained soldiers: organized, relentless, unstoppable.

In the ancient Near East, a locust invasion looked exactly like an army campaign — clouds darkening the sky, fields stripped bare, noise like chariots when they landed. (Joel 2:5 confirms this.)

The “Teeth of a Lion”

“Strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion.”

This isn't exaggeration — it's escalation. Locusts don't just nibble; they *consume*. When Joel says they have “lion's teeth,” he's describing their **ferocity and totality** — nothing is spared. But spiritually, the “lion” language also mirrors **enemy nations** (Assyria, Babylon), who devour with the same hunger.

God is saying: “You thought it was just insects — but I'm showing you how sin attracts predators. When you leave your vineyard unguarded, lions come.”

The Vine and Fig Tree

“He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree.”

The **vine** and **fig tree** appear together repeatedly in Scripture as the **symbols of peace and prosperity** (1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4). To “sit under your vine and fig tree” meant security — no war, no fear, no famine.

Now God says they're stripped and barked. “Barked” means the outer layer of the tree has been chewed off, exposing the white inner wood — *it's still standing, but dead*. This is the picture of a nation that still looks alive but has lost its fruit — **appearance without abundance**.

- The **vine** represents **spiritual life** — your personal walk with God, your inner connection to Him.
- The **fig tree** represents **outward fruitfulness** — visible blessings, family, stability, and peace.

When the locusts came, both were destroyed. It's God showing Israel: “You've lost the fruit because you've lost the root.” YOU LOST IT! “Everything is made white.” It's bare.

He calls it “*My land*” — meaning, even in judgment, it’s still His. They forgot they were stewards, not owners. That’s why He allowed it to be stripped — to remind them who truly provides the harvest.

“God said, ‘That vine is mine. That fig tree is mine. You enjoyed the fruit but forgot the Farmer.’ So He let the land go bare — not to destroy it, but to make them hungry for Him again.”

Sometimes what you call *disaster* is really *deliverance* — God breaking idols you didn’t know you had. The stripping wasn’t the end — it was the setup for restoration.

Closing Call – When the Field Becomes the Pulpit

Joel’s message is simple:

When God’s people ignore His gentle warnings (the **whisper** — like preaching, conscience, conviction), He’ll eventually use **stronger measures** (the **wind** — like storms, loss, or disaster) to get their attention.

The locusts were God’s loudspeaker — and the famine His call. What the locust left was the lesson they needed.

I want you to do this. Find one area of waste — time, money, influence — and dedicate it back to God today. Turn your loss into a lesson. For example, playing games at times is fine. But don’t let them overtake your day. Don’t let Facebook take your entire day. Don’t waste the precious time God gave you.

Next-Sermon – “The LORD Roars from Zion: Amos 1’s Opening Warning”

We’ve heard Joel’s wake-up call — locusts, loss, and lessons from judgment. But Sunday morning, we’ll hear something even louder. Because while Joel shows us the *damage* of sin, **Amos reveals the danger of ignoring it.**

Pastor Nathan Holmes is bringing a message titled “**The LORD Roars from Zion: Amos 1’s Opening Warning.**” When a lion roars, everything in the jungle stops — and when God roars, no one can pretend they didn’t hear.

If you’ve ever wondered whether God still speaks to a rebellious world — the next sermon will answer that question. Don’t miss it. The roar from Zion isn’t just judgment, it’s mercy trying to get your attention before it’s too late.

Let’s pray.