

The Day of the Lord is Near: Joel 1:15-20

Scriptures for Today:

Joel 1:15-20 *Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come. 16 Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God? 17 The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. 18 How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. 19 O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. 20 The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.*

Introduction

Imagine opening your mail tomorrow and finding a notice that says:

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: \$500,000

At first, you think there must be some mistake. Then you remember. Ten years ago, you signed a loan with a balloon payment. The monthly payments were small, but the agreement stated that the remaining balance plus interest would become due all at once at the end.

So you signed it, put the paperwork aside and went on with your life. It remained somewhere in the back of your mind, but because the due date was so far away it never felt urgent.

But now the payment day is at hand. There's no more overlooking it. It demands your attention. And you're unprepared because you were too focused on other things.

That is the urgency we find at the end of Joel chapter 1.

Joel, who is a prophet of God, has already described a devastating locust plague that swept across the land of Judah.

Wave after wave of insects devoured everything growing in the fields. Back then you couldn't just walk into a grocery store. More people grew their own food. They relied on gathering during harvest.

Example: Ruth gleaned the fields to gather food for her and Naomi.

But now everything that grows has been consumed.

The vines were destroyed. The fig trees were stripped bare. The grain had withered. The farmers had nothing to harvest, and the priests had no grain or wine to offer in the house of God.

Joel commanded the people to remember what happened and tell it to the generations that followed. He told the drunkards to awaken, the farmers to be ashamed, and the priests to mourn.

The destruction surrounding them served as a warning. But Joel did not want the people to focus only on the locusts, the empty barns, and the ruined fields. He wanted them to understand what that devastation was pointing toward...

A greater day was approaching. A day when payment would be due and judgement would be poured out. The day of the Lord was at hand.

The locust plague had given the people a glimpse of divine judgment. Joel is going to turn their attention from the destruction already surrounding them to the greater destruction that would come from the Almighty.

1. The Day of the LORD Is Near (v.15)

Joel 1:15 Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD *is* at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

“Alas” is a cry of grief and distress.

Joel was not treating prophecy as an interesting subject to discuss. He understood that real people would experience real destruction.

Example: If someone smells smoke in the middle of the night and cries, “The house is on fire!” they’re not trying to start a discussion about fire. *“Let’s all sit down and discuss how dangerous fire can be.”* No. They are trying to awaken everyone before it is too late.

That is the urgency in Joel’s voice: **“Alas for the day!”** ...Which day?

“For the day of the LORD is at hand.”

What Is the Day of the LORD? We need to understand what the Bible means when it speaks about “the Day of the LORD.” The exact phrase “day of the Lord” is used 29 times in the KJV Bible. The best way to understand scripture is to let God’s Word define itself.

I want to read a few instances in the Bible where this phrase is used.

Isaiah 2:12 For the day of the LORD of hosts *shall be* upon every *one that is* proud and lofty, and upon every *one that is* lifted up; and he shall be brought low:

Isaiah 13:6 Howl ye; for the day of the LORD *is* at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.

Isaiah 13:9 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.

Amos 5:18 Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end *is* it for you? the day of the LORD *is* darkness, and not light.

Based on these passages, does the day of the Lord seem like a day of peace, joy, and comfort?

It's a day when everyone that is proud and lifted up will be brought low.

It's a day of destruction. A day of wrath and fierce anger. It's a day of darkness.

Simply put, The Day of the LORD is an appointed time when God openly intervenes in judgment and demonstrates that He is still in control.

There are days when it appears on the outside like man is in control. Nations rise against God. Rulers reject His Word. People live however they please. The wicked prosper, sin appears to go unpunished, and God may seem silent.

But the Day of the LORD is when God openly demonstrates that He is upon the throne. He has all authority and power. It is a day when God says, "Enough." Payment is due.

It's important to understand that the "day of the Lord" in the Bible is used to describe both days that have already taken place in the past, as well as a final day of the Lord in the future.

How do we know this? We can see that there are actual historical days in the past that were distinguished as the day of the Lord...

Jeremiah 46:1-2 The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Gentiles; **2** Against Egypt, against the army of Pharaoh-necho king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon smote in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah.

Jeremiah 46:10 For this *is* the **day of the Lord** GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood: for the Lord GOD of hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates.

Jeremiah 46:13 The word that the LORD spake to Jeremiah the prophet, how Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon should come *and* smite the land of Egypt.

This prophecy of the day that Babylon would destroy Egypt was described as the day of the Lord. There are other examples like this in the Old Testament where we can point to an event that has already taken place and say that was considered a day of the Lord...

It was clear vengeance and judgement from God upon the wicked.

But those historical judgments were not THE final Day of the LORD.

Many hundreds of years later in the New Testament scriptures, Peter spoke of the Day of the Lord as an event that was coming in the future.

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Notice that Peter did not say the Day of the LORD had already come.

He said: “The day of the Lord **will come...**”

Therefore, the Bible speaks of historical Days of the LORD, but it also warns of an ultimate Day of the LORD that is still to come.

On the historical days, God judged particular armies, cities, and nations. But on this future Day, God will judge the entire world. The heavens will pass away with a great noise. The elements will melt with fervent heat. The earth and everything man has built upon it will be burned up.

Last time I checked that did not happen yet.

Think of everything that people spend their lives accumulating: houses, possessions, businesses, money, awards, monuments, and achievements. Imagine spending your whole life trying to earn trophies that sit on a shelf and collect dust.

Peter says that all “the works that are therein shall be burned up.” It will be the ultimate demonstration that God—not man—is in control. Yet people will continue living as though that Day will never come.

2 Peter 3:3-4 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, **4** And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.

Their argument is, “Nothing has happened yet, so nothing is ever going to happen.”

People wake up, go to work, take their children to school, make plans for the weekend, save for retirement, and assume that tomorrow will be another ordinary day.

The sun came up yesterday. The sun came up today. Therefore, they assume it will always continue this way. But another ordinary morning does not prove that God’s promised Day will never arrive.

Imagine someone who receives a notice that their house is scheduled for demolition. The date has been set, but several weeks pass and the house is still standing. They still sleep in the same bedroom every night. Would the continued existence of the house prove that the demolition had been cancelled?

No. Every passing day simply moves the house closer to the appointed date. In the same way, God's patience does not mean that His judgment has been cancelled.

Peter explains why this Day of the Lord has not yet arrived:

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

God is not late. God has not forgotten. God is longsuffering. Every additional day is another opportunity for people to repent and be saved. But that opportunity will not remain open forever.

So the future Day of the LORD is not merely the defeat of another army or the destruction of another nation. It will bring the destruction of this present world, the judgment of the ungodly, and ultimately the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Now that we understand that the Day of the LORD can refer to both historical judgments and the ultimate judgment still to come, how does this relate to Joel 1?

The people in Joel's day were already experiencing a historical judgment from God. The locust plague was not merely an unfortunate natural disaster:

Joel 2:25b ...my great army which I sent among you.

The locusts belonged to God. He commanded them, and He sent them.

But the devastation that they brought did not exhaust everything Joel meant when he spoke of the Day of the LORD.

Joel 1:15 Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD *is* at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

So these locust were both a judgment and a warning. It showed them what happens when God intervenes, while pointing toward that future Day of the Lord what was still approaching.

Later in Joel, the prophecy reaches beyond the current judgment in Judah:

Joel 2:31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

This is a prophecy that is later quoted in the New Testament in Acts 2.

Back in the Old Testament, God was already warning His people of what was to come in the future.

But they did not have to wait until the future to know that God's judgment was real. The evidence was already before their eyes...

Everything Was Cut Off (v. 16-18)

Joel 1:16-18 Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, *yea*, joy and gladness from the house of our God? 17 The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. 18 How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.

Joel is saying, “the day of the Lord is going to come as a destruction from the Almighty.”
“We have the evidence and the warnings right before our eyes.” “Look what God has already done”

“Is not the meat cut off? Our food is gone.”
If an entire nation has no food, that’s a big problem. That’s a huge warning.

Psalm 37:25 I have been young, and *now* am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

Matthew 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Joy and gladness was cut off from the house of God. The people had nothing left to offer to the Lord. Serving God and giving back to Him will bring great joy into your life:

Deuteronomy 12:6-7 And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: **7** And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee.

When you have nothing to give back to God, that’s a big problem. That can be a warning just like it was for Judah.

Joel 1:17 The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered.

Crops were being planted but the seeds were rotting under the dirt.
The garners (where the grain is stored, granary) were laid waste.
Barns are broken down and corn is withered away. Every effort to provide food for themselves had failed.

God is using Joel to remind the people, “Take a look around and see what is happening” I’ve already taken all this away, and I’m about to take more...

It was so bad that even the animals were groaning.

Joel 1:18 How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.

All the important things that they relied on were being cut off. That's a wake up call to take action. It's in those moments that we should examine ourselves.

Lamentations 3:40 Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.

Just because we lose things doesn't mean we are being chastened by God. Look at Job for example. But we should use those times as an opportunity to make sure we are not living in disobedience.

But none of these things should have come as a surprise. God promised that these things would happen if they did not listen to the voice of the Lord and observe His commandments.

Deuteronomy 28:38-39 Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather *but* little in; for the locust shall consume it. **39** Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress *them*, but shalt neither drink *of* the wine, nor gather *the grapes*; for the worms shall eat them.

There are explicit commands for us in the New Testament. When we do not follow them, we should not be surprised when things start to get cut off.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. **11** For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. **12** Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

If you are an able-bodied human being and you have no food because you don't want to work, Just remember that God gave you a command and a warning.

In Joel, the fact that everything was being cut off was proof that God's judgement was coming to pass.

Joel Cried Unto the LORD (v. 19 – 20)

Joel 1:19-20 O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. **20** The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Even though everything around Joel was being cut off and consumed, there was still one thing he could do. The only thing he could do was cry unto God.

Earlier in the chapter, Joel had commanded the people to cry unto the LORD:

Joel 1:14 Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders *and* all the inhabitants of the land *into* the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,

Now Joel is practicing what he preached.

It's easy to talk about what everyone else around us needs to change. But what about me?

Joel personally cried unto the Lord. He didn't wait for the leaders and the priests and the others to cry out. That's what we need to do as a country, as a church, and as individuals, we need to spend time focusing on ourselves. Examining ourselves. Crying out to God. Reading His Word. Fixing the things that He wants us to change.

Why was Joel crying out?

for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. **20** The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Everywhere he looked he saw destruction. Earlier, we read Peter's description of the future Day of the LORD:

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

In Joel, the fire consumed the pastures and trees. In 2 Peter, the earth and all the works that are therein will be burned up. The scale is much greater, but we see the same truth: Everything man depends upon can be consumed when God intervenes in judgment.

The houses, possessions, money, and achievements that people spend their lives accumulating will not last forever.

That is why Peter asks:

2 Peter 3:11 *Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness,

In other words, if we know what is coming, how should it affect the way we live today?

God does not warn us about future consequences simply so we will know about them. He warns us so we will change before they arrive.

Sometimes we need to step back and look at our lives from the outside. Look at the big picture.

What will be the consequences if I continue raising my children the way I am raising them right now?

What will be the consequences if I continue treating my spouse the way I am treating them?

What will happen if I continue eating things that are destroying my health?

What will happen if I keep consuming alcohol, smoking and injecting drugs?

What will happen if I continue ignoring God and rejecting His Word?

What will happen if I reject the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ, and the Day of the Lord arrives?

Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

The consequences may not appear immediately.

You can neglect your children today, and they may appear fine.

You can mistreat your spouse today, and the marriage may remain together.

You can consume something harmful today, and your body may still feel healthy.

You can ignore God today, and tomorrow may seem like another ordinary day.

But that does not mean the consequences will never come.

The harvest does not appear the same day the seed is planted. But eventually, we reap what we have sown.

Joel was looking at the consequences before his eyes. The fields were empty. The barns were broken down. The rivers were dry. The pastures were burned.

But even though everything else was being cut off, Joel could still cry unto the LORD.

That was what God wanted His people to do. He wanted them to stop, examine themselves, and turn unto Him while there was still time.

At the beginning, we imagined receiving a notice that said:

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: \$500,000

You could place that notice inside a drawer and continue living as though everything were normal.

But ignoring the notice would not cancel the payment. Every ordinary day would bring the appointed day closer.

Joel was delivering a warning from God: "The day of the LORD is at hand."

Judah had continued living as though everything would remain the same. But then everything that brought joy and gladness was cut off. The appointed consequences had arrived.

Sin allows you to enjoy something now while hiding what it will cost you later. But eventually, payment becomes due.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Day of the LORD is not merely history for us to study. It is also a future warning for us to heed.

God's judgments in the past prove that His warnings are not empty. And the future Day of the LORD reminds us that we must be ready.

So do not put God's warning back into the drawer.

If you are not saved, believe on Jesus Christ today.

If you are already saved, examine the direction of your life. Where are your present choices leading you? What warning from God's Word have you been ignoring because the consequences have not arrived yet?

Learn from what happened in the past. Prepare for what is coming in the future. And cry unto the LORD while there is still time. Let's Pray