

Joel 2:12-27 – Return to Me

God told the people of Judah, through Jeremiah the prophet, that he would punish them for their sin by the sword, by famine and by pestilence. In Deuteronomy 28:38, locusts were one of the curses pronounced from Mt Ebal if the people of Israel did not obey God. In the time of the prophet Joel, God brought famine through a locust swarm. God, through Joel, called the people to repent.

Read Joel 2:12-17.

What did God call the people to do? Tearing garments was sometimes done in distress or mourning. Why did God tell them to “rend your hearts and not your garments”? (2:12-13)

In verse 13, what characteristics of God were mentioned that gave Judah hope that their situation could be turned around? See Jonah 4:2 for the same list of God’s attributes. (2:13)

In response to true repentance what might God do? ESV, NIV, NASB have the word “relent”. KJV and some other versions have “repent”. What do people usually associate with repenting? What does it mean for God to “relent”? See Jonah 3:9a for a cross reference. Note that in Joel no specific sins of Judah were mentioned. (2:14)

In verses 15 and 16, what did God call the people to do? What groups of people were to be involved? God told the priests to weep and pray between the temple porch and the altar. What were the priests told to pray? (2:15-17)

Read Joel 2:18-27.

Verse 18 seems to assume that the people of Judah did repent and pray for God’s mercy. The verse begins God’s response to the people’s repentance. In verses 18-19, how did God respond to the people of Judah? (2:18-19)

Verse 20 mentions “the northerner” (ESV). KJV and NASB have “northern army”. NASB has “army” in italics meaning that the word is not in the original text. NIV has “northern horde”. Since the “north” was often used by Jeremiah to speak of the Babylonian army, some commentators believe this verse is a reference to the Babylonian or Assyrian army and therefore the locusts are imagery. The direction of the wind would determine the direction of actual locusts. It is also possible that the locust swarm came from the north. Both dead locusts and the bodies of dead soldiers would create a great stench. (2:20)

In verse 21, there is a call to the land. In verse 22, there is a call to the beasts of the field. In verse 23, there is a call to the children of Zion. Why should the land not fear? Why should the beasts not fear? (2:21-23)

What were the children of Zion called to do? In verses 23-24, what did God do for his people? Verse 23 may indicate that with the locust swarm there was also a drought. (2:23-24)

Based on verse 25, do you think that the locust swam occurred more than once during the time of Joel? Notice that God called the locust “my great army”. In Jeremiah, God called the evil King Nebuchadnezzar “my servant”. How did God’s army of locust illustrate his sovereignty? How does God calling a locust swarm “my great army” argue against people who say that God has nothing to do with “bad” things happening to people? The locust did not speak to the people like Balaam’s donkey and tell them to stop sinning and then leave the land untouched. Nebuchadnezzar did not stop outside Jerusalem just to tell them to stop sinning and then leave. Both God’s “great army” and God’s “servant” brought serious destruction and pain. (2:25)

Verse 25 is another verse which makes me question the interpretation of the locust as the Babylonian or Assyrian army. It would make sense to say “my great army” which was like locust. But if the “locust” were an actual human army, it does not make sense to speak of them as locust and then refer to them as “my great army”. It seems backwards.

In verses 26 and 27, what was the result of God’s blessing? (2:26-27)

Both verses 26 and 27 end with the sentence “And my people shall never again be put to shame”. What does this mean? How was this promise fulfilled? (2:26-27)