

1. **The Interpretation of the Locust Plague (2:1-11)**
 - a. **The Day of the LORD Is a Day of Darkness and Gloom (v1-2)**
 - b. **Fire Turns Eden to Desolate Wilderness (v3)**
 - c. **The Assault of the Devastating Army (v4-9)**
 - d. **The Day of the LORD Darkens All Creation (v10-11)**
2. **The Call to Return to the LORD (2:12-17)**
 - a. **Return to the LORD and Rend Your Hearts – Not Your Garments (v12-13a)**
 - b. **Return to the LORD – Maybe He Will Relent? (v13b-14)**
 - c. **Consecrate a Fast and Assemble the Congregation (v15-16)**
 - d. **“Spare Your People, O LORD” (v17)**

The first half of the book of Joel (37 verses) focuses on the locust plague and the call to return to the LORD.

The last half of the book (36 verses) turns to the LORD’s response: the justification of Zion and the judgment of the nations.

Last time we looked at the idea of repentance –
 how there are two different ways of talking about repentance:
 in Greek, the basic idea of repentance is a turning of the mind;
 in Hebrew, the basic idea of repentance is being deeply moved.

That’s why our Shorter Catechism blends the two ideas together:
 “repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin,
 and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,
 does, with grief and hatred of his sin, [there’s the Hebrew idea]
 turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.”
 [there’s the Greek idea].

But Hebrew uses the language of “turning” or “returning to the LORD”
 to speak of what the people are called to do.

And last time we heard how the people were called to return to the LORD
 and *perhaps* God would relent – perhaps God would have compassion on them.

And we saw the connections with Exodus 32-34,
 when God revealed himself to Moses,
 how God revealed himself as gracious and merciful,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love –
 and he relents over disaster
 (he repents of the evil that he said he would bring).

Now in verse 18, there is an abrupt shift in perspective.
 So far the focus has been on Israel – and what has happened to Zion.
 Now the voice changes – the tense changes – and we shift perspective.

3. The Justification of Zion (2:18-27)

a. Then the LORD Had Pity – and Sent Grain, Wine & Oil... (v18-19)

¹⁸ *Then the LORD became jealous for his land
and had pity on his people.*

First, notice what it is that motivates God.

What motivates God?

His covenant.

His promises.

The LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.

Land and seed.

God had promised Land and Seed to Abraham –
and that all nations would be blessed.

As we saw in verse 17, the priests crying out before the LORD in the language of Moses,
“Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

God is motivated by his own glory.

That may seem a little deflating to us at first.

After all, if your husband said, “I love you for the sake of my own glory,”
you should probably slap him!

But God’s glory is an infinitely better thing than any mortal’s glory!

And if you think about the alternatives,

the fact that God is motivated by his own glory – his own covenant promises –
is a really good thing!

If God was motivated by something in you,
then his love for you would depend on *you*.

But if God’s love and compassion depends on himself,
then his love for us depends on *himself* –
and quite frankly, God is much more reliable than we are!

And so when God sees his people return to him, fasting and weeping, and crying out,
“Make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations,”

“then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.”

In the 2nd commandment God had identified himself as “a jealous God.”

In the right context, jealousy is a good thing.

A man should be jealous for his wife.

If another guy tries to steal her away, a good husband will get jealous,
and will do something about it!

In the same way, God is jealous for his land.

If another god tries to steal her away, God gets jealous,
and he does something about it!

And he answers them:

¹⁹ *The LORD answered and said to his people,
“Behold, I am sending to you
grain, wine, and oil,
and you will be satisfied;
and I will no more make you
a reproach among the nations.*

Grain, wine, and oil – the three basic staples of middle eastern agriculture –
also, three necessities for Israel’s liturgy!

Where there is grain, wine and oil, there will be joy and peace.

And then the other part of the promise to Abraham kicks in.

“Those who curse you will be cursed, and those who bless you will be blessed,
and in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed.”

b. ...and Drove the Northerner into the Sea (v20)

²⁰ *“I will remove the northerner far from you,
and drive him into a parched and desolate land,
his vanguard^[b] into the eastern sea,
and his rear guard^[c] into the western sea;
the stench and foul smell of him will rise,
for he has done great things.*

The jealousy of God for his land prompts him to destroy the invading army.

Locusts usually came from the east or the south,
so it would be a little odd to refer to the locust plague as “the northerner” –
but then again, this was no ordinary locust plague!

And as the book of Joel progresses,
the locust plague becomes more and more a picture of an invading army
(which frequently came from the north!).

But God promises that he will divide and conquer the invading army (of any sort!)
by driving him into the eastern and the western seas.

And then he calls the Land and even the beasts of the field to fear not, be glad and rejoice:

c. Fear Not, O Land – for the Tree Bears Its Fruit (v21-22)

²¹ *“Fear not, O land;
be glad and rejoice,
for the LORD has done great things!*
²² *Fear not, you beasts of the field,
for the pastures of the wilderness are green;*

*the tree bears its fruit;
the fig tree and vine give their full yield.*

Notice that verses 21-22 are not particularly addressed to Israel.

It is the *land itself* that is told to “be glad and rejoice.”

The beasts of the field are told “fear not” – you will have plenty of food!

The ground was cursed because of man (Genesis 3).

The creation groans under this curse (Romans 8).

And so the creation itself rejoices when the sons of God are revealed.

When the LORD does great things, all creation rejoices!

But notice why (v22):

the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit;

the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

Certainly this is because God has destroyed the locust plague!

But particularly the yield of the fig tree and the vine

depend on cultivation.

The creation rejoices when man cultivates it wisely.

[I don't want to take a long detour into agricultural policy,

but Joel 2 suggests that if we think of our crops

as being *solely* for human consumption,

then we are missing the point of man's relationship to the created order.

The beasts of field should rejoice when we have a good harvest!

If they start to proliferate at the expense of humans,

then we may need to do some “crowd control”! –

but we shouldn't worry that animals are eating *some* of our crops.]

But the rejoicing of the fields and beasts participates in the joy of the children of Zion:

d. Be Glad, O Children of Zion, for God Will Restore the Years the Locust Has Eaten (v23-25)

²³ *“Be glad, O children of Zion,*

and rejoice in the LORD your God,

for he has given the early rain for your vindication;

he has poured down for you abundant rain,

the early and the latter rain, as before.

In Deuteronomy 11, Moses had said that if Israel would love the LORD their God

with all their heart and all their soul,

then the LORD would give them the early rain and the latter rain,

that they might gather their grain, wine and oil.

And he will give the early rain *for your vindication* –

this is the word “tsedakah” – often translated “righteousness.”

(It’s the word used in Genesis 15:6,
“Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”)

This is why I referred to this section as the “Justification of Zion.”

After all, there is nothing that Zion has done to deserve the early rain.

Why did God send the early rain?

Yes, instrumentally, it is through Zion’s returning to the LORD
and crying out to him.

Faith has always been the instrument by which we receive justification!

But why does God send the rain for their justification?

Because the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.

Because God is faithful to his covenant, and keeps his promises!

It’s not that they deserved God’s favor!

It’s that God has mercy on those who cry out to him –

and so he sends the early and the latter rain for their vindication.

And so:

²⁴ *“The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.*

²⁵ *I will restore^[d] to you the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent among you.*

The word “restore” is the verbal form of the word “Shalom” – “peace.”

To restore means to bring back a condition of peace.

God will bring back peace to Zion – a peace that is characterized by plenty.

Yes, the locusts destroyed everything –

and they destroyed everything at the command of God:

“my great army, which I sent among you” –

but the LORD gives, and the LORD takes away,

blessed be the name of the LORD –

because in the end, the LORD restores the fortunes of Zion!

Do you feel like the locust have devoured years from your life?

God promises that he will restore the years that have been devoured.

God promises that he will restore peace and plenty –

that a bountiful harvest will come to those who turn to him.

(We’ll come back to this in a minute)

And

e. And You Shall Know that I Am the LORD (v26-27)

²⁶ *“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.*

Notice again how Joel connects eating and worship.

The bread that you eat is connected to the grain offering that you give to the LORD.

The wine that you drink is connected to the drink offering that you pour out to the LORD.

Just as for us – when you eat and drink, you also should remember the bread that we break
and the cup that we bless!

Verse 26 and verse 27 each have the same refrain:

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

²⁷ *You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.*

I want you to think about this.

We’re not sure when Joel was written.

But one thing we *do* know

is that Israel *was* put to shame after Joel was written!

Even if you take the latest date possible and put Joel in the 5th century BC,
then it was only a few decades later that the Greeks came through –
and then the Ptolemies, and the Seleucids, and the Romans...

But remember that Joel has been talking about the coming of the Day of the LORD,
as verse 28 makes abundantly clear:

4. The Outpouring of God’s Spirit (2:28-32)

a. In the Last Days, I Will Pour Out My Spirit (v28-29)

²⁸ ^[e] *“And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.*

²⁹ *Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.*

Think about the time sequence for Joel.

2:1 – the day of the LORD is coming; it is near

2:11 – the day of the LORD is great and very awesome (it has come)
(and so the priests call a fast and cry out to the LORD)

2:18 – then the LORD became jealous and had pity
(and so restored his land and his people)
2:28 – and it shall come to pass afterward...

In other words, Joel sees the current trials and tribulations of Jerusalem
as a prelude to the coming Day of the LORD;
at some point the Day of the LORD (the day of judgment) will come;
and then afterward, the LORD will pour out his Spirit on all flesh.

You could excuse the Jews for thinking that this is referring to the end of this age.
It really sounds from verses 28-32 (as well as chapter 3)
that this is talking about the final judgment.

And it is.
The Day of the LORD *is* the final judgment.
And the Holy Spirit is poured out *after* the final judgment.

But wait, we have the Holy Spirit –
the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost!

So that must mean that the final judgment has already happened!

That is the point that Peter makes in his sermon on Joel 2 in the book of Acts.
When the Spirit is poured out, Peter instantly realized (by the Spirit!)
what is going on.
Jesus has passed through the final judgment.
The Day of the LORD has fallen upon Jesus.

The locust plague has devoured Jesus.

And Jesus has passed through death and hell and been raised up to the right hand of the Father.
The Jews had thought that all these things would happen to Israel at the end of history.
But Peter sees that all these things have happened to Jesus in the middle of history –
so that those who believe in him might not perish but have everlasting life.

b. I Will Show Wonders in Heaven and on Earth (v30-31)

Verses 30-31 describe what in fact happened on the cross
as the great and terrible day of the LORD came upon Jesus.

³⁰ “*And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.*” ³¹ *The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.*

There is a little ambiguity in the text of Joel about the exact timing of the events.
After all, it *sounds* like the Day of the LORD had come earlier in chapter 2 –
and the Spirit is poured out “after those days” –

but now it says that the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,
before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

In the fulfillment of these things, the relationship becomes clear:
the Day of the LORD falls *first* upon Jesus,
and those who believe in him are spared from the coming wrath;
but then the Day of the LORD will fall upon those who do not believe.

That's why the Jews and proselytes in Jerusalem are asking,
"what shall we do?"

They recognize the outpouring of the Spirit as the fulfillment of what Joel had said.
They now know that the Day of the LORD they had *expected* to come upon Israel
has fallen instead upon Jesus.

And this means that because *they* have *not* received the Holy Spirit,
therefore they are doomed to destruction in the Day of the LORD!

And so they ask, "what shall we do?"

Peter's answer follows Joel's reply:

c. And Everyone Who Calls on the Name of the LORD Shall Be Saved (v32)
³² *And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.*

Peter said,

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ,
for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
For the promise is for you, and for your children, and for all who are far off,
everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

There is great comfort in these words this Christmas.

Yes, the Day of the LORD is coming – the day of judgment and gloom –
but if you have repented and been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ,
if you have returned to the LORD with all your heart,
then you have passed from death to life,
because Jesus has already passed through the Day of the LORD.

Judgment Day has already happened to Jesus – so that you need not fear death!

Are you calling on the name of the LORD?

It's not enough that you called on his name once – way back when.
Are you *now* calling on the name of the LORD?

It can be really easy for us to get lazy.

We get complacent and our hearts grow dull.

Return to the LORD – call upon his name –
flee to our Lord Jesus Christ –
because he is the one who has passed through the final judgment –
he is the one who has endured the Day of the LORD,
and everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Conclusion

Now, in the light of verses 28-32, I want you to think back to verses 23-25,
and think of what this might say to us, here at Michiana Covenant today?

I don't know that we necessarily need to think of job transfers and graduations as a locust plague,
but it is certainly true that we are all feeling a bit as though the swarming locusts
have passed through and left us decimated.

Over the last 10 years we have added 216 members to our rolls –
and we have sent 150 off to other places.
More than thirty men have passed through our officer training program
(thirteen have been ordained).
And there are now fourteen men who are serving Christ around the country –
and around the world –
who have been equipped by this congregation.

One of the wonders that God has shown since the day of Pentecost,
is how his church has become a single world-wide family.
It may feel like a locust plague at times –
but God promises that he will restore the years that the swarming locust has eaten.
You may be grieving the loss of friends who have moved a thousand miles away,
but the outpouring of the Holy Spirit means that Christ's church
will never be put to shame.

Get to know your neighbors and colleagues.
If they are already connected to a solid church, then rejoice with them.
We share a common Lord, and your fellowship can greatly encourage them –
and they, you!

But if not, then invite them to come and hear the gospel of Christ.
In the morning service we are just about to go through the doctrine of salvation.
Between Christmas and Easter will be talking about what it means to be in Christ –
how we are saved, and the great benefits of our union with Christ.