

# “The Day of the Lord”

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**Series:** *The Minor Prophets*

**Bible Text:** Joel 2:28-32

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You can be turning in your Bibles to the Old Testament book of Joel. Go to the New Testament book of Matthew and go backward. It's in that section. We've said a couple of times, we're doing this series, one passage, representative passage from each of the minor prophets. The minor prophets are the small books at the end of the Old Testament. For good or bad, these are the pages that tend to be a little whiter than the others, a little less used, a little less weathered. Today, we're looking at Joel. Joel is the name of the prophet, and we don't know anything about him, really, except that he wrote this. What we do know is that he wrote when something bad had happened. There was a national, natural calamity. It was a locust plague. And through Joel, God wants to speak about something that's actually a much bigger deal than a locust plague, which was a big deal for them. So let's read it. And remember, this is God's word. We're going to look at Joel 2:28-32.

*28 “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.*

*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.*

*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.*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

*Lord, as has already been prayed, we pray again and ask that we would understand your word, that you would give us the help of the Holy Spirit, that he who indwells your people would now illuminate your word and not just so that we can understand it with our thinking, but so that it might actually make its way into our affections and the seed of our being, that we might be*

*transformed as you apply your word to our lives. Would you do that for us? We pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

A few of you, probably most all of you, maybe know what I'm talking about when I use the phrase "a day which will live in infamy", right? Maybe, show of hands. All right. Majority. Good. I'm encouraged. That's great. Famous line from Franklin Roosevelt on December 8th, 1941 about what happened on December 7th, 1941, which is the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the moment that launched us into World War Two. For years in American history, that was a well-known day. Everybody knew about the day which will live in infamy. It's observed. It's thought about. Interestingly, increasingly in our day, there are less people who experienced it. And so if you do know about it, you only know about it from history. And you can bet that within the next 10, 20, 50, 100 years, there'll be even less people who know about the day which will live in infamy unless they happen to read those particular history books. So in that sense, Franklin Roosevelt was right and was wrong, right? It does live in infamy. And yet history marches on and new dates are added to it. It's just how it goes. But if you were the widow of a soldier who lost his life on that day, that was a calendar date that would bring emotion, memory. It was a date on the calendar that changed your life forever.

Dates on calendars do that. Dates on calendars can be the source of great joy and gladness. The wedding date, the due date, the start date for a new job. We have these dates that are that are anticipation and joy and happiness. And then there are other dates that don't do that. Different emotions altogether. The date of the doctor appointment, the date of the audit, the date of the anniversary of that person's death, the date of your next scan, the date of your last paycheck. We kind of live and die based on dates on a calendar. It's actually how our lives operate and work. And it's for sorrow and for joy. And if we had to say what is the main theme of the Book of Joel, it is about a date on a calendar.

God has made it clear that there is a day when he rights all the wrongs, and that for some it's a day of great joy, for others it's a day of great sorrow. And it's called the Day of the Lord.

And while the day which lives in infamy will certainly pass to history books and be eventually just one more date that people don't forget, this is a day that will change everything forever and will not be forgotten, for sure.

So we're talking about the Day of the Lord and we're going to look at two aspects of it. The Day of the Lord as a warning of the end, but the Day of the Lord as an inauguration of a beginning. All right. Two aspects. That's what we're looking at.

### **So let's talk about the Day of the Lord as a warning of the end.**

If you if you were to go back and read the Book of Joel, the first thing you would be struck with is the occasion for it. And the occasion already said it's a locust plague. We don't have these. So we need to talk about that for a minute. An agrarian society that doesn't have an Ingalls or Wal-Mart is completely dependent on what grows from the ground, most often right in front of them.

And a locust, if you can picture this, it's like a, like take a grasshopper, blow it up, make it nastier. That's a locust. And modern stats on locust plagues in the Middle East say a swarm of 80 million locusts can consume the food of 35,000 people per day. So that's 80 million locusts, 35,000 people's food per day. And they're not just there for one day. They're there for a while. Also, 80 million is kind of a small locust plague. Very often the numbers are in the billions rather than the millions. And so, and then there's lots of types of locusts. And we're not even talking about that yet. I mean, there's lots of types of locusts, lots of locusts. And the takeaway is if you have a locust swarm, it's death for many and hardship for all. There's no food. You're not going to eat.

This is not the only locust plague in the Bible. If you think backward in the Bible, there was another famous locust plague. We call it the eighth plague in the land of Egypt when after such devastation on all the crops in Egypt, God brought about locusts to consume whatever else was left. And it was it's the one where God tells him, I'm putting this locust plague so that you will tell your children and their grandchildren how I delivered you from Egypt.

That plague in Egypt, this plague in Israel, it's bad. But if you read through this book, you get the sense that it's not the worst thing. Actually, it's this anticipation of this much, much greater thing, much scarier thing in some ways called the Day of the Lord. Here's some statements about the Day of the Lord from this book.

It is destruction from the Almighty, a day of darkness and gloom, clouds and thick darkness. So if you have a locust plague, it's bad, but it's not nearly as bad as the coming day of the Lord.

Now, what's clear in this book is that God is the judge of both Israel and the nations. And what he says in our passage in verse 30 is that he will show what he calls

*wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.*

This warning of judgment turns from a locust plague in the beginning of the book to when we get to our passage. This is this is a cosmic scene of creation justice. It's a cosmic scene of God showing up and taking care of business. These sorts of signs are displayed throughout the Bible, just like the locust. It's not the only time that we see the sun turning into darkness.

Again, back to the plagues. The eighth plague was the locust plague. What was the ninth plague? It was the sun turned to darkness. A darkness to be felt, it says in the book of Exodus. It was God's judgment on Israel as he prepared to let his people go. There's fire and smoke that makes us think of Mount Sinai, where the people saw the Lord descend on the mountain and it's shaking and there's smoke and there's fire. And they come to Moses and they say, you talk to him. If we talk to him, he'll kill us. And God kind of says, that's pretty much right. Yeah, you're going to need a mediator.

What do we do with all this? What do we do with all these signs with locust plagues, moments of darkness, fire, smoke?

The Book of Joel would like for us to understand these are tremors of the future earthquake. Shots across the bow of a future war. Many intrusions of God's judgment that are intended to point us forward to this final consummate day of judgment where he rights all the wrongs.

Let me answer a question for us. Are we supposed to think of natural disasters this way?

Yes and no. No, in the sense of what we see for the TV preachers. You've all seen the TV preachers that show you here's this earthquake in this country. And now I'm going to proceed to tell you exactly why this earthquake came upon these people for this specific sin. And I always just want to say there's no way you can know that, that is arrogant. It's foolish. It's pretending to know the mind of the Lord. So in that sense, no,

It's also the case that every time we see the devastation of a natural disaster, or the destruction of warfare, or all of the things that can go bad on the earth, it should make us pause and consider. There is this much greater destruction coming when God shows up to judge and I should be a repentant person who trusts him.

In fact, Jesus himself made this clear in one of the gospel accounts. There was a moment when a tower had fallen on 18 people in a city called Siloam and it killed them. And the disciples were trying to figure out what did those people do to deserve that kind of judgment? And do you remember Jesus' statement? He said, do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? He says, no, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

See, we get into trouble when we start thinking, oh, those people were so bad. Therefore, God judged them. And the whole point of things that happen on the earth is to show us everybody deserves judgment. God's going to show up and destroy things. You should repent. That's the takeaway.

Many destructions are a warning to all. Little days of the Lord point to the big day of the Lord. And that's kind of behind the language in 30 and 31. This is language that Jesus, again, uses in the famous Olivet Discourse, where he talks about the end of the world. The scene there is that the disciples had been walking with Jesus and they're in Jerusalem and they look at the temple and they tell Jesus, look at how beautiful the temple is, the buildings, the stones. And Jesus, it's kind of a downer statement, but he turned to him and said, yeah, not one stone will be left on top of another. Which changes the tone of the conversation, I suspect. Of course, their natural question is, when, when is that going to happen? And he proceeds to answer their question in that discourse. And he starts talking about a day when the moon will turn to blood and the sun turns to darkness. And at a base level, he's at least hinting at a day that was coming in AD 70. In AD 70, the Roman army marched into Jerusalem, took the whole city and completely wiped out the temple. It was, in a sense, a mini judgment and a call to repent. And all in light of the full picture of judgment at the end of the Bible.

The thing about the Minor Prophets is if you want to see them, if you want to see these themes spelled out, read in Revelation. They all come back up again.

If you read at the end of the story, there are locusts. The locusts in Joel are eating crops. The locusts in Revelation are, for lack of a better way to say it, eating people.

There's darkness and the sun kind of going out in the book of Joel. And in the book of Revelation, there's an angel who pours out a bowl of God's wrath. And it is darkness and the earthquakes. And people beg to hide under the mountains and the mountains fall on them so they don't have to face the wrath of God Almighty.

There's smoke that goes up forever from the cities of man. And it's telling us about this reckoning, the consummate day of the Lord.

What do we do with all of this?

What do we do with warnings like this?

All these things that point us backward in the Bible force us to consider the movements and historical moments of our own day and that drive us forward to the end. There's one thing to do with this, and it's not figure out the mind of God. It's repent. That's the only takeaway. When you see God show up and say, I'm going to actually judge everything, the takeaway is repent. Heed the warning. If you were an Israelite hearing this prophecy in Joel's day, you were supposed to turn to the Lord. Stop just doing external motions of religion and turn to him with your heart. Stop going down the road of rebellion and disobedience to God's law. Turn back to God.

And it's the same for us today. This is intended to drive us to the end of history and tell us today, while you can, you should repent. Heed the warning. God will not just let things go on as they are forever. Did you know that that's our problem? Historically speaking, I mean, it's always been this way. We always assume that things are just going to go on exactly as they are right now for the rest of time.

The folks in Noah's day did that, and they mocked and they continued being evil, and they certainly didn't repent when Noah said, it's going to rain. The letter that Peter wrote to the church says essentially people do the same thing. We assume that God is going to just continue letting things go on like they are.

We internalize the Bob Marley song. Every little thing is going to be all right. I've always wanted to ask Bob, why do you think that? In what universe is every little thing all right? Is that true in your life? I don't think so. We have historical evidence to the contrary.

He said he would flood the earth. He did it.

He said he would bring locusts upon Egypt. He did it.

He said he would send Israel into exile if they turned away from him. And he did it.

He said the temple would be torn down. The temple is torn down.

He says he'll come to judge the living and the dead. Do not think he won't do it. He will do it.

He doesn't say stuff to say stuff and then just gloss over it and forget about it. That's not who he is. It's not how he operates.

The call for us is to turn from evil and turn to God by faith in the Lord Jesus. And that's true if you're if you're a believer or an unbeliever. If you're a believer, the call here is to be a repentant person.

I love quoting the first of the 95 theses that Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, wrote. The first thing he wanted to say to the church with all of its abuses in the fifteen hundreds and all of its chaos was

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*when our Lord Jesus Christ said repent, he meant for the whole of the Christian life to be one of repentance, meaning there's not a time when you and I as Christians need to stop turning from sin and turning back to God. That is a thing that we do on a day to day, week to week basis.*

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What is repentance? It's more than just confession. Confession is critical. But just telling God what we've done or not done, that's not repentance. That's the first step. Repentance actually involves confession, and if I continue down this path it leads to bad things. I'm going to have to stop the car and turn around and go the other direction. I've been running away from God. I need to stop and run back to him.

To be honest, wherever you're at in this room today, believer or nonbeliever, you are either at any given time, you're either running toward Jesus or you're running away from Jesus. There is no neutral where you're just static. That doesn't exist. You're either going away from him or toward him.

What about for you?

Are you in a place where even as a Christian, maybe you need to stop, turn around and start running back to God, believing the promises of the gospel and thinking that he will actually welcome you in because of the work of Christ for you?

If you're here and you're not yet a Christian, welcome. Really glad that you're here. This is exactly what you expected when you said you were going to come to church today. Sermon on death, judgment, fire and brimstone. You got exactly what you expected. It's what's in the minor prophets. To you, I would say this is actually the thing that you need to sit with the most in the whole of the scripture.

If there's no God and there's no judgment, go ahead, do whatever you want. Who cares? If there's a God who made you and says that he will evaluate you, you cannot afford to keep doing exactly what you're doing. You can't do it. It's the most foolish thing to do is to keep on like things are.

No, stop and turn. Consider the claims of Christ. Consider that there is a God who promises to judge, but is also the God who promises a way of escape if you'll take it through his son, the Lord Jesus. For those who believe already, it's a good day to call on the name of the Lord again. That's one of the takeaways here at the end of the passage is *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*. That's true for a non-Christian.

I would say that to you if you're a Christian, call on the name of the Lord again and come back to him and know that you will be saved. Heed the warning. The warnings are there for a reason.

What if you did? What if you did? What if you're a non-Christian and you came up to me afterward and said, look, I think I want to trust Jesus with my life and to forgive me. For those of you who have, what if you do repent? The day of the Lord continues to be a warning, but it also transforms and it becomes something very different for us. So it's not just a warning of the end. It is this inauguration of a beginning. And so that's the second point. We need to talk about that.

### **The day of the Lord as an inauguration of the beginning.**

In this book, the Lord promises that if you repent, he will meet you with grace, mercy and steadfast love. He says earlier in the book, if you rend your heart and not your garments, meaning not just the externals of religion, but if you actually turn to him with your heart, he will relent and leave a blessing. That's what you should expect. If you turn to the Lord in repentance, you should expect him to relent from disaster and leave a blessing. The famous promise of mercy is in 2:25 where he says,

*to those who repent, I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten. You will eat and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God.*

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*If you repent, you should expect mercy from God.*

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And that's especially clear here at the center point of the book at our passage. After the description of the locust plague and the promise day of the Lord, we read in verse 28,

*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. Your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days, I will pour out my spirit.*

Now Joel is speaking about this future day from his perspective, right? This is not happening in Joel's day. He's prophesying. He's looking ahead and he's saying that God is going to pour out his spirit on all flesh. We know this. The Holy Spirit was poured out in the Old Testament too. It's one book. It's one story. But it was different in those days. The Spirit tended to come upon a person in a moment to accomplish a specific act of deliverance. It doesn't mean that people didn't have the Holy Spirit unless, except for those moments. But what he's describing here is whatever was the work of the Spirit in the Old Testament, this is an extension and a fulfillment and something bigger and greater in the new.

All flesh here means not just judges and kings. All types of different people throughout the nations. Whenever this happens, sons and daughters will prophesy. Not just the people who are in the school of the prophets from the Old Testament. They're going to tell God's truth. They're going to forthtell things that are already known to be true, God's law. And they're also going to have these moments where they foretell things, things of the future potentially. There's going to be old men dreaming dreams of the truth. And young men seeing visions of the truth, and to stun everyone. This would have been the showstopper. Even on male and female servants, which is to say slaves, people who do not belong to themselves. On the lowliest, less than human in their culture, people, God will actually pour out his Holy Spirit. The way Paul says this in one of the letters is male, female, Jew, Gentile, slave, free.

Unheard of, new, something coming that would change everything. We don't have to wonder when this happened. In Acts chapter two, we read how it happened. We read it earlier in the service. The Holy Spirit came upon the church in power on the day of one of the feasts of Israel called Pentecost. There were visible pictures of flaming tongues of fire that appeared over people's heads.

I mean, if you want a display of something strange happening, that's one of them. A flaming tongue over somebody's head. That would have been wild enough, but then people start speaking different languages that they didn't know. They were actual languages because it's a feast day, so people from all sorts of areas have gathered in for the feast, and they all speak different languages. Suddenly they hear the acts of God in the gospel proclaimed in their own tongue, in a language that they could understand.

If you were kind of on the outside looking in, you would have said, those people are drunk because it's a bunch of different languages all mingled together. It sounded like chaos, and Peter takes that opportunity to say, actually, what you're seeing is the fulfillment of Joel chapter two.

He quotes it in full, and he applies that moment to this passage. The Holy Spirit has showed up. Jesus told him, wait in Jerusalem until they receive power from on high. This is the day they receive power from on high.

In that moment, God brought about a new era in the history of the world, a new epoch, a new way that things were going to go. It's the inauguration of something, and again, we have to look at Revelation to see where it ends.

If you look at the end, the final culminating day of the Lord, yes, it's judgment for those who continue in rebellion, yes. What about for those who repent? It's a new heavens and a new earth. It's a new heavens and a new earth where nobody has to be told, know the Lord, anymore. There are no communicants classes in this place because they know him. There's no more need to have the gifts of prophecy and all of the things that we see here, even in Acts chapter two, because people just know the truth, and it's not just that they know it, they love it, and they say it, and they don't lie anymore, and there's no glossing over things or manipulating. It's a world, a realm of truth. It's a realm of purity and holiness and rightness.

Everyone will be indwelt and empowered by the Spirit, and we won't quench him anymore through disobedience or by going our own way. The lowliest are raised up with the highest.

That's our future, but it's inaugurated now. It has started. Yeah, it's got this future culmination, but it has started, and if you belong to Jesus, you live in it. It has begun. The day of the Lord has begun already.

What do you do with that?

Call on the name of the Lord and be saved, yes, and to pull in some New Testament language here, walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

This is what Peter essentially told his audience at the end of his sermon. He preached the gospel to that crowd on the day of Pentecost, and they heard the gospel. They heard about the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus. They heard about how they could be forgiven of sin, restored to God, justified. They heard that this prophecy of Joel was fulfilled in that moment. They saw the power of God. They heard about sin credited to Jesus' account and Jesus' righteousness credited to our account, and it says they were cut to the heart, and they cried out, what must we do? And Peter said, repent, be baptized, all of you for the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Call on the name of the Lord Jesus and walk by the Spirit. It has begun. This is where we are in history. When you call on him, you begin to experience the age inaugurated at Pentecost, life in the Spirit.

It dawned on me this week how little we talk about the day-to-day operations of the Spirit in the life of a believer.

The Spirit gets a lot of bad press these days, usually in church circles. He gets kind of a black eye, because there are places where the Holy Spirit is invoked to essentially say, this person's experience is therefore true for everyone. That's breaking the third commandment. That's using the name of the Holy Spirit in a way that is unfaithful.

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*When you use the name of the Spirit to verify your experience as binding on all believers, when it's contrary to God's Word, you've broken the third commandment.*

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And that happens all over the place these days, and it's such a shame because he is the gift that you have if you belong to Jesus.

He's here to take the truth of God's Word and light it on fire on our insides and in our thinking.

He's here to shine the light for us on the Father and the Son, and rarely if ever, on himself.

Jesus told us that he would send the Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. To help you see your sin, your need for Jesus' righteousness, and the fact that there's a judgment coming. You need the Spirit for all of that.

He sent the Spirit to regenerate our hearts, to help us have communion with the Father of Son, to intercede for us when we pray. All of these things.

Do you realize that if you belong to Jesus, you are indwelt by the third person of the Trinity that God himself has come to make his residence in you? You are never alone. Yes, you can quench him, but you're never alone if you're in Christ.

He is there to help you and to enable your communion with the Father and the Son.

How do we walk by the Spirit?

Fill your mind with God's truth and trust that the Spirit will actually apply it to your heart and your mind.

Mortify your sin. I'll never forget the phrase that Don prayed just a minute ago, to vomit out sin like a bad virus. That, that will preach right there. I like that. If you end up doing that and trying to kill your sin, guess, guess who was behind it? The Holy Spirit. He hates sin more than you do, and he gives you power to fight it.

Ask the Father to help you by the Spirit to taste and see that he is good. If you're reading the Bible or praying and you actually feel the joy of the Lord, and you, you want to give him thanks or praise, guess who's behind that? It is the Spirit who enables what the Puritans called experimental religion, meaning not just head stuff, but it affects the heart.

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*There's a day coming when you'll be made perfect. Until then, the day of the Lord is inaugurated, and you can walk by the Spirit.*

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Every Sunday that we gather here, we're to remember that date on the calendar, fixed by God, the day of the Lord. We have plenty of miniature days that warn us, that call us to repent. He will come and judge. But we live in the age of the Spirit, in the age of good news, in the age when we can call on the name of the Lord and know that we'll be saved and walk by the Spirit until he actually fulfills all of his promises.

So brothers and sisters, while the world scoffs, while the world continues to look at you and assume that you're absolutely out of your mind, the world looks at Christians and says, you are just as drunk now as you were on the day of Pentecost. You're small-minded, bigoted, you're all of the bad things. Never mind. Call on the name of the Lord, walk by the Spirit.

While your friends and neighbors keep pursuing their agendas and wanting to get something for themselves because they think this is all there is, and while the enemy laughs because he has absolutely convinced them that they're right, never mind. Call on the name of the Lord, walk by the Spirit, and while you're at it, tell them the truth very lovingly. Until all the darkness of the world turns into eternal light, call on the name of the Lord and walk by the Spirit. Pray with me.

*Our Father, we come to you and ask for the ability to believe the things that you say that we don't want to believe. I suspect not one person in this room naturally would think that you are coming to judge as you say you are. We just assume that the world will barrel on like it is, but you promise us that you will come and evaluate and judge. Help us believe you. Make us repentant people. I pray for anyone here who has not bowed the knee to Jesus. Let today be the day. By your Spirit's work, would you convict? Would you regenerate? Would you open their eyes? And for all of us, Lord, let us continue to call on your name. And would you fill us with the same Spirit that you poured out so many years ago and help us to walk by his power? We ask Jesus in your name, amen.*

\*\*Portion of scripture read before sermon—Acts 2:1-21