

# Joel 1:5-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/joel/joel-1/joel-15-7/>

*Joel addresses the drunkards of Judah, urging them to lament the disaster caused by the locust plague.*

Joel now addresses a future generation who has experienced the invasion. The future event is so certain that it is spoken of as a current reality. This call to lament will arguably apply to Jews from 586 BC all the way to current day, since Israel has never fully recovered its territory and its heritage. Joel addresses specific groups within the nation, urging them to lament the devastating effects of the plague. For each group, the prophet issued a call that the people should mourn together and repent. The event is a call to each generation to return to faithfulness to God and His ways, which lead to an abundant life.

The first group was the drunkards, those who got drunk on wine. Joel said, *Awake, drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you wine drinkers.* Joel called upon the *drunkards* to *awake*, not from their sleep but from their intoxication. Heavy drinkers do not normally seek to live a righteous life before God, nor do they care much about what is going on around them. Their priority is to escape from the responsibilities and stewardship of life. This escape ultimately destroys relationships and calling, as well as stewardship. Joel urges them to *weep* and *wail on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth.* The drunkards don't appear to care about much, but they will care that their *sweet wine is cut off.*

Weeping and wailing are terms that are associated with funerals as people express their sorrow and grief over the death of a loved one. For instance, Abraham wept over the death of his wife Sarah (Genesis 23:2) and David over the death of his friend Jonathan (2 Samuel 1). Here in this passage, the *drunkards* were expected to express the grief that no wine was available. The plague of locusts had destroyed the vineyards of Judah. With their *wine supply cut off*, the *drunkards* were sobering up. They must face God. They were *awake*. The invasion of foreign armies is horrific and lamentable, but it will also get the attention of those wasting their lives away. Perhaps this wake up call will lead to further repentance, and a restoration.

The reason for alarm over the locust plague was then spelled out through a vivid statement in which Joel said, *For a nation has invaded my land, mighty and without number.* This makes it clear that the locust plague is a symbol of a foreign invasion. The fact that it is spoken of in the past tense, yet has not yet occurred, indicates the certainty of the prediction. This invasion will have so many soldiers that it will be *without number*. God has not forsaken Judah or its land, for God describes the invasion as being of *my land*. This would explain why verses 2-4 state that nothing like this has been seen by these people or their ancestors.

Individual locusts are insignificant and crushable (Psalm 109:23). But there were thousands upon thousands of them who were coming. So, the prophet compared the locust plague to an invading army as it destroyed the land's vegetation.

One of the remarkable characteristics of a locust is its ability to eat. Joel observed that the locust's *teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness*. Since lions have very powerful *teeth* and lionesses have powerful *fangs* (Amos 5:19; Psalm 58:6), the image evokes the notion of ferocity, destructive power, and irresistible strength. Daniel's prophecy in chapter 7 predicts four kingdoms that will occur in successive order, with the first kingdom being represented as a lion (Daniel 7:4,17). This is likely the kingdom of Babylon. In the time of Daniel, Babylon is the dominant world power, and Daniel is a Jew who has been deported from Judah to Babylon. In Daniel's vision, the lion represents Babylon, who is currently in control of Israel, while the other animals in Daniel's vision represent nations who will come later.

At the time of Joel's prophecy, Babylon had not yet invaded, although it is so certain that Joel is speaking of it in past tense. Joel predicts that the locust plague/invasion was so destructive that it devoured the land, leaving no vegetation: *It has made my vine a waste, and my fig tree splinters*. The mention of the splintering of a *fig tree* might indicate that the army is cutting down trees, perhaps to make siege engines or otherwise support their war effort. The *waste* of the grape *vine* might indicate the torching of vineyards in Judah.

Here the prophet explained the extent of the damage caused by the locusts (which pictures the invading army) when he told his audience that they destroyed *the vine and fig tree*. These would be two primary sources of sustenance for the inhabitants of Judah. Joel described in detail the completeness of the damage: *It has stripped them bare and cast them away. Their branches have become white*. Again, the imagery is of the locusts who have stripped Judah of its ability to produce food.

Locusts are notorious not only for attacking and devouring plant life but also for breaking off branches and stripping off bark. As they destroyed the vines and fig trees, they exposed the white wood of the branches, causing significant damage to the trees. Such aggressive harm can very often kill the plant entirely so that it never grows back. Such is the destruction wrought by the invading army; it is a picture of devastation.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>5</sup> Awake, drunkards, and weep;**

**And wail, all you wine drinkers,**

**On account of the sweet wine**

**That is cut off from your mouth.**

**<sup>6</sup> For a nation has invaded my land,**

**Mighty and without number;**

**Its teeth are the teeth of a lion,**

**And it has the fangs of a lioness.**

**<sup>7</sup> It has made my vine a waste**

**And my fig tree splinters.**

**It has stripped them bare and cast *them* away;**

**Their branches have become white.**