

# Joel 1:8-10

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/joel/joel-1/joel-18-10/>

*Joel addresses the worshipers, urging them to lament the disaster caused by the locust plague.*

Having urged the drunkards to lament the disaster caused by the locust plague (vv. 5–7), Joel now turned his attention to those who worshiped in the temple. He commanded them to *wail* because the incomparable catastrophe would have negative effects on their religious worship.

In ancient times, grief at the death of a loved one usually included wearing sackcloth made of goat or camel hair, placing dust or ash on the head, and wailing (Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 3:31). These outward expressions of grief would demonstrate how mourners suffered the loss of their loved ones. Joel asked the worshipers to wail for Judah and likened Judah's sorrow to that of *a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth*. This comparison served to emphasize the profundity of the grief.

The word translated as *virgin* is “*betûlâh*” in Hebrew. It usually refers to a grown-up or young woman without any sexual experience with men (Genesis 24:16). Such a woman had no husband (Leviticus 21:3) and had not yet officially left the house of her father. In our passage, the *virgin* was engaged and was soon to be married because a bride price had already been paid to her father (Deuteronomy 22:23–24). Unfortunately, before the marriage was consummated, the woman lost her *bridegroom*, the man to whom she was betrothed. The point of comparison here is that the people of Judah would mourn over the death of the nation just like a *virgin* would over the death of the man to whom she was betrothed, the *bridegroom of her youth*. This would be intensely distressing.

Part of the rationale for such serious wailing was because *the grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD*. There is no record of the grain or drink offering being halted prior to Judah being exiled to Babylon. But Joel is speaking of the future invasion as though it has already occurred, because it is an event that is certain to occur. The offerings will cease because the Babylonians will destroy the temple and all the implements of worship.

The *grain offering* (“*minḥâh*” in Hebrew) was a present of sacrifice or tribute that the people of Israel and Judah brought to their Suzerain God to show gratitude and dedication (Judges 3:17-18; 2 Samuel 8:6; 1 Kings 4:21; 2 Kings 17:3). It consisted essentially of flour. The *drink offering* included wine. This *offering* often accompanied animal sacrifices (Exodus 29:38–46; Hosea 9:4). According to the book of Numbers, “one-fourth of a hin,” approximately one gallon of wine was to be poured out into the altar fire for each sacrifice (Numbers 15:4–5). These were offered on the altar. But they will stop, because the altar, and the temple will be destroyed by the invaders.

The prophet Joel observed that *the priests, those who were ministers of the LORD, mourn*. The *priests* fulfilled several important religious duties in ancient Israel. The *priests* have good reason to mourn because their function is eliminated. There is no more temple, no more altar, for the Babylonians have destroyed them both. There is no further need of their services. When Judah is

exiled to Babylon, there will be no more temple worship until they return under Ezra. Not only will the *priests* not be able to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people, but also they will miss their portion of the offerings given by the people. This is how the priests and Levites were supported for their full-time religious work, through the offerings of the people (Leviticus 2:2–3, 10). Their means of support has dried up. In this manner they would share the plight of the drunkard; they were among those who would feel the devastating effects of the locust plague by losing things dear to them.

The prophet summarized the impact of the locust plague as follows: *The field is ruined, the land mourns; for the grain is ruined, the new wine dries up, fresh oil fails.* Grain, wine, and oil were three products essential to sustain life in ancient Israel and Judah. The *grain* refers to the production of field crops such as cereals and legumes. This would provide the fundamental staples for their food supply. The *new wine* is a beverage made from fermented grape juice, which would provide sustenance as well as a source of pleasure. The *fresh oil* refers to oils that can be obtained from olive trees. This oil was used in cooking as well as to fuel lamps for lighting. The destruction of these things would indicate that normal life had ceased. Food is lacking, drink is lacking, oil for light and cooking is lacking.

The loss of *grain*, *new wine*, and *oil* was a sign of God's judgement (Deuteronomy 28:51).

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>8</sup> Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth**

**For the bridegroom of her youth.**

**<sup>9</sup> The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off**

**From the house of the Lord.**

**The priests mourn,**

**The ministers of the Lord.**

**<sup>10</sup> The field is ruined,**

**The land mourns;**

**For the grain is ruined,**

**The new wine dries up,**

**Fresh oil fails.**