

Joel 1:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God.

Analysis

Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests (Hebrew chigru vesphehu hakohanim, חִגְרוּ וְסָפְדוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים)—Joel commands the priests, Israel's spiritual leaders, to lead corporate mourning. The verb chagar (חָגַר, "gird") means to bind on sackcloth, the coarse goat-hair garment worn in mourning. Saphed (סָפַד, "lament") describes loud, public mourning—wailing and beating the breast. Priests who normally wore fine linen must now wear sackcloth, demonstrating that religious status doesn't exempt from judgment.

Howl, ye ministers of the altar (Hebrew heililu mesharetey mizbeach, הִילִילוּ מִשְׁרֵטֵי מִזְבֵּחַ)—Yalal (יָלַל, "howl") intensifies beyond lamenting to anguished crying. The "ministers of the altar" (mesharetey mizbeach) performed daily sacrifices. Now, with agricultural devastation, they have nothing to offer. The cessation of sacrificial worship demonstrates judgment's severity—when God removes means of worship, it reveals His displeasure and calls for urgent repentance.

Come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God (Hebrew bo'u linu basaq mesharetey Elohai, בֹּאוּ לִינוּ בַשָּׂק מִשְׁרֵטֵי אֱלֹהֵי)—Joel commands all-night prayer vigils in sackcloth. The verb lun (לָוַן, "lodge/lie all night") indicates sustained, not perfunctory, intercession. This echoes Moses's forty-day intercession (Deuteronomy 9:18-25) and anticipates Jesus's Garden of Gethsemane vigil. The possessive "my God" emphasizes intimate covenant relationship—these ministers

serve not an impersonal deity but the living God who entered covenant with Israel.

For the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God (Hebrew *ki nimna' mibeyt Eloheykhem minchah vanešek*, כִּי נִמְנַע מִבֵּית מִנְחָה וְנֶשֶׁךְ)—The grain offering (*minchah*, מִנְחָה) and drink offering (*nešek*, נֶשֶׁךְ) accompanied daily sacrifices (Numbers 28:1-8), representing thanksgiving and devotion. The verb *mana* (נָמַן, "withhold") indicates these offerings ceased not by choice but necessity—the locust plague destroyed crops. This exposes a crucial theological truth: all worship depends on God's provision. We cannot manufacture acceptable worship through human effort; God must supply both the material means and spiritual enablement (John 4:23-24, Philippians 2:13).

Historical Context

The priesthood descended from Aaron through Levi, serving at Jerusalem's temple (or earlier at the tabernacle). Daily worship required grain, wine, and oil for offerings accompanying morning and evening sacrifices (Exodus 29:38-42, Numbers 28:1-8). The locust plague's destruction of agriculture made these offerings impossible, effectively halting temple worship. This crisis anticipated later disruptions: Babylonian temple destruction (586 BC), cessation during exile, and ultimately Christ's fulfillment of the entire sacrificial system (Hebrews 10:1-18).

Priests wore distinctive garments: fine linen tunics, sashes, and turbans (Exodus 28:40-43). Exchanging these for sackcloth symbolized mourning and humiliation before God. All-night prayer vigils occurred during national crises (Judges 20:26, 1 Samuel 7:6, Nehemiah 9:1-3). Joel's command marshals all spiritual resources to seek God's mercy before judgment becomes final.

The phrase "house of your God" refers to the temple, God's earthly dwelling where His name resided (1 Kings 8:27-30). When offerings ceased, it demonstrated that the covenant relationship had ruptured—not because God failed but because the people's sin brought covenant curses. This foreshadowed the greater crisis when Christ prophesied the temple's destruction (Matthew 24:1-2), fulfilled in AD 70 when Rome razed Jerusalem. Yet Christ Himself became the true temple (John

2:19-21), and believers corporately form God's new temple where His Spirit dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, Ephesians 2:19-22).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the cessation of offerings teach that all worship—even liturgical acts—depends entirely on God's gracious provision?
2. What does priestly leadership in corporate repentance teach about spiritual leaders' responsibility to model humility and mourning over sin?
3. How does the Old Testament sacrificial system's dependence on agricultural abundance point to Christ as the ultimate provision for worship?

Interlinear Text

חָגַר וְ	וְסַפַּד וְ	הַכֹּהֲנִים	הֵיל יֵלֻ	מְשָׁרֵת י	מִזְבֵּחַ
Gird	yourselves and lament	ye priests	howl	ye ministers	of the altar
H2296	H5594	H3548	H3213	H8334	H4196
בֹּאוּ	לֵי לַיָּלָה	בְּשָׁקִים	מְשָׁרֵת י	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	נִמְנָע
come	lie all night	in sackcloth	ye ministers	of my God	is withholden
H935	H3885	H8242	H8334	H430	H3588
מִבֵּית	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	מִנְחָה	וְנֹסֶךְ:		
from the house	of my God	for the meat offering	and the drink offering		
H1004	H430	H4503	H5262		

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 4:8 (Parallel theme): For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the LORD is not turned back from us.

Jeremiah 9:10 (Parallel theme): For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the habitations of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none can pass through them; neither can men hear the voice of the cattle; both the fowl of the heavens and the beast are fled; they are gone.

Joel 2:17 (Sacrifice): Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?

Ezekiel 7:18 (Parallel theme): They shall also gird themselves with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be upon all faces, and baldness upon all their heads.

1 Kings 21:27 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.