

# Joel 2:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

## Analysis

**Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders** (Hebrew qibetsu-am qaddeshu qahal qibetsu zeqenim)—this triple summons establishes comprehensive corporate participation. The verb qabats (קָבַץ, "gather") denotes intentional assembly, not casual meeting. Qadash (קָדַשׁ, "sanctify") means to set apart as holy—this gathering isn't social but sacred, requiring spiritual preparation through repentance and purification. Every demographic must participate: the congregation (qahal, the covenant assembly), elders (zeqenim, community leaders), children (olalim, young children), and nursing infants (yoneqei shadayim, literally "suckers of breasts").

**Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet**—even newlyweds enjoying their protected honeymoon period (Deuteronomy 24:5 exempted them from public duties for one year) must join the assembly. The chuppah (חופה, bridal chamber) and cheder (חדר, private room) represent the most legitimate earthly joy and privacy, yet covenant crisis supersedes all personal celebration. This demonstrates that when God calls His people to corporate repentance, nothing—not age, marital status, or legitimate pleasure—exempts anyone. The community stands or falls together.

This verse establishes the totality required for genuine covenant renewal. Unlike individualistic modern Christianity, biblical faith recognizes corporate covenant

identity. While the New Covenant emphasizes individual faith (Ezekiel 18:20, John 3:16), it doesn't eliminate corporate dimensions—the church is one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27), corporate sin affects all (1 Corinthians 5:6), and believers bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). When the church faces divine discipline or needs spiritual renewal, comprehensive participation is required—not just clergy or the spiritually mature, but the entire covenant community must humble themselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from wicked ways (2 Chronicles 7:14).

## Historical Context

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Joel's call to comprehensive assembly reflects ancient Israel's covenant structure where the community stood together before God. At Sinai, all Israel—men, women, children, and sojourners—entered covenant with Yahweh (Deuteronomy 29:10-15). Major renewals required universal participation: Joshua's covenant renewal at Shechem (Joshua 24:1-2), Josiah's reformation (2 Kings 23:1-3), and Ezra's public reading of the Law (Nehemiah 8:1-3) all assembled the entire community. The inclusion of nursing infants reflects the corporate nature of covenant blessings and curses—God visits "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation" while showing "mercy unto thousands of them that love me" (Exodus 20:5-6).

The exemption of newlyweds from public duty (Deuteronomy 24:5) made Joel's demand even more striking. Ancient Near Eastern culture highly valued marriage and procreation; the honeymoon period allowed establishing the household and conceiving children. Wedding celebrations lasted seven days (Judges 14:12, 17), and the new husband was exempt from military service and business obligations for a full year. Yet Joel commands even this protected status to yield before covenant crisis. This demonstrates that no earthly relationship, however legitimate and God-ordained, can supersede relationship with God Himself. Jesus later taught this principle: anyone who loves father, mother, spouse, or children more than Him is not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26).

The corporate assembly Joel describes became a pattern for later Jewish and Christian practice. Solemn assemblies (*atsarah*) were called for national crises,

covenant renewals, and major festivals. The early church continued this pattern in corporate prayer meetings (Acts 1:14, 4:23-31, 12:12), though shifting from national Israel to the universal church. The Reformation recovered emphasis on corporate worship and church discipline, while Puritans practiced days of humiliation and fasting during crises. Modern evangelicalism's individualism has largely lost this corporate dimension, yet Scripture consistently presents God's people as a community that stands together in repentance, worship, and obedience.

## **Related Passages**

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

## **Study Questions**

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1. What would comprehensive corporate repentance look like in your local church—involving every member regardless of age or status?
2. How does Joel's inclusion of nursing infants challenge modern compartmentalization of children from "serious" spiritual matters?
3. What legitimate earthly joys or priorities might God be calling you to temporarily set aside to prioritize spiritual renewal?

## Interlinear Text

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אַסְפוּ	עַם	קִדְּשׁוּ	קִהְל	קִבְּצוּ	זִקְנֵי יִם	אַסְפוּ
Gather	the people	sanctify	the congregation	assemble	the elders	Gather
H622	H5971	H6942	H6951	H6908	H2205	H622
עוֹלָלֵי יִם	וְיִנְקֵי יָ	שֵׁדֵי יִם	יֵצְאוּ	דָּתָן		
the children	and those that suck	the breasts	go forth	let the bridegroom		
H5768	H3243	H7699	H3318	H2860		
מִחֲדָרָו	וְכָל הַ	מִחֲפָצֶיהָ:				
of his chamber	and the bride	out of her closet				
H2315	H3618	H2646				

## Additional Cross-References

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**2 Chronicles 29:5** (Parallel theme): And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place.

**2 Chronicles 20:13** (Parallel theme): And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

**1 Corinthians 7:5** (Parallel theme): Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

**Exodus 19:22** (Parallel theme): And let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them.

**Exodus 19:10** (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes,

**Joel 1:14** (Parallel theme): Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,

**1 Samuel 16:5** (Parallel theme): And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

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