

# Joel 2:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run.

## Analysis

**The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses** (Hebrew kemar'eh susim mar'ehu, כִּמְרָאָה סוּסִים מַרְאֵהוּ)—Joel transitions from fire imagery to military metaphor, describing the locust army's appearance as horse-like. The Hebrew sus (סוס, "horse") primarily meant war-horse in ancient Israel, not work animals. Horses epitomized military power, speed, and terror (Job 39:19-25, Jeremiah 8:16). The comparison emphasizes unstoppable, disciplined advance. Ancient observers noted that locust heads resemble horses' heads—a similarity reflected in Revelation 9:7 ("the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle").

**And as horsemen, so shall they run** (Hebrew ukheparashim ken yerutsun, וַיִּכְפְּרָשִׁים כֵּן יֵרֻצֻּן)—parash (פָּרָשׁ) means cavalry, mounted warriors. Ruts (רָץ, "run") conveys rapid, determined movement. Cavalry represented elite military units—fast, mobile, overwhelming. Joel compares the locust swarm's advance to cavalry charge: organized, powerful, unstoppable. This military language reinforces that the plague is God's army executing divine judgment (2:11, 25).

This verse demonstrates prophetic dual fulfillment. Literally, it describes the locust invasion Joel's generation experienced. Symbolically, it points to future military invasion (possibly Babylonian conquest in 586 BC). Eschatologically, it foreshadows the Day of the LORD when God's armies—angelic and/or human—execute final judgment. The book of Revelation employs similar imagery for end-

times judgment (Revelation 9:7-10, 19:11-21). Reformed interpretation recognizes these layers of meaning: historical events typologically prefigure ultimate realities.

## Historical Context

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Ancient Near Eastern warfare relied heavily on cavalry after horses were domesticated for military use (roughly 2000 BC). By Joel's time, horses were synonymous with military might. Nations lacking horses faced strategic disadvantage (Deuteronomy 17:16 warned Israel against amassing horses, lest they trust military strength rather than God). The Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians all fielded formidable cavalry. Joel's comparison to horses and horsemen would immediately communicate overwhelming military threat.

Locust swarms advance with remarkable organization and speed. Modern scientific observation confirms Joel's description: locusts can travel up to 100 miles per day, maintain formation during flight, and move with apparent coordinated purpose. Ancient peoples, lacking entomological knowledge, could only describe what they observed—the swarm resembled a cavalry charge in its speed, power, and terrifying advance.

The military language also functions theologically. God repeatedly describes judgment using military imagery throughout Scripture. The Assyrian army that destroyed northern Israel (722 BC) was God's instrument (Isaiah 10:5-6). Babylon served as God's "battle axe" against Judah (Jeremiah 51:20). The Roman legions that destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70 fulfilled Jesus's prophecy (Luke 21:20-24). Even demonic forces serve God's sovereign purposes (1 Kings 22:19-23, Job 1:6-12). All history unfolds under divine providence—God orchestrates even judgments executed by His enemies.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

## Study Questions

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1. How does recognizing that God commands even His enemies (locusts, enemy armies) demonstrate His absolute sovereignty over history?
2. What does Joel's military imagery teach about the serious, inescapable nature of divine judgment?
3. How should the church respond to God's judgments on nations—with self-righteous gloating or humble recognition that "judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17)?

## Interlinear Text

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מַרְאֵה הוֹ	סוֹסֵי יָם	מַרְאֵה הוֹ	וּכְפָרָשִׁים יָם	כִּי
The appearance	of horses	The appearance	and as horsemen	H3651
H4758	H5483	H4758	H6571	
יָרוּצוּן:				
so shall they run				
H7323				

## Additional Cross-References

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**Revelation 9:7** (Parallel theme): And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.