

Joel 2:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks:

Analysis

They shall run like mighty men (Hebrew *kegibborim yerutsun*, גִּבְּרִים יָרַצְוּ) means mighty warrior, champion, hero. The term describes military elite like David's "mighty men" (2 Samuel 23:8-39) and Gideon as "mighty man of valour" (Judges 6:12). Joel compares locusts to these elite warriors in speed and determination. *Ruts* (רָצַ, "run") emphasizes rapid, purposeful movement. Unlike random insects, these advance with warrior-like intentionality.

They shall climb the wall like men of war (Hebrew *anshey milchamah ya'alu chomah*, אֲנָשִׁי מִלְחָמָה יַעַלُו חָמָה) —ancient siege warfare involved scaling city walls. *Chomah* (חָמָה, "wall") refers to fortified defensive walls protecting cities. The verb *alah* (עָלָה, "go up/ascend/climb") describes the locusts scaling barriers that stop human armies. No wall provides protection; the swarm penetrates every defense. This anticipates verse 9's description of locusts entering houses through windows.

And they shall march every one on his ways (Hebrew *ve'ish biddarkav yelekun*, וְאַיִשׁ בִּדְרָכָיו יֵלְקַעַן) —*ish biddarkav* literally means "each man in his ways," emphasizing individual discipline within collective movement. Despite being countless billions, each locust maintains its course. *Halak* (הָלַךְ, "walk/go/march") describes steady, determined advance. This phrase parallels military formations where soldiers maintain ranks and positions during advance.

And they shall not break their ranks (Hebrew *velo ye'abbetun orchotam*, וְלֹא יַבְּבֹתּוּ אֶרְכֹּתָם)

עֲבָת (עֲבָת, "pledge/exchange/break") here means to deviate from or break formation. Orchah (וְחָ) means path, way, or rank. The phrase emphasizes disciplined formation—no individual locust breaks ranks or deviates from assigned path. This military precision demonstrates that the swarm operates under divine command, not random instinct.

Historical Context

Ancient Israel's military relied primarily on infantry, with elite units like David's mighty men. Soldiers trained to maintain formation during combat—breaking ranks meant vulnerability and defeat. Disciplined armies defeated larger but disorganized forces (Gideon's 300 defeating Midianites, Judges 7; Jonathan and armor-bearer routing Philistines, 1 Samuel 14). Joel's description of locusts maintaining perfect formation despite numbering in billions emphasizes supernatural discipline.

City walls were primary defense against invaders. Fortified cities like Jerusalem, Jericho, and Lachish had massive stone walls—some 20-30 feet high and 15-20 feet thick. During siege, defenders fought from walls while attackers used ladders, ramps, and siege towers to scale them. Joel's description of locusts climbing walls like warriors would resonate with audiences familiar with siege warfare. The implication: even Jerusalem's walls provide no protection against God's army.

The description of individual discipline within massive swarm reflects observed locust behavior. Entomologists note that swarming locusts maintain remarkable coordination despite numbering in billions. They move in same direction, maintain spacing, and respond collectively to environmental cues. Ancient observers, lacking scientific explanation, could only describe this as military-like discipline. Joel correctly interprets this natural phenomenon as evidence of divine sovereignty—God commands even insects with precision.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does the locusts' perfect discipline and formation teach about God's meticulous sovereignty over all creation?
2. How does Joel's description of invaders scaling walls challenge false securities (fortified cities, walls, human defenses)?
3. In what ways do modern people trust false securities (wealth, technology, military might) that will prove as useless as walls against locusts?

Interlinear Text

כִּבְבוֹר יִם	וְאֵצֶן	וְאֵשׁ	מִלְחָמָה	יַעֲלֵה	חָוֵם הַ
like mighty men	They shall run	every one	of war	they shall climb	the wall
H1368	H7323	H376	H4421	H5927	H2346
וְלֹא יָלַכְתִּי	בְּדָרְכֵי	וְאֵשׁ	יַעֲבֹט וְ	אַרְחֹזָתָם:	
every one	on his ways	H1980	H3808	and they shall not break	their ranks
H376	H1870			H5670	H734

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 30:27 (Parallel theme): The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands;

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