

Joel 2:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief.

Analysis

They shall run to and fro in the city (Hebrew ba'ir yashoquu, בָּעִיר יִשְׁקוּ)—shaqaq (שָׁקַק, "run to and fro/rush/range") describes frantic, comprehensive movement throughout the city. Ir (עִיר, "city") represents humanity's ultimate defense—fortified settlements with walls, gates, and organized resistance. Yet even cities provide no refuge. The locusts penetrate urban areas just as thoroughly as fields.

They shall run upon the wall (Hebrew bachomah yerutsun, בַּחוֹמָה יִרְצֹנּוּ)—ruts (רָץ, "run") emphasizes speed and determination. The wall (chomah), humanity's primary defensive barrier, becomes merely another surface for the invaders to traverse. This repeats the theme from verse 7—no wall provides protection. The imagery anticipates verse 9b where locusts enter houses.

They shall climb up upon the houses (Hebrew babattim ya'alu, בַּבָּתִּים יַעֲלוּ)—alah (עָלָה, "go up/climb/ascend") describes the locusts scaling buildings. Bayit (בַּיִת, "house") represents private, personal space—the final refuge. Yet even homes provide no sanctuary. The progression is devastating: fields destroyed (chapter 1), cities penetrated, walls scaled, houses invaded.

They shall enter in at the windows like a thief (Hebrew be'ad hachallonot yavo'u kegannav, בְּעַד הַחֲלוֹנוֹת יָבֹאוּ כְּגַנָּב)—challon (חֲלוֹן, "window") was the vulnerable opening in ancient houses. Gannav (גַּנָּב, "thief") provides startling comparison—the invaders come unexpectedly, penetrate defenses silently, and take everything

valuable. Jesus used identical imagery: "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 3:3, 16:15). The comparison emphasizes suddenness, stealth, and comprehensive loss.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cities employed multiple defensive layers: outer walls, inner citadels, individual fortified houses. During siege, populations retreated behind successive barriers. Joel's description shows each layer penetrated—city walls, house walls, even windows. This comprehensive penetration communicates that no human defense avails against God's judgment. The comparison to a thief would resonate with audiences familiar with burglary—thieves entered through windows (especially upper-story windows) to avoid locked doors.

Windows in ancient Near Eastern architecture were small openings, often unglazed, covered by lattices or shutters. They provided ventilation and light but were vulnerable points of entry. Proverbs 7:6 describes looking out through window lattices. Sisera's mother looked through windows awaiting his return (Judges 5:28). The comparison of locusts entering through windows to thieves emphasizes that even the most intimate, protected spaces provide no refuge.

The thief imagery appears throughout Scripture as metaphor for unexpected judgment. Job warns that "the eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight... in the dark they dig through houses" (Job 24:15-16). Jesus repeatedly warned that His return would come unexpectedly like a thief (Matthew 24:43-44, Luke 12:39-40). Paul wrote that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). Joel's prophecy establishes this motif that New Testament writers develop eschatologically.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the progression from fields to cities to houses to windows demonstrate that no place provides refuge from God's judgment apart from Christ?
2. What does the comparison to a thief teach about the suddenness and unexpectedness of divine judgment?
3. In what ways do modern people create false securities (alarm systems, insurance, savings) that will prove as futile as locked doors against locusts?

Interlinear Text

בְּעִיר	יָשׁוּ קוֹ	בְּחוֹמָה	יָרְצוּ	בְּבֵת יִם
in the city	They shall run to and fro	upon the wall	they shall run	upon the houses
H5892	H8264	H2346	H7323	H1004
יַעֲלֶוּ	בְּעִיר	הַחֲלוֹנִים	יָבֹאוּ	כְּגֵנֶב:
they shall climb up		at the windows	they shall enter in	like a thief
H5927	H1157	H2474	H935	H1590

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 9:21 (Parallel theme): For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets.

John 10:1 (Parallel theme): Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

Exodus 10:6 (Parallel theme): And they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor

thy fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day. And he turned himself, and went out from Pharaoh.

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