

Locusts

Four different types of locusts are mentioned by Joel 1:4:

1. gazam, which means 'to cut off,' and refers to the locusts that eat the tops off the stalks of plants. This type of locust has been called the 'gnawing locust,' or 'the devourer,' and has no wings. The eschatological (future) reference is to Tiglath-pileser III, also known as Pul, the Assyrian king.
2. 'arbeh, which means 'to increase;' this type of locust eats the stalks of the plants. It has been called 'the swarming' locust. The eschatological reference is to Sargon II, an aristocrat unlike his predecessor, Tiglath-pileser III, who was a commoner. Sargon II founded the Sargonid Dynasty.
3. yelek, which means 'to lick up,' and designates the locust that eats the stub of the stalk. The eschatological reference is to the Assyrian king Sennacherib.
4. chasil, which means 'to devour,' and denotes the locust that eats the root of the plant. And eschatologically, the term refers to Esarhaddon.¹

Locusts belong to the order called Orthoptera, and include grasshoppers. True locusts, or jumping grasshoppers are migratory and belong to the family Acrididae. There are 23,000 different species of locusts. And they cause great damage to crops wherever they swarm. Modern control measures include poison bait, the plowing under of locust eggs, airplane sprayed insecticides and truck-mounted poisonous mist blowers. When locusts swarm, the numbers are estimated to be in the hundreds of millions.

A few Scripture references are:

"They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it." Judges 6:5.

"They will chop down her forest,' declares the Lord, 'dense though it be. They are more numerous than locusts, they cannot be counted.'" Jeremiah 46:23

"Locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks." Proverbs 30:27

To demonstrate how destructive locust infestations can be, Gustaf Dalman wrote:² "In Jerusalem the locusts appeared at that time in flights lasting for hours, like clouds from the northeast and south, from the 22nd to the 27th of March....At the end of May and the beginning of June the first hatching of eggs, deposited by them into the ground, appeared as wingless larvae..., which wander about and eat up everything green that they encounter. Wild growth, grain, the leaves of fig trees, vines, even olive trees, everything disappears where they move along. They cover the walls of houses, penetrate to the inside through doors and windows, just as Exodus 10:5f assumes. Following a sixfold shedding, the wings appear after approximately two months, and twenty days later they fly on..., to invade other regions."

NOTES:

¹Isaiah 7-11 speak specifically of Tiglath-pileser III; Isaiah 20:1 speaks of Sargon II; and Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18 speak of Sennacherib. Esarhaddon is mentioned in Ezra 4:2.

²Dalman, Gustaf. Arbeit 1/2, 393f (based on Israel Aharoni's description of the locust plague of 1915-16).