

REFLECTION PAGE

For use as a small group discussion starter and/or for personal spiritual reflection
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Joel 2:12-14, 28-32 (NRSV)

¹² Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

¹³ rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the Lord, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.

¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain-offering and a drink-offering
for the Lord, your God?

²⁸ Then afterwards

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.

²⁹ Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

³⁰ I will show portents in the heavens and on the
earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹The
sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to
blood, before the great and terrible day of
the Lord comes. ³²Then everyone who calls on the
name of the Lord shall be saved; for in Mount
Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who
escape, as the Lord has said, and among the
survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.

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The Prophet JOEL

Joel is a relatively short book that uses a natural disaster (a swarm of devastating locust) to describe God's judgment on the nation. The second half of the book describes God's restoration of Zion and judgment on foreign nations. It is a rather frightening book that presents God as intensely jealous for Zion to the exclusion of any others.

If you have 15 or so minutes, go ahead and read through the entire book of Joel.

Stories about "destruction from the Almighty" (1:15) may be difficult to reconcile with images of a gracious and loving God.

- When you read images of destruction and dismay like the ones presented in Joel, how do you react?
- Do you think there is an "Old Testament God" who is angry and punishing, and then a "New Testament God" who is compassionate and forgiving?
- Isn't there only one God, eternal and unchanging for all time?

Now focus on chapter 2, verses 12-14 for a while.

- What does the phrase "Yet even now..." say about God?
- What does it mean to "return" to God?
- What does the description of God in verse 13 reveal about God's character?

In verse 14, using the same word ("turn"), the prophet asks a question - "Who knows...?"

- Why do you think this is phrased as a question?
- Why does the prophet not make a proclamation that God will turn and relent?

PENTECOST

We focus on the prophet Joel this week because this is the passage that Peter quotes in Acts 2:15-

21. The Holy Spirit has just been given to the disciples, and Peter proclaims that Joel's prophecy is being fulfilled.

- Assuming the crowd of "devout Jews" (2:5) knows their scriptures, what must have been their feeling when Peter told them they were witnessing the fulfillment of this vivid prophecy?
- What would the people be expecting to happen next if they believed what Peter told them?

The focal point of the prophecy that applies to the Pentecost event is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh.

- Why does the prophet include the pairs - male and female, old and young, free and slave - in the list of those upon whom the Spirit is poured?
- What does this inclusion say about the availability of the Holy Spirit?
- Is this universal nature of God's Spirit important in your theology?
- Why or why not?

Quotable:

"It is the Spirit's work to draw what might otherwise be a cacophonous disunity into symphony. The Spirit worked to transcribe God's music for playing on the human instrument of Jesus of Nazareth; the Spirit now works to orchestrate that theme for an ensemble of billions."

—Mike Higton, Christian Doctrine

The Lord is my REFUGE...

Joel talks about God offering Zion (Jerusalem) as a refuge for God's people.

- How is God a "refuge" for you?
- From what in life do we need to take refuge?
- How does God protect us from those things?
- When we suffer or hurt, does that indicate that God is no longer protecting us?
- A refuge is intended as a temporary shelter, so what happens when you stay too long?
- Is there a risk in long-term refuge?

Metaphorical Meaning

There is much about God that is impossible to fully describe. So much of our language about God is metaphor and comparison.

- What images, metaphors, and comparisons describing the Holy Spirit can you list off the top of your head?
 - In Acts 2, the Spirit is described as "divided tongues, as of fire." What do you imagine this must have looked like?
 - Does speaking in metaphorical terms (rather than literal terms) somehow weaken the "truth" of what you are saying?
 - Why or why not?