

Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. (Joel 2:13)

*Merciful Father, your grace and mercy is far beyond what we deserve. When we struggle and fall short, give us your Spirit to return to you in faith and repentance. Make us die every day to sin that we may be raised up to new life in Christ alone, the one in whom we pray. Amen*

## Introduction

The prophet Joel spoke to God's people about the consequences that were coming because they had turned away from the Lord. But he did not leave them with no hope. He called them to repent and turn away from their sin, and seek the Lord for his forgiveness.

## Read: Joel 2:1-2a, 10-17

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

## The Biblical Context

When we hear the word "prophecy," what often comes to mind are predictions of the future. But the prophets were not simply fortune tellers, nor were they people who made guesses about things to come.

Prophets were messengers who spoke the direct message of God. Sometimes this message had to do with future events — like the bad results of the people's bad actions. But prophecy is also a call to action. Too often people take their faith in God for granted. The prophets help us realize that the Lord is real and that God is acting in our lives every day!

Most of the named prophets in Scripture lived in the eras of Monarchy and Division (around 1100-700 B.C.) and through years of Assyrian and Babylonian exile (around 700-500 B.C.). Joel was a "post-exilic" prophet.

## Discussion Questions

1. In these verses, the prophet Joel described the "day of the Lord." What does it sound like to you? What emotions does it stir up?
2. People often look for some sign that God is real, or wish that God would appear to them. Do you think that if God showed up and spoke to you it would make your life easier or harder? Explain.
3. Verse 11 says that God's Word is powerful. Can you think of some examples from the Bible where God did mighty things by the power of his Word alone?
4. In verse 12, how can you tell that these words are *from* God, not just *about* God? Why is that important to know?
5. Re-read verse 13. Where before have you heard (or sung) the phrase "Return to the Lord your God ..."? At what time of year in the Church do we focus on this theme of repentance?
6. What does Joel want the people to gather together to do? When do we do this in our lives of faith? Why is this important?
7. Hundreds of years after Joel lived, the Apostle Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and quoted the prophet. Read: Acts 2:16-21. What amazing thing happened to Jesus' disciples on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4)? Would you call that a good "day of the Lord"?
8. Now read: Acts 3:17-21. Given all that the prophets spoke and all that Jesus has done for us, what does God ask us to do? How does God fulfill his own promise in our lives of faith?