

God's Love Restores

***Key Verse: "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."
—Joel 2:13***

***Selected Scripture:
Joel
2:12,13,18,19,28-32***

THE CONTEXT OF THIS

week's lesson is found starting in Joel 2:1, which states: "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh." The expression "day of the LORD" is a period elsewhere described in the Bible as "a time of trouble," "great tribulation," and a "day of vengeance" which concludes this present Gospel Age. (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21; Jer. 46:10) In Joel's prophecy, this period is described as "a day of darkness and of gloominess. . . . A fire devoureth before them . . .

and nothing shall escape them." (Joel 2:2,3) The "fire" here spoken of is symbolic, and refers to destruction. In verse 10 we are told that the earth, symbolizing present, man-made institutions, "shall quake," and the heavens, denoting false religious systems, "shall tremble."

In verse 11, the prophet speaks of an "army" before which "the LORD shall utter his voice." God's wisdom will allow the hopes, fears, follies and selfishness of this great "army" of discontented mankind to work out his own grand purposes in the overthrow of present institutions—social, religious, political, and economic. These experiences will prepare mankind for God's kingdom of righteousness and peace, which will afterward be established in the earth.

This will mark a turning point in God's arrangements for man. Verse 12 elaborates on the "silver lining" to the previously described trouble. "Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart." One of God's main purposes in permitting this period of trouble, darkness, and gloominess is to enable mankind to turn, or return, back to their all-wise, powerful, merciful, and loving Creator for the solution to all their problems. Our Key Verse, from the *New Living Translation*, states: "Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead. Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish."

Later in this prophecy, Joel says, "Fear not," but "be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. . . . Ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: . . . I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed."—vss. 21,26,27

"It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." (vs. 28) Here is one of the many Scriptural proofs that the Holy Spirit is not a separate being. It is not possible to "pour out" a spirit being. Rather, the Holy Spirit is the power and influence of God. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given, or poured out, upon the apostles and other consecrated believers gathered in Jerusalem, Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." (Acts 2:16) Following Peter's discourse, God's Holy Spirit was poured out also upon "about three thousand" whose hearts were touched by the Gospel message. (vs. 41) This pouring out of the Spirit was only upon the Lord's followers, not all mankind. However, in God's kingdom, soon to come on earth, his Spirit will be poured out "upon all flesh," and "all families of the earth [shall] be blessed," in accordance with God's immutable promise!—Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:25; Heb. 6:13-18 ■