

Joel 2:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

Analysis

After describing devastating judgment (chapter 1) and the approaching Day of the LORD (2:1-11), God issues one of Scripture's most gracious calls to repentance. The Hebrew conjunction *ve-gam-attah* ("Therefore also now") indicates that despite impending judgment, opportunity for mercy remains. The source is emphatic: *ne'um-Yahweh* ("says the LORD")—this isn't human wishful thinking but divine invitation. The command *shuvu aday* ("turn to Me") uses the covenant term for repentance—not merely changing behavior but returning to covenant relationship. The preposition *aday* ("to Me") is crucial: genuine repentance directs itself toward God Himself, not merely away from sin or toward moral improvement.

The phrase "with all your heart" (*bekhol-levavkhem*) demands comprehensive, undivided turning. The Hebrew *lev* (heart) encompasses intellect, emotions, and will—the entire inner person. God rejects half-hearted, superficial repentance. The accompanying signs—"with fasting, with weeping, with mourning" (*uvetzom uvivkhi uvemisped*)—describe external expressions flowing from genuine internal contrition. Fasting demonstrates prioritizing spiritual reality over physical appetite; weeping and mourning express godly sorrow for sin (2 Corinthians 7:10). Yet verse 13 immediately clarifies: "Rend your heart, and not your garments"—God requires authentic heart-change, not merely ritual performance.

This verse establishes that genuine repentance is comprehensive ("all your heart"), God-directed ("to Me"), and urgent ("now"). The Reformed doctrine of effectual

calling teaches that while the command to repent is universal, only those whom God's Spirit regenerates can truly respond (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25). Yet the offer remains genuine—"whosoever will may come." The call to repentance demonstrates God's desire to show mercy rather than execute deserved judgment. Even when judgment is announced, repentance can avert or mitigate it (Jeremiah 18:7-8; Jonah 3:10). This grace anticipates the gospel: God calls sinners to repent and believe in Christ, who bore the judgment we deserved (Mark 1:15; Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9).

Historical Context

Joel's call to repentance addresses a community experiencing devastating locust plague yet spiritually complacent. The historical setting likely involves either pre-exilic Judah (9th-7th century BC) facing covenant curses for disobedience, or post-exilic community (5th century BC) struggling with apathy despite temple restoration. Either way, the people maintained religious ritual while hearts remained distant from God—a pattern repeated throughout Israel's history and church history.

Ancient Israelite fasting involved abstaining from food and water, wearing sackcloth, sitting in ashes, and public lament (Esther 4:3; Jonah 3:5-8; Daniel 9:3). These outward signs demonstrated inner contrition, though they could become empty ritual divorced from genuine repentance—precisely Joel's concern. The prophets consistently confronted this disconnect: Isaiah 58:3-7 condemns fasting that lacks justice; Jeremiah 4:4 demands circumcised hearts; Amos 5:21-24 rejects worship without righteousness.

The timing "therefore also now" suggests the locust plague had occurred, judgment was progressing, yet mercy remained available. This illustrates a crucial biblical principle: God's judgments serve remedial purposes, driving people to repentance while opportunity exists. Jesus later applied this principle, calling His generation to repent lest worse judgment fall (Luke 13:1-5). The church age extends this call: "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). God's patience shouldn't breed complacency but urgent repentance (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What does "all your heart" repentance require that mere outward religious reformation lacks?
2. How does God's invitation to return "now" challenge procrastination and presumption on divine patience?
3. In what areas of life do you practice external religiosity (fasting, weeping) without genuine heart-turning toward God?

Interlinear Text

וְגַם	עַתָּה	נֹאֵם	יְהוָה	שׁוּבוּ	עַד יְיָ	בְּכָל
H1571	H6258	Therefore also now saith	the LORD	turn	H5704	H3605
		H5002	H3068	H7725		
	לְבַבְךָ	וּבְצוֹם	וּבְבִכּוֹ			
	ye even to me with all your heart	and with fasting	and with weeping			
	H3824	H6685	H1065			
	וּבְמִסְפָּד:					
	and with mourning					
	H4553					

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 12:6 (Parallel theme): Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.

Jeremiah 4:1 (References Lord): If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the LORD, return unto me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove.

Hosea 6:1 (References Lord): Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.

1 Samuel 7:6 (References Lord): And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

Acts 26:20 (Parallel theme): But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

1 Samuel 7:3 (References Lord): And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

Hosea 14:1 (References Lord): O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

Judges 20:26 (References Lord): Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

Zechariah 7:3 (References Lord): And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?

Isaiah 22:12 (References Lord): And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: