

Joel

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, . . . the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Book of Joel using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Reading the Prophets*—especially the section on Joel—will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don’t miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church’s criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God’s unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church’s living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit’s guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you’ll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§]And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶]Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||}that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||}and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven . . . earth . . . under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God’s g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

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Prepare

Read the Introduction to Joel, paying particular attention to the *Message of the Prophet* and the *Christian Perspective* on it. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Joel to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Joel, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Joel as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:2–12.** What had recently devastated the countryside of Judah? What had been devoured, and what made the crisis worse? How does Joel view this calamity? What thus follows the prophet's description of the devastation?
2. **1:6.** To what are the locust hordes likened? What image represents the locusts' capacity to devour and destroy? What does the Book of Revelation, drawing from this passage, describe? According to St. John Chrysostom, what will kill us in the life to come? How are these things more fierce than lions' teeth?
3. **1:9.** What did the food shortage in Judah disrupt? Besides the threat of hunger facing the people, what supplies were lacking? What would failure to worship the Lord as mandated in the Torah cause? To what is "the house of the LORD" probably referred here?
4. **1:14.** What are the aims and benefits of abstaining from food? For what special day does Joel call? What are the days of prescribed fasting? Although Jesus affirms the importance of fasting, what does he criticize about it? When is fasting commended by the Catholic Church? When is it required? According to St. Leo the Great, for what is devout fasting valuable, and how do we know this?
5. **Word Study: The Day of the LORD (1:15).** As a traditional concept in the OT and the unifying theme of the Book of Joel, what is the "day of the LORD"? Why does it melt the hearts of all? What will happen on the day of the Lord? What do the days of the Lord that punctuate the history of Israel ultimately foreshadow? How does this prophetic theme appear in the NT? What will happen on this day?

For application

1. **1:2–4.** What stories of hard times have your grandparents or older relatives passed down in your family? In your experience, what sorts of economic or material disaster would you want to tell your descendants about? Why do families pass such stories down from one generation to the next?
2. **1:13.** What is sackcloth, and why would one wear it at a time of tribulation or mourning? In stories of the saints, why do some of them wear uncomfortable clothing like hair shirts even when times are good? What would prompt you to consider wearing such garments?
3. **1:14.** Most Christian communions require periods of fasting, especially before major feasts or holy days. What purposes do such periods serve? In your Catholic ritual church (e.g., Roman, Byzantine, Maronite, etc.), what are the major periods of fasting? What guidelines or regulations govern such fasts?
4. **1:19–20.** Joel imagines not only people but also animals praying for relief from natural disasters such as wildfires and pest infestations. About which environmental crises are you most concerned? What recourse to prayer do you have in the face of such conditions?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:1–11.** What do Judah and Jerusalem, already devastated by locusts, face, and why is its precise nature disputed? Either way, who is behind the coming chastisement? For what is this section of the book noted, literarily? Where else does the apocalyptic literary form appear in the OT and the NT?
2. **2:12–18.** Who is to participate in the national act of repentance for which Joel calls? When are these verses, which call God's people to contrition and conversion, read and for what purpose? What are we to note carefully about Lent and Easter? Just as we observe Lent with a kind of sadness before rejoicing at Easter, why should we do penance in this life, according to St. Caesarius of Arles?
3. **2:13.** What makes outward signs of repentance meaningful? To what is tearing one's garments a response? When were the unchanging attributes of God, his graciousness and mercy, revealed, and to whom? What did God postpone in the aftermath of Israel's apostasy in worshiping the golden calf? Of what kind of evil does this verse say God repents? In this context, what does God have the sovereign authority to do?

4. **2:28.** On whom will the mighty presence of God descend, and what will it make of them? To what is the Spirit of the Lord implicitly compared? What wish of Moses will this event fulfill? According to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, how does God give the Spirit? How was prophecy manifested in the early Church among women? What do dreams and visions serve as?
5. **2:32.** What power does the name YHWH, revealed to Moses in the burning bush, have the power to do, and why? To whom does Paul, who quotes from Joel's prophecy, apply this promise? According to St. Augustine, why did the apostle cite this testimony? What happens to those who call on the Lord's name following his Resurrection? Who are the "remnant" who will be saved?

For application

1. **2:1–11.** The "day of the LORD" is mentioned twice in these verses. What kind of "day of the Lord" does our civilization face? What kind of imagery would you use to describe it? How dire is it? What role do you think the Lord plays in it?
2. **2:12–13.** Read the notes for these two verses. What moral responsibility do we have for the environmental crises we face? What acts of repentance can we make that would appeal to God's mercy to avert these chastisements?
3. **2:15–16.** What is your practice with respect to fasting? If you never or seldom fast, why do you avoid doing it? Do you fast mainly at liturgically mandated times, or do you fast privately? If you fast regularly, what motivates you?
4. **2:28–29.** Joel prophesies that the Holy Spirit will be poured out on everyone. In Christian sacramental experience, when does that outpouring typically occur? How might the outpouring of the Spirit occur outside of reception of the sacraments? What indications would you expect to see that such an outpouring has occurred?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:1–16.** To what kind of war does the Lord summon all nations? For whom will it be a day of vindication? Why is the defeat of the nations assured?
2. **3:2.** With what valley is the valley of Jehoshaphat sometimes identified? Since the name Jehoshaphat translates "the LORD has judged", what reference is more likely? How is the vision often read in Christian tradition? According to St. Francis de Sales, what will happen after the history of the world comes to an end?
3. **3:13.** Of what is the harvest a prophetic image? To what is the separation of the righteous and the wicked likened? Since the wine press is another image of judgment, what happens to clusters of grapes?
4. **3:17–21.** With what do these verses deal? What will happen once the nations are punished for their crimes? Beginning in the NT, how does Christian tradition read oracles about the future Jerusalem? How do the final visions of Joel underlie the final visions of the Book of Revelation? According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, although those who fight against Zion will come to utter ruin, which place will be neither conquered nor burned?

For application

1. **3:2–3.** Why is human trafficking so heinous a crime? How serious a problem is it in our own country? Compare these verses with the Judgment of the Nations parable in Matthew 25. Even if you are not involved in actively combating human trafficking, what corporal or spiritual works of mercy can you do to aid its victims?
2. **3:10.** Read the note for this verse. In what kind of warfare are Christians engaged? Though military imagery in spiritual matters is sometimes alien to the modern mind, why is it critical that you consider yourself a warrior? According to Eph 6:10ff., what weapons do you have?
3. **3:13.** If you are a farmer or a gardener, how do you know when the produce you planted is ripe for harvest? What conditions does Joel see that indicate the time is right for judgment? What conditions exist in our own time that suggest a time for judgment may be imminent? With whom would judgment begin (see 1 Pet 4:17)?