

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Almighty God, may we always be ready for You to work in our lives by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Place in our hearts a longing to see You at work in our midst, and an expectation that great things will be done! Give us a desire to join with You in the work of salvation and deliverance by which Your Kingdom comes on earth, and may we be content in our relationship with You. Thank You, Almighty God; AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: WEALTH

**1. For yourself**

*Give thanks to God for all that you, your accumulated 'wealth'. Ask the Lord to help you use it all for His glory and praise*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Pray for any of your family who may be going through hard, especially financially. It is not something some people will talk about but it is important, and by the grace of God, we have a duty to help each other in the family*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Pray that the church of which you are a part will have the courage to be generous to those who are in need*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Pray for those in your country who have an abundance of wealth and have a duty before God to use it wisely. Pray that political leaders will have the courage to distribute the wealth of the nation with care and insight*

### Meditation

When life is quiet, Lord, fill my mind with what is good,  
And keep the enemy away from my thoughts and feelings.

When life is routine, Lord, give me the concentration I need  
To attend to the detail of what I do, and honour You in my work.

When life becomes difficult, Lord, save me from panic;  
Help me to focus on You, and trust Your spiritual guidance.

When life is horrendous, Lord, draw me ever closer to You,  
To gain the spiritual energy I need to find my way through trouble.

When life is easier, Lord, may I not forget You or Your love,  
But remember Your faithfulness through good times and bad.

When life is quiet, Lord, fill my mind with all that is good;  
Keep me alert, and prepare me for all that is yet to come.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – Acts 2:14-24

<sup>14</sup> Then Peter, standing with the Eleven, raised his voice and declared to the crowd:

'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem; know this and listen carefully to what I say. <sup>15</sup> These men are not drunk, as you imagine, for it is only nine in the morning! <sup>16</sup> No, this is what the prophet Joel said:

<sup>17</sup> "So, in the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup> Even on my servants,  
both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.

<sup>19</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire, vapour and smoke.

<sup>20</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great  
and glorious day of the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> And all who call on the name of the Lord  
will be saved."

<sup>22</sup> 'People of Israel, hear this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man commended by God to you by means of miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by the sure will and plan of God, but you killed Him by crucifixion with the help of Gentiles! <sup>24</sup> But God raised Him up and set Him free from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to hold Him in its power!

## Review

***Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter speaks to the crowds. First of all, he has to counter the scurrilous accusation that the disciples are drunk. Then, the Holy Spirit inspires him to explain what has happened in terms of Old Testament prophecy, and he quotes the prophet Joel.***

The second chapter of Acts is surely one of the richest chapters of the Bible! After the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, the disciples were consequently given the strange but empowering gift of 'speaking in tongues'. This astonishing phenomenon was something that drew the crowds to the disciples; the people who heard this came from around the world and yet they could hear the disciples words '*in their own languages*' (2:11)! So it was that by the design of God, a ready crowd was quickly gathered to hear Peter speak out first to defend the disciples from the accusation that they were drunk (2:15), and secondly, to give what is accepted as the most important sermon in the life of the Christian church (2:14-36).

So today's reading is the first half of Peter's great Pentecost sermon (2:14-24), and we will study the second half of it tomorrow (2:25-36). The whole sermon is a powerful defence of the Christian belief that Jesus was killed by the Jews and was raised from the dead, and in a remarkable twist (which we will study tomorrow), Peter concludes with an appeal to faith in Jesus Christ. Because of this, the sermon is regarded by some as a model of an 'evangelistic' sermon, designed to appeal to non-believers to believe in Jesus Christ. It is all the more remarkable that it was preached on the spur of the moment, and in response to the accusation that the disciples were drunk!

Peter outmanoeuvred the accusation of drunkenness with a logical defence; he said it was too early in the morning for anyone to have sufficient wine to be drunk (2:15). By now he was standing together with the other eleven disciples (2:14), and the opportunity was ripe for Peter to speak, so he launched without a break into an explanation of what was happening to the disciples. We can imagine the scene. The disciples had been worshipping the Lord in the Temple in a state of high excitement and speaking in tongues, but now they stood with Peter, full of the joy of the Holy Spirit, as he spoke to those who had heckled them.

Probably by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter was enabled to remember the one passage of Old Testament Scriptures referring to the promise of God to pour out His Spirit on 'all people', Joel 2:28-32, which he quotes almost exactly, here. This prophecy became an important one for the early church, probably because of its use by Peter on this momentous day, and it is found in other parts of the New

Testament, in Romans 10:13 and also Revelation 6:12. Peter also refers to a phrase from the same prophecy again, later on in his sermon (2:39). For a long time, Christians have wondered whether this famous sermon by Peter (2:14-36) was indeed what Peter said on the first Pentecost, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that those present were so struck that its structure and contents were remembered accurately. Certainly, his use of Joel's prophecy is remarkable and dramatic.

The book of Joel presents a warning to God's people of His coming judgement on their sins. To this extent, it is similar to many prophecies, for example, of Amos or Hosea. The passage quoted here stands out however, because it promises a unique intervention into the world by God before He comes with His cataclysmic last judgement (2:19,20). He promises to make a powerful blessing available not just to Israel, or indeed to faithful Israelites; He promises to '*pour out my Spirit on all people*' (2:17). Remarkably, the words '*all people*' here imply more, perhaps '*all kinds of people*'. Now in Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit came on prophets who prophesied, and Kings who were anointed into the leadership of Israel. In general, the Holy Spirit was only available for certain people, and for certain jobs God needed to be done. But Joel prophesies the day when God will lavish His Spirit on all without discrimination, and the day had come!

Lastly, in our reading today, Peter turns to address his hearers with a stark and penetrating challenge. This outpouring of God's Spirit comes as the result of God's work in this world, principally through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (2:22-24)! Peter delivers an incisive analysis of what God has done in Jesus, which would have severely challenged those who heard him. He said that God had sent His Messiah to His people, but they had not accepted Him, instead they had killed Him, but Jesus had been raised from the dead!

Our reading today closes at this point of suspense, and the theme of God's work in Jesus Christ carries over to tomorrow's reading. Suffice to say that here, Peter speaks with extraordinary accuracy and simplicity of thought, to challenge his hearers with the truth of what we now call the 'Gospel'. It was the first time that anyone had heard this message and it was stunningly delivered with a substantial quote from Old Testament prophecy. How would this message be received? We will find out soon enough, but as we read on, we will find there is much more to this great sermon!

## Going Deeper

### V14 'Fellow Jews ...'

#### Other translations:

*'Men of Judea (New Jerusalem Bible, English Standard version)*

The Greek words 'Men of Judea' are best translated as 'fellow Jews', because this best conveys the sense of Peter's call to the hearers, in language that is familiar to us today.

### V15 'it is only nine o'clock in the morning'

#### Other translations:

*'it is only the third hour of the day' (English Standard and New Authorised versions)*

The Greek expression 'third hour of the day' refers simply to what we call '9 o'clock'. To translate the phrase as in the Greek does not convey the meaning of the text to the reader in the language of today.

### V18 'in those days, and they will prophesy ...'

These words are missing from some of the ancient manuscripts found in the Western churches. The words '*and they will prophesy*' are not a part of the prophecy of Joel, from where this quote originally comes, so it seems that they were omitted possibly for this reason, and the words 'in those days' were accidentally omitted as well. I am content that they are most likely part of the original text.

### **Prophecies of doom and gloom, or hope?**

In verses 19 and 20, Joel's prophecy is typical of Old Testament prophecies of the final judgement of God. Isaiah speaks in a similar way when he prophesies against Judah and Jerusalem for her sins (Isaiah 4:3-5). In Old Testament times, these prophecies were designed to warn Israel about her sins so that she might return to her ways of faithfulness. However, from the time of Isaiah onwards, the prophets became increasingly sure that such a return was not possible, and that God was planning to come with a final 'last' judgement to redeem His people and judge the world. Isaiah's prophecies speak of God's solution to the problem of Israel's continued sin by sending a 'suffering servant' (Isaiah 53) who would demonstrate God's ways, and Jeremiah prophesies that God will '*write my law on their hearts*' (Jeremiah 31:31f.). The prophet

Joel is unique in saying that the God will additionally send His Spirit, prior to this last judgement, and this is why the prophecy we have studied here is so important.

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## Discipleship

### Application

#### ***The general availability of the Holy Spirit***

We cannot ignore the spiritual fact exposed here, which is that God makes His Holy Spirit available for all, and it is not given to an elite group of Christians or people of special spiritual insight. Unfortunately, many Christians live with the impression that the things of the Spirit are like religious choices available on a supermarket shelf; they are there for taking for those who want them. Such an attitude is a denial of God's graciousness. He has made Himself personally available by His Spirit to all who will receive Him by faith. Our passage means nothing if it does not say this.

#### ***A man commended by God***

This passage contains Peter's wonderful comment about Jesus, that He was a man '*commended by God by means of miracles ...*' (2:22). This is an important text, for it confirms the general opinion of many today that miracles should not be sought by the church for the sake of merely publicity. Rather, God does miracles on earth in order to save people, and bring them to Christ. God is specific and He does things for distinct purposes; He intervenes in human history and performs miracles primarily so that people might see Him and not merely to pander to our requests and whims. So it can be very affirming when God does something miraculous for us personally, but we would be wise to interpret what He does as something to guide us back to Christ.

### Questions for groups

1. What does this passage tell us about God's will for His people the church? What does Peter's sermon tell us about the faith of the first disciples?
2. Discuss in your group what you think of the message in Joel's prophecy. What is God's purpose in sending the Holy Spirit?
3. Why did Jesus die, according to this passage of Scripture, and how does this fit with your understanding of Christian doctrine on the matter?

### Discipleship challenges

- *Ask yourself whether you are happy with what this chapter of Acts says about the Holy Spirit, including His coming in the days prior to God's judgement. Pray and ask God whether He has more of His Holy Spirit to give to you*
- *Does God still need to come and judge His people and the whole world? What reasons might God need to come and judge the world, and ask yourself whether you have any vested interest in anything that God might wish to condemn. So Pray and ask the Lord for guidance*

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## Final Prayer

Thank You Lord Jesus Christ, for the gift of Your Holy Spirit and all they He does for us. Our lives are blessed by Your provision of grace, and You empowered us to be the people we were made to be. Come to us now with renewed vigour to refresh us and inspire us for what lies ahead. We praise You Lord Jesus Christ; come Holy Spirit, come: AMEN.