

With Fall Festivals Approaching, Messianic Jews Cling to This Crucial Message

Recently, I taught through the Twelve Minor Prophets at my Messianic synagogue in Atlanta. Going through these books has been helpful to our community as we have moved into Hebrew month of Elul and toward the fall holidays of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur.

In Judaism, the weeks leading up to the fall holidays are designated as a special time of spiritual accountability.

During this series, we had a particularly important discussion on the book of Yoel (Joel). Yoel gives one of the most powerful descriptions of the power of *teshuvah* (returning to God or “repentance”) in all of the prophets. In this article, I’d like to share with you an excerpt from our discussion with the hope that you will be inspired to do your own *cheshbon nefesh* (accounting of the soul) during this season.

In verses 1-12 of chapter 1, the prophet draws a picture of imminent judgment and devastation that is coming to Judah and Jerusalem. In verses 13-14, there is a call for a last minute, massive *teshuvah* (repentance). Then, for the next 17 verses, leading until about halfway through chapter 2, Yoel continues to give a graphic description of the Day of the Lord judgment that is right on Judah and Jerusalem’s doorstep.

Starting in verse 12 of chapter 2, we have an amazing text. Up to this point, God has been explicit through the prophet that Jerusalem is an inch away from judgment and devastation. But even with things as bad as they are, let’s read what God says in verses 12-14:

“Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to Me with all your

heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning. Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents from punishing. Who knows? He might turn aside and relent, and He might leave behind a blessing—a grain offering and a food offering for the Lord your God.”

The word *rend* means “to tear or cut.” Tearing or cutting one’s garments has been a longtime Jewish expression of grief or sorrow.

“Yet even now,” God says at the last minute, if you will do *teshuvah*, if you will return to Him, He will consider relenting. What we see here is that the destruction that did end up coming to Jerusalem could possibly have been averted if they had heeded God’s call to do *teshuvah*, even at the last minute.

Let’s not let this principle escape us as we consider our own lives.

All of us can experience seasons in life where we are in a deep pit. And our world may seem so ominous, and so devastating, and so dark, that there seems to be no way out. But the truth is that with God, there is always a path toward the light. God never wants us to intentionally choose to wait until the last minute to cry out to Him for mercy. But even at the last minute, God welcomes our return to Him. And the text above (Yoel 2:12-14) describes where we have to get to in our hearts.

We have to remember that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster (13b).

I love these words from Paul in 2 Cor. 1:8-10:

“For we would not, brothers, have you ignorant of our troubles

which came to us in Asia. We were pressured beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. We had the sentence of death in ourselves, so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. He delivered us from so great a death and does deliver us. In Him we trust that He will still deliver us.”

If God can raise the dead, He can heal anything in your life or mine.

Corrie ten Boom said, “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.”

Perhaps there is something in your life that is very dark, and maybe it’s of your own doing (as it was with Israel in the book of Yoel).

Or maybe you’re a victim of someone else’s wrongdoing.

Whatever the circumstances are, I encourage you to take responsibility for your part, return to God, and trust that He will create a path towards the light. That path may not be easy, and it may still involve pain and consequences. But it’s always going to be a better path if it’s the path of repentance.

If you find yourself in a hopeless struggle, cry out to God, give Him your heart, and trust that He will bring redemption according to His good and gracious purposes. He is willing to do so—even at the last minute. {eoa}

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