

A Study of the Minor Prophets

Leader's Guide

This is the series of eighteen Bible studies looking at the Minor Prophets, appropriate for any group of Christian women. It may also be used with unchurched neighbors and friends who wish to study the Bible. The lessons are written to provoke discussion and timely application of the material presented to us in these last twelve books of the Old Testament. Each session should take about 60 minutes to complete, but may be longer depending upon the amount of discussion. Each lesson comes with a leader's guide to give an idea of the types of things that might be considered in the discussion. It is recommended that the leader read the People's Bible Commentary for these books as part of her preparation.

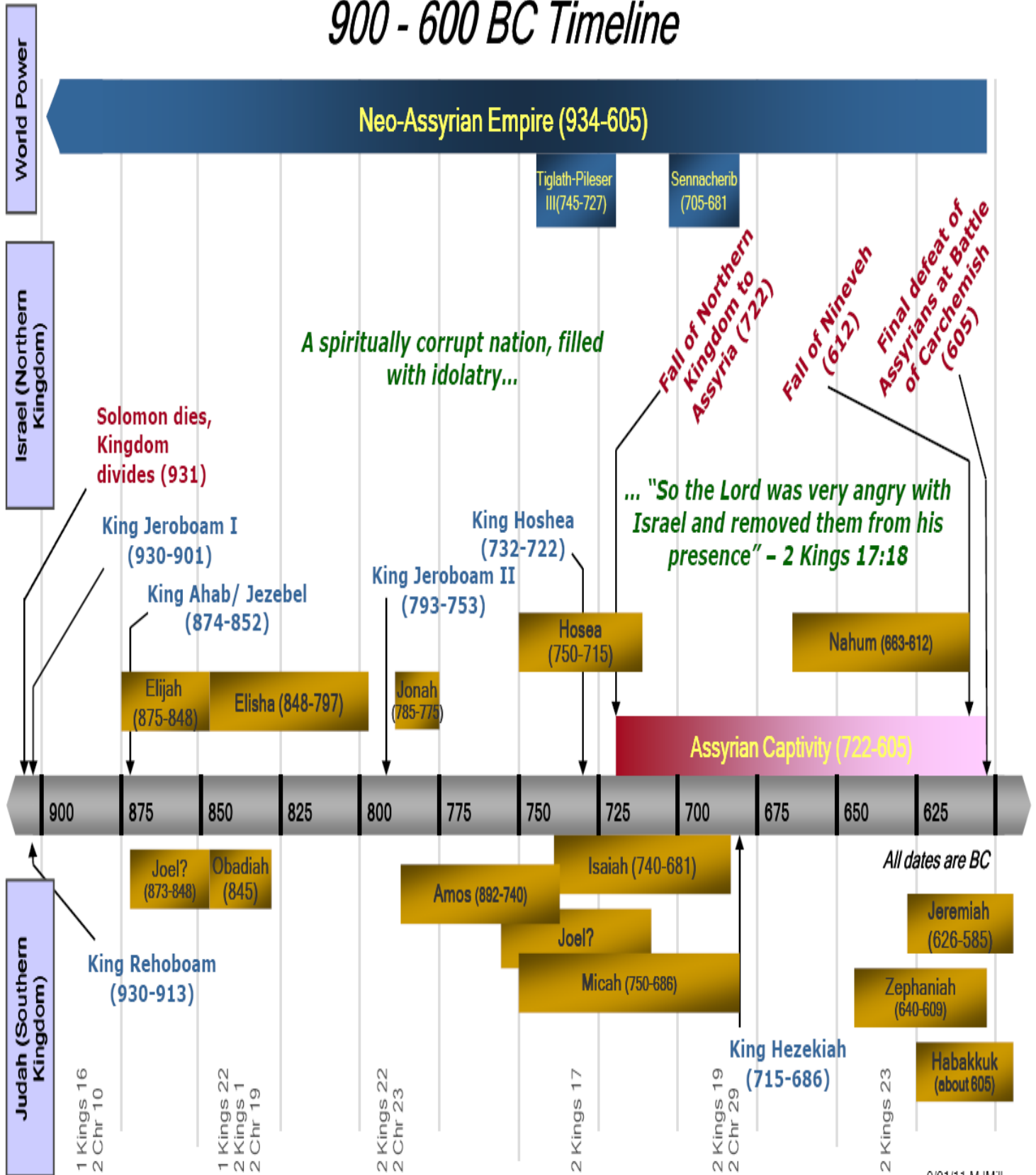
Throughout the studies of the Minor Prophets, the accompanying Timeline of 900-400BC may prove helpful to understand what was going on in the world at the time of the prophet.

This study was written by Marilyn Miller, a WELS staff minister at Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Houston, TX. The theological content was reviewed by Martin Luther College Professor Lyle Lange. In his review Professor Lange said, "This is simple, concise, and accurate presentation of God's message to us through the Minor Prophets. It will be a great blessing to all who use it."

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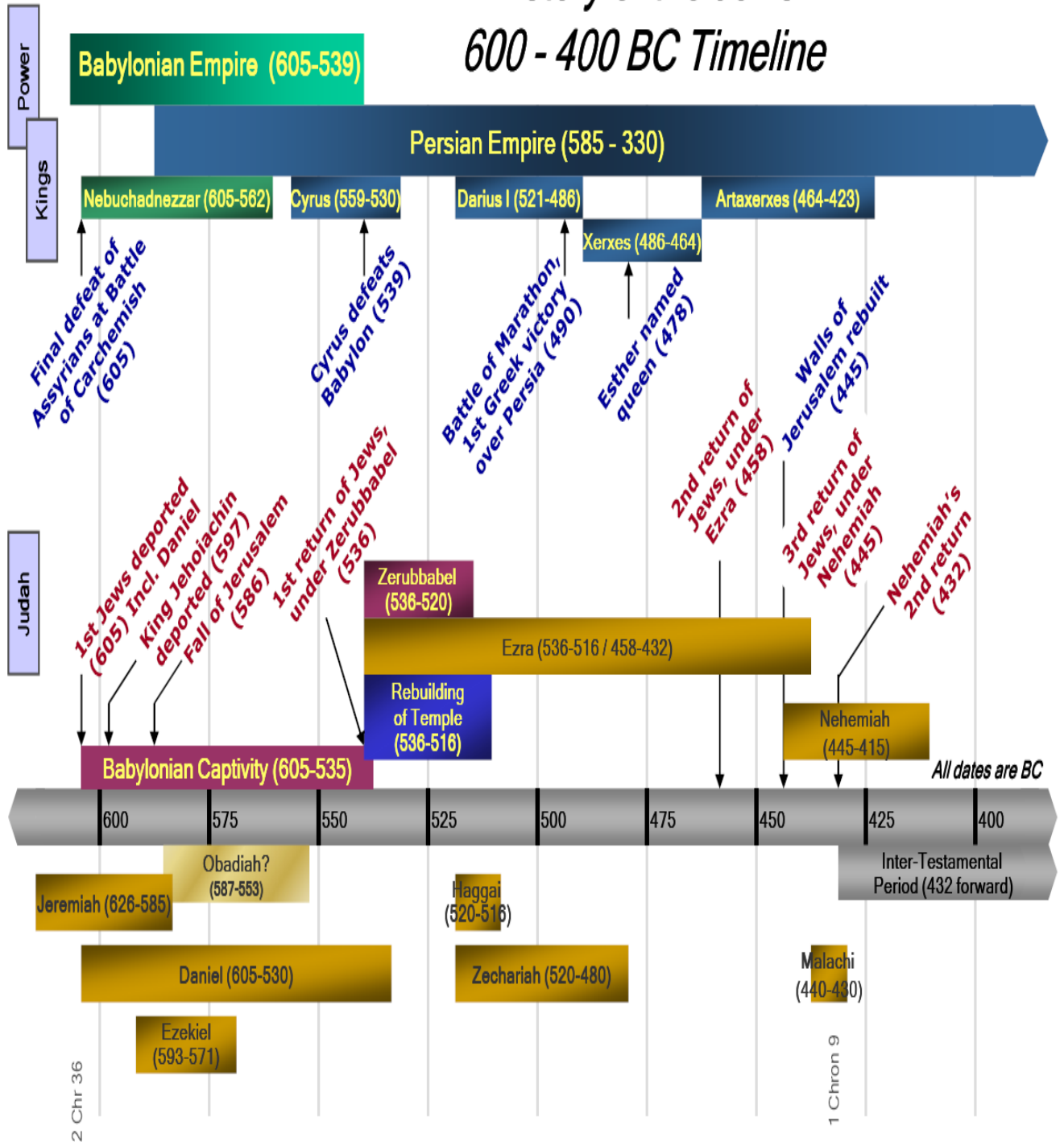
History of the Jews

900 - 600 BC Timeline



History of the Jews

600 - 400 BC Timeline



Lesson 1 – Introduction & Hosea 1-3

Opening Prayer

Introduction to the Minor Prophets

1. What are the Minor Prophets?
 - *The last twelve books of our Old Testament, known in Hebrew as “The Twelve”*
 - *Named because they are considerably shorter than the books of the other prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel*
 - *Customarily written on a single scroll, whereas the other prophetic books each had their own scroll*
 - *Written about 850-450 BC. The history of these times is shared with us in 2 Kings 14-15, 2 Chronicles 26-36, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. The Major Prophets cover this same period of history*

Introduction to Hosea: Israel’s Unfaithfulness – The Lord’s Faithfulness

2. What do we know about Hosea?
 - *His name means “salvation” – symbolizes God’s relationship with Israel*
 - *He was a contemporary of Isaiah, Amos and Micah;*
 - *He lived during the final days of the Northern Kingdom, just before it was carried off into captivity by Assyria, from which it would never return*
 - *At this time, Israel was filled with idolatry, had abandoned God and his commands, and was spiritually and morally bankrupt. They worshiped at shrines and adopted the deities of the land, practicing ritual prostitution and human sacrifice. This led Hosea and other prophets to use prostitution as a picture of the people’s unfaithfulness to the Lord*
 - *He vigorously preached against the idolatry of his time and bravely rebuked the people, kings, and priests in an attempt to remind Israel of the Lord’s loving faithfulness and give a call to repentance*

Hosea chapter 1

3. Read Hosea 1:1-9. Gomer apparently had children by other men (vs 2); and the meaning of the names of her children are “God scatters” (Jezreel) “unloved” (Lo-Ruhamah) and “not my people” (Lo-Ammi). From our introductory discussion, why do you think God put Hosea into this difficult, gut-wrenching relationship with Gomer?

What better way to begin to understand how God must feel as those he loves betray him so completely. Even those things that are meant to give pleasure – a loving wife and children – bring pain and heartbreak. Are we really any better than Gomer? Haven’t we also been unfaithful to God, with no right to have his love? Haven’t we also caused God great pain?
4. Note on vs 4: At Jezreel, Jehu murdered Ahab’s son King Joram and ordered Jezebel thrown from her window into the street. Jehu piled up the severed heads of Ahab’s seventy princes (2 Kings 10:11) at the city gates. The slaughter of Ahab’s family, though not pretty, was still commanded by God. Shortly after Gomer gave birth to Jezreel, God used the Assyrians to

bring judgment on Israel by carrying them off into a captivity from which they would never return. How do the names of Hosea's other two children also foretell an ominous future?

Daughter's name was Lo-Ruhamah, meaning "not loved." Israel's time of grace came to an end with the Assyrian captivity. God had promised David there would always be a remnant of believers to give birth to the Messiah, but this promise was fulfilled through Judah, not through Israel. Israel stubbornly resisted God's call to repentance and thus the nation became "unloved" (though some individuals may well have heeded the warnings and returned to the Lord.) The name of Hosea's second son, Lo-Ammi, means "not my people" and this is what happened as the Lord turned his back on Israel.

5. What hope do we see in 1:10-2:1? (Reference Genesis 22:17-18)

We are reminded of the promise God gave to Abraham – the promise of many descendents from which a Savior would be born. "Yet" this punishment just described would not be forever and a period of blessing would follow when the Kingdom would be united under the Messiah and would once again worship the true God together. In this time of blessing, we won't be remembering the bloodshed of Jezreel but rather a time of planting, growing and harvesting. "Jezreel" means "God will scatter." In the first case he scattered his people, in the second case, he scatters seeds of faith. Heavenly Father, forgive our unfaithfulness and restore us as your children.

Hosea chapter 2

6. Read 2:2-13. What is Hosea trying to accomplish in 2:2-5?

Life must have been unspeakably difficult for Hosea, living with a woman who continued her adulterous ways even after marriage; she even gives her lovers the credit for providing for her. Can you fathom the emotional turmoil and depression he must have felt? What a disgrace it must have been for him. He turns to his children in an effort to see if they can influence Gomer to be faithful to him. If she doesn't change he will take away all he has given her and throw her out to die.

7. Name 3-4 ways we can apply these passages to our own lives and our own world?

1) Even though we have been grossly unfaithful, God still wants reconciliation, not a divorce. Amazing grace! 2) How often don't we take the credit for our achievements and revel in our wickedness instead of thanking God for his blessings? God forgive us. 3) The faithful among us should be rebuking the unfaithful in an attempt to have them turn from their evil ways. Their souls and eternal life are at stake! 4) Finally, we can expect judgment. If we don't repent and turn away from our sins, we will forfeit God's love and suffer in the parched desert of hell. God preserve us!

8. We can easily see how God is speaking to his people through Hosea. What are some of the problems Hosea says will come to Gomer?

The harvest will be destroyed (vs 9 & 12), worldly possessions will be taken away (vs 9), shamed (vs 10), joyful times will only be a memory (vs 11).

9. What is the purpose of the troubles that come into our lives?

Usually we can't link our problems to a specific sin, saying "God is punishing me for ..." But we can expect the consequences of our sins to be significant, meant to interfere with the path we have chosen and remind us of the love of God from which we have turned. God uses these times to call us to repentance, to bring us back to our first love. He has promised (Rom 8:28) that "all things work together for our good." This good is our salvation, taking our place in heaven for eternity,

with our Savior. Hosea teaches us that in the heart of God, love burns hotter than anger.”
(Eickmann, pg 29)

10. Read 2:14-23. Why does God keep blessing us even when we turn from him?
Sometimes a marriage can be repaired by starting over, by wooing each other and falling in love all over again. This is an attempt to regain what was lost, to bring us back together. God wants reconciliation!
11. Once God has reconciled with us, what pictures of harmony do we see in these verses?
No wars, no weapons, no floods, no droughts, work and nature will no longer be cursed (Gen 3:16-19), God and man will once again be in harmony – we will be reconciled with God through our Savior, forever.

Hosea chapter 3

12. Read chapter 3. How does God do the same for you and me as Hosea did for Gomer?
Gomer was a slave to her chosen life, much as we were slaves to sin. God is just and there is a price to pay for reconciliation. Jesus paid that price for us also, so we are no longer slaves to sin. Certainly “Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6) Reconciliation is all on God’s side; we have nothing to do with it – God comes to me even when I rail against him, and pleads with me to change my ways.
13. For personal meditation: What Baals are in our lives? In what ways are we serving Baal rather than our Lord? From what sins is God calling us to repentance? Is there someone in your life for whom you can be God’s instrument of restoration?

Closing Prayer

References:

Eickmann, Paul E., *The People’s Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 1-37

Lesson 2 – Hosea 4-6

Israel's Unfaithfulness – The Lord's Faithfulness

Opening Prayer

Hosea chapter 4

1. Read Hosea 4:1-8. What charge does the Lord bring against Israel in verses 1-3? Also look at Leviticus 26:14-20 to see if the Israelites should have been surprised at the Lord's reaction.
They were not faithful to the promises they made to each other or to God (vs 1); they did not acknowledge the Lord as their God; they filled their lives with many blatant sins against the 10 commandments; there is much bloodshed. At Mt. Sinai, Moses told them the Lord would not tolerate this type of behavior and attitude, and he would bring his justice down on them.
2. Do you think we are under the same curses today because of our sins?
We're told God is a just God, and a jealous God. We have been given the 10 commandments to show us what God desires of us. We can look at nations that were once bastions of Christianity but today are heathen and God has taken his blessing away from them. Yes, look at our own country, founded by God-fearing men and women who wanted to ensure their children would always worship the true God, but now we stray so far from the truth and bring dishonor to the Almighty God.
3. Hosea 4:4-8 seems to be addressed to Israel's priests. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Why?
 - Today's pastors are just like the OT priests.
They are both considered spiritual leaders and ones to help keep the focus on the path to salvation, teaching the people God's commands and leading worship. They are both ones to set an example of a God-fearing life. The OT priests represented the people before God. Only the priests could enter the Holy Place and offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and atonement; and only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place. In the NT Jesus has replaced that need for an intercessor since he paid in full the price demanded for our sins (Heb 10:11-14) and we can go to God directly, in Jesus name
 - Pastors are nothing special since they are sinners just like everyone else.
Yes, pastors are sinners just like everyone else in the world and they, too, are in need of a Savior. However, they have also been called by God to be his ambassadors - to faithfully teach and instruct the people, to call people to repentance and announce God's forgiveness, to administer the sacraments, to lead lives that give honor to the God they serve and set an example for all to see God's desire for our lives. This calling does set them apart as they carry out the heavy responsibility that God has placed on them.
4. Read 4:10-19. Do you see parallels between the OT problems talked about here and the church today?

Yes, just look at our world and the many ways the values of the world spill over into the church – quarrelling and unrest, poor stewardship, priorities out of line with the opportunities God puts in front of us, too much/too little tolerance...

5. Does God hold the priests (and NT pastors) accountable for the actions of the people? (See Ezekiel 34:1-10)
Indeed, each individual is responsible for learning and following the Word of God and on Judgment Day each individual will be held accountable for his/her own sins. However, those called to be spiritual leaders (pastors, teachers, parents...) may lead people astray through their actions and their false teachings. God will hold them accountable for being poor/corrupt shepherds.
6. Do you think God will hold others (e.g. politicians, rock stars, athletes, TV evangelists, drug pushers, gang leaders, parents) accountable for the moral and spiritual decline in our country?
The 10 commandments were given to all people and written in the hearts of all people. Luther's explanations make it clear that not just the blatant act of stealing or adultery are sins, but harming people in body or reputation, lusting, coveting someone's possessions, not helping someone, not helping to protect their property and much more are all sins for which we need forgiveness. Then we are to love our neighbor as our self (Luke 10:27-28). We also know we must answer for sins of commission as well as omission. Certainly we will all be held accountable should we lead someone astray or fail to help when we have the opportunity. Those in positions of authority or influence will especially be held responsible. We ask God to forgive these sins and help us lead lives to his glory.
7. What's the difference between the idols we worship today (wealth, status, materialism, career, power...) and those that Israel chose?
Not a thing! They all lead to destruction. They all come to us slowly and sweetly, they take hold of us and turn us from our Lord.

Hosea chapter 5

8. Read chapter 5. Compare the way the people seek the Lord in verse 6 with the way they seek him in verse 15.
In verse 6 they go to him to hedge their bet, just in case Baal and Ashtoreth (goddess of love, fertility and war; spouse of Baal) aren't good enough. Or maybe out of habit, a bothersome duty. They do not go with a heart filled with love, faith and trust. In verse 15, in the misery that has come to them when the Lord deserted them, some may remember the Lord, admit their guilt and beg for his forgiveness.
9. How could our worship be displeasing to God, even while we go to church, sing and pray to him? (You may want to reference 1 Kings 18:21 and Matt 6:24.)
Our God is a jealous God and he does not tolerate divided loyalty, a presence without a mind that is totally engaged, doubt (though we do come to have our faith strengthened through Word and Sacrament). He wants to own our hearts.
10. What types of things do we do today that could be compared to Israel forming an alliance with pagan Assyria when it was in trouble (vs 13).

When troubles come our way, do we immediately turn to God for help or do we try to fix them ourselves? Do we look for worldly solutions? Can people tell we have the all-powerful God in our lives or do we act like everybody else in the world? Where do we put our trust?

11. Agree or disagree: Children cannot rise above the moral example set by their parents.

Hosea chapter 6

12. Read Hosea 6:1-11a. The first three verses of chapter 6 are said by the Israelites, and God responds in the next three verses. Do you see anything missing in Israel's words?

They don't even hint at a confession of their sins. They are responding to the difficulties they've had but not to the knowledge of their guilt. They have the idea that God will welcome them back as surely as the sun rises and the rain falls. Isn't this what Gomer did – profess her love for her husband and then run after her lovers?

What is God's response?

God knows their love is fleeting, as temporary as the dew. They didn't listen to the prophets God sent to call them to repentance. God says he doesn't want all of their sacrifices; he wants their hearts and their loyalty.

13. Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 to the Pharisees in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. Why did the Pharisees need to hear these words?

They were all about fulfilling the many man-made laws for appearance' sake, to make themselves look better than others. Their hearts did not belong to God.

Why do we need to hear these words?

To call us to repentance and turn our focus back to our Savior

14. In light of what we have read so far in Hosea, how would you evaluate the teaching of some that says once saved, always saved?

There's no justification for this teaching in these chapters. The Israelites certainly fell away from their God and God gives us many warnings to take heed lest we fall (1 Peter 5:8 – Satan stalks seeking whom he may devour). In verse 5:4 it says "their deeds do not permit them to return to their God." The Lord was their God at one time, but now they are unfaithful to him; they have fallen away and God will remove them from his sight (2 Kings 17:18). Preserve us from such an end, dear Father.

15. For personal reflection: Can you see the sins of Hosea beginning to take root in your heart or in that of someone you know? What will you do about it?

Closing Prayer

References:

Eickmann, Paul E., *The People's Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 38-61

Eickmann, Paul E., *The People's Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos – A Study Guide*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1990. 14-18

The Serendipity Bible for Groups. Littleton, CO: Serendipity House, 1998. 1233-1236

Lesson 3 – Hosea 7-10

Israel's Unfaithfulness – The Lord's Faithfulness

Opening Prayer

As we read through these chapters, we can see how severely God will punish the people for their horrible sins. But, there are also several verses that show us the depth of love he has for his people. Be looking for these as we go through our study today. The law is harsh and meant to show us our sins but our sins do not change the grace of the gospel always there to bring us to Christ.

Read Hosea chapter 7

1. In Hosea 7:2 the Lord says “I remember all their evil deeds...they are always before me.” Yet King Hezekiah confessed in Isaiah 38:17 “You have put all my sins behind your back.” How do you explain this seeming contradiction?

God is all-knowing and nothing escapes him. Unbelievers don't recognize the existence of God, his many attributes or his role in the world; for this they will be judged. Believers however know that God is in control and is watching all that goes on. When we repent of our sins and look to the grace of Jesus as the one who reconciles us with our Lord, we rejoice in that he does not hold those sins against us. When God looks at those who believe, he sees the perfection of his Son, not the corruption of our sin.

2. Why is it important that we confess our sins? (1 John 1:8-9)

Only through confession do we take hold of the promise of forgiveness, the promise of salvation, the strength to change our ways. Without confession and repentance our relationship with God is no different than that of the people of Hosea's time and our God will say of us “and none of them calls on me.” (vs 7)

3. This chapter talks about the people relying on themselves and on the great nations of the time to save them. They paid a huge price (37 tons of silver!) for protection from Assyria and Egypt, which ended up debilitating them financially and yet it was ineffective in providing protection. They never called on the Lord for help. Why are the following pictures appropriate to their situation?

- vs 8 – flat cake not turned over

a cake that isn't turned over will be burned on the bottom and uncooked on the top. The cake is being ruined but no one notices because they only look at the uncooked top

- vs 9 – hair is sprinkled with gray but he does not notice

Israel doesn't learn from their experiences, just ages and keeps on with the same attitudes

- vs 11 – like a dove, easily deceived and senseless

simple, mindless, not thinking for itself, just following the flock

-vs 16 – they are like a faulty bow

they have missed their mark, missed their purpose for being

Read Hosea chapter 8

4. God makes his accusations against Israel more and more clear, and warns of the judgment that will come upon them. In what ways does God say idolatry is foolish? (vs 6)
The things they put their trust in were made by men and would be destroyed. There is no lasting hope there!
5. What is the connection between Israel's building palaces and forgetting his Maker in verse 14?
The palaces are signs of their godlessness. Rich men are building luxurious palaces in which to live. They live for their luxuries and trust in the fortifications they have built. They are complacent with God but secure in the world. Wealth, luxury and materialism have become gods along with Baal and all the rest. Does this remind us of our own lives and of America?
6. How do those same words apply to us when we say "My retirement is secure because I've made good investments" or "I know I'll be OK because I have the best doctors in the country"?
These comments show we are putting our trust in made-made things, not in our Almighty God. God wants faith that trusts in his promises. It is such an easy thing to put our trust in worldly things rather than seeing those worldly solutions as blessings given us by God.

Read Hosea chapter 9-10

7. Why does God call the Israelite harvest the wages of a prostitute in chapter 9:1?
God's provision isn't diminished; he granted a bounteous harvest even to the wicked. Yet, because the people asked Baal to provide for them and gave Baal the credit and did not recognize it as coming from God, it would not be the blessing that it could have been. It led them further into their depravity instead of bringing them closer to the True God. Just because things are "going well", it doesn't mean God is pleased with us.
8. What is God showing Israel about their idols in these chapters, especially in 10:5-8, and how does it relate to us today?
Their idols had no power and were carried off by their enemies as they lay defeated, with no king, their land going to ruin and people dying or put into bondage. Their idols were just earthly things, unable to help them in any way. Verse 7 says the land will float away like a twig on the surface of the water. Quite a hopeless situation they find themselves in. Today our idols are just as powerless as those described in Hosea and they lead to the same type of destruction for those who rely on them.
9. God's impending judgment will be harsh. The whole nation will be carried off into captivity, separated from the things they love and the land they know and will never return. They will be taken into captivity and all their possessions taken away. Do you think anyone listened to the warnings of Hosea and repented? What happened to those who repented when God's judgment came to Israel?
Very likely some did repent but they also were carried off into captivity. They had the Lord to protect and provide for them and could trust in his promises and get comfort and encouragement from them. As it happens with us, sin affects the lives of the righteous and the unrighteous alike. The righteous are brought closer to their Lord through the suffering and look to the goal of heaven. The unrighteous look to this world and wonder why things are so bad for them. They are bereft of comfort and encouragement.

10. We see God's anger flame, flash and thunder as he looks at the way the people have turned away from him, and don't heed his many warnings. The flood and Sodom and Gomorrah testify to the Lord's anger with sinners. Do you think the coming destruction of Israel was because of the sins they committed or was there more than sin involved?

When we repent of our sins, God, through faith, gives us as our very own, the forgiveness Jesus won for all, no matter how grievous the sin. He constantly gives people another chance by sending warnings and providing the means by which we can come to him. He promises to forgive when we repent. Unbelief forfeits the forgiveness Christ won for all. Only when we reject God and his promises of deliverance do we place ourselves under his judgment. Israel's judgment wasn't as much about sin as it was about the lack of repentance, for indeed, we all daily sin much. Lord, draw me close, send me your Holy Spirit, make me yours, and be merciful to me, a sinner.

11. Sometimes the cacophony of sin outweighs the quiet voice of the gospel. But the gospel invitation is still present even if we don't heed it. What are some phrases in these chapters that display the Lord's love for his people despite the lives they have been leading?

7:7 & 7:14 – one calls on me – just ask and I will help!

7:13 – long to redeem them

7:15 – trained and strengthened so they have what they need to face temptations

8:12 – I gave them the law so they would know

9:10 – the fondness he has for them and the pleasure they give him

10:12 – time to seek the Lord until he comes and showers righteousness on you – an invitation to come back to their Lord

12. What will you take away from our study today?

Closing Prayer

References:

Eickmann, Paul E., *The People's Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 61-95

Eickmann, Paul E., *The People's Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos – A Study Guide*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1990. 19-28

Lesson 4 – Hosea 11-14

Israel's Unfaithfulness – The Lord's Faithfulness

Opening Prayer

Read Hosea chapter 11:1-11

1. Again God goes back into history to remind the people of what he has done for them. To what time did he refer in 9:10a (Deuteronomy 29-30)?

While the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 yrs, they were cared for in every way. Then Israel dedicated herself to God in a covenant at Mt Sinai, promising to be faithful. God was delighted with them, much like the pleasure of a juicy grape when very thirsty.

In 9:13a and 10:1a?

God blessed them richly, picture of a young, thriving vine bearing much fruit.

In 11:1 (Exodus 4:22-23)?

Israelites rescued from bondage in Egypt

Why does God go back in time to these ancient memories?

To remind them that he was always there, always providing, always protecting, always faithful to his promises

Have you ever used this technique?

2. What love we see from God in this chapter! We are reminded of Hosea, in 3:1, wanting to take back his wife Gomer at any cost. Here we see God deliberating with himself on just what to do with Israel and we see a true example of grace at its fullest. What is the progression of God's thoughts?

1-4 he loves these people intensely and has provided for their every need for many years, 5-7 his holy justice demands they pay for their sins, this can't be tolerated, 8-9 his compassion does not let him carry out the penalty their unfaithfulness deserves. His unfathomable love surpasses all understanding. (How difficult would it be for you to forgive if you had been so completely betrayed?) 10-11 they will get another chance and he will turn their hearts back to him. Even though they would be carried off into captivity, some would repent and return to the Lord, and a Savior would be born.

What if God's grace hadn't prevailed and he had carried out the judgment against these people?

God had promised all mankind a Savior from the children of Abraham. Would we ever have had a Savior? Could man ever have been reconciled with God? Could we look forward to life in heaven?

A quote from Martin Franzmann: "God in his holiness will not destroy; neither can his love merely overlook and tolerate man's rebellion. His love will deal effectively with man's sin. With the roar of a lion the Lord will declare both his inexorable wrath against sin and his inextinguishable love for his

children; and at that roar his wayward children will at last come trembling home to him. That roar was ultimately heard at Calvary, and all history since then is the history of the homecoming of mankind.” (Concordia Self-Study Commentary, St. Louis: Concordia, 1971, p 597.

3. How would you respond to someone who points to this description of grace in action, and then draws the conclusion that we can continue doing whatever we want because God’s judgment will not come to us, that he’ll just get angry and then will back down?

“You shall not tempt the Lord your God!” God tells us how he wants us to live and how we are to praise and worship him. Sincere repentance and true faith will bear much good fruit. As we meditate on the grace shown us, we are led to desire to do all we can to please our gracious Lord. Review Romans 6:15-18. Why do you want to go back on the road that leads to destruction?

Read Chapter 11:12-12:14

4. Even though Israel has been the focus of much of what Hosea records so far, Judah also has fallen away. Jacob didn’t trust God to bless him and stole the birthright from his brother Esau. Many years later he struggled with God (Genesis 32), begging for God’s blessing. At this time God changed his name to Israel. God wants this same change to happen in the lives of Israel and Judah. But they continue to reject him and put their trust in Baal and themselves. They boast of what they have done for themselves. Read Deuteronomy 4:25-31. Is God rejecting or fulfilling his covenant in the coming captivity?

God told the people what he expected and the consequence of their actions. He says “you will perish quickly”, “will certainly be destroyed”, “the Lord will scatter you”. But he also says “if ...you seek the Lord your God, you will find him”, “you will return to the Lord”, “the Lord your God is a merciful God and ... will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers.” This looks like a fulfillment of the covenant as he ensures a remnant will continue.

How has God cared for you by disciplining you?

Read Chapter 13

5. Verse 2b says Israel practiced human sacrifice. We are shocked at such a thing. The *People’s Bible Commentary* suggests abortion is a kind of modern human sacrifice to an idol. Agree or disagree?

Abortion is no more than worshiping the god of convenience, of comfort, of pleasure, of irresponsibility, of self. Both the examples from Hosea and modern day abortion are detestable in the sight of God.

Why do the four similes in verse 3 provide good images of the life of an idol-worshipper?

Those who worship idols dare to compare the Lord, the Almighty Creator, to stuff that man makes out of wood and stone. What a contemptuous comparison. Those things have no more power than the morning mist or a whiff of smoke, barely visible for a short while then gone. The Lord will remove such idol worship from his sight.

6. How does God describe his judgment upon the people in verse 7-8?

God pictures himself as a devouring lion, a lurking leopard, an angry mother bear whose cubs have been taken away, a wild animal tearing its victim apart.

Can you picture God in the terms that Hosea uses?

If no, then we underestimate his anger. This is the anger Jesus bore when he took our place on the cross. Our sins are not something simple, easily wiped clean. The curse of sin is real.

7. What is the message 12-14?

vs 12-13 - Because Israel refuses to repent, their sins will be stored up, waiting for judgment day. God wants to call Israel his children but they refuse to repent and thus refuse to be reborn as God's children. This is God's unrelenting law. 14 - Then the gospel promise comes through. God's will is to save his people, not to destroy them and he describes a victory over the death that will bring complete destruction. God will pay whatever price is needed to ransom his people from this death. (Also see 1 Corinthians 15:52-53). But the Lord will not change his mind about Israel's doom because there is no repentance.

Read Chapter 14

8. We see a confession and repentance in verses 1-3. How can the people find it within themselves to turn from their evil ways? (See also Jeremiah 31:18 and John 15:5)

God alone, through his law leads sinners to confess and turns runaway sinners around by means of his gospel promises, and leads them home to himself again. Man can do nothing.

What promise do we see in verses 4-8?

God gives his unconditional promise of a new spiritual life which he will create and nourish. He will send his healing love, described as the abundance of nature. This love is fulfilled in the gift of our Savior. When we die, we will join our Lord in heaven in eternal life, never subject to the eternal death that Jesus conquered for us.

Compare this covenant with the one in Deuteronomy 4:25-31.

This one is unconditional! God does all that needs to be done! Praise the Lord from whom all blessings flow. The previous one was two-sided. The blessing was contingent on what the people did, but God knows this is impossible.

Read together Luther's Third Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

9. How have you grown from your study of Hosea?

Closing Prayer

References:

Eickmann, Paul E., The People's Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 95-123

Eickmann, Paul E., The People's Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos – A Study Guide. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1990. 28-37

The Serendipity Bible for Groups. Littleton, CO: Serendipity House, 1998. 1242-1245

Lesson 5 – Joel

Return to the Lord, for he is gracious and compassionate...abounding in love

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Joel

1. What do we know about Joel?

- *His name means “the Lord is God” and he is the son of Pethuel (1:1), but this is all we know about the person of Joel*
- *Because of the content of his book, we can assume he worked in Judah, the southern kingdom, perhaps in Jerusalem*
- *Because this book has traditionally been placed between Hosea and Amos, some are led to think they were contemporaries; because Joel talks about priests but no king, some think he may have written at the time of priestly leadership at the beginning of the reign of Joash, the boy-king, 835-796 BC; scholars date the book of Joel sometime between 800-400 BC*

Read the first three paragraphs of the section entitled The Locust Plague in The People's Bible Commentary – Hosea, Joel, Amos, pg 127-8, for background information.

Read Chapter 1

2. Skimming back through chapter 1, pick out verses that describe the locusts and their effect on the land.

Primarily 4-11

Pick out verses that describe references to a drought.

10, 12, 17-20

3. Read Deuteronomy 28:15-19, 22-23, 38. Of what is the Lord reminding his people through the locust plague and drought?

In his last words to Israel before they entered the land of Canaan, the Lord, through Moses, promised blessings if they would keep the law-covenant and threatened curses if they broke it. Now the threat is being carried out – the Lord means what he says! The Lord is exceedingly angry with his people.

What invitation did the Lord extend to his people in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14?

If the believers humble themselves, repent and turn from their evil ways, the Lord will forgive them and heal their land

Do such curses connected with the Sinai law covenant apply to God's New Testament people? (See Galatians 3:10-14)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law so that by faith we may receive the promise of a Savior! We are no longer subject to the curses of the law.

4. Verse 1:15 announces the “*day of the Lord*” in terms of the locust plague and drought, a dreadful time that will bring much life to an end. Compare and contrast this with what we are told about the “*day of the Lord Jesus Christ*” in 1 Corinthians 1:7-9.

Joel’s “day of the Lord” points to his current situation but also Judgment Day. Judgment Day is indeed a day to be feared for those who are not believers, for those who have separated themselves from God, for those who refuse to repent. The people of Joel’s day feared the day because of the destruction the locusts would bring, not realizing the spiritual death to which they were also subject. Believers eagerly wait for the last day because we have been declared righteous; we are reconciled with God through our Savior. We do not live under the law but under grace. We may suffer dreadful times in this life, but God has promised he will see us through those days. God has promised forgiveness and mercy to those who repent. We don’t fear the “day of the Lord” (vs15) but see it as the entryway to eternal life. Praise be to God!

Read Chapter 2:1-17

5. In vs 12 the Lord calls on his people to fast, weep and mourn as they would for someone who has died. It was a custom of the time to tear their garments when mourning. Explain what God is saying in vs 13 when he says “Rend your heart and not your garments.”

The Lord is calling the people to look beyond the devastation of the locusts and drought, to mourn because they have left the Lord their God. He doesn’t want just the outward show or ceremony, but rather to let the seriousness of their sin penetrate their hard hearts, to feel a true inward sorrow that will lead to repentance.

Agree or disagree:

- God’s law leads us to repent of our sins.

One of the purposes of the law is to show us our sin and to lead us to repentance. This applies to both believers and unbelievers. But the law only shows us our sin (a mirror), we need the gospel to receive relief from that agony.

- God’s love and forgiveness lead us to repent of our sins.

For those who believe, the gospel motivates a deep desire to turn away from sin and lead a life that pleases God. The law is still used to understand God’s will, God’s definition of a godly life (a guide). This desire to please God is the true motive for repentance.

- We repent of our sins to avoid God’s punishment.

In this case, the law is being used as a curb, to escape the fear of God’s judgment. Again the fear of the punishment can prepare our hearts for repentance but we need the gospel to give relief from that fear.

6. According to verse 13, should I fear coming to the Lord to repent of even the most grievous sin?

God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love. We should have no fear in coming to God with our confession and repentance, asking for forgiveness and strength to turn from our ways. Sin is sin, even though our human minds like to categorize some as worse than others. God has forgiven the sins of all people. Those who confess their sins receive, through faith, the forgiveness Jesus won for all. He will relent from sending his calamity. Thank you Lord, for your love and faithfulness; thank you for giving me a Savior.

Read Chapter 2:18-32

7. In verse 25 the Lord says “my great army that I sent among you.” What do passages like this emphasize about the troubles in our lives?

God is very aware of what is going on, is in control and uses evil for good, to strengthen our faith in him and solidify our relationship.

8. Joel 2:28-32a was Peter’s sermon text on Pentecost (Acts 2:16). On Pentecost, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit directly on the believers in Jerusalem. How is the Spirit poured out on us today?

God reveals himself to us through the Word of God, the Bible. He no longer uses dreams, visions or prophecies to reveal himself.

Read Chapter 3

9. In this chapter the Lord pictures the final judgment, when all nations, all people, will gather before him. Verses 9-13 give us two pictures of that final judgment. What are they and how do they help us understand what is to come?

Verses 9-12 talk of a great battle that will affect everyone, even those who think themselves weak, when there will be no need for harvesting equipment, just a need for weapons. No one will escape this battle just as no one will escape standing in front of the Judge. For those on the wrong side of the battle, those who do not have God as their general, the day will end in complete destruction. Verse 13 pictures a final harvest when all will be brought in and there will be no more growing seasons. The winepress pictures the Messiah as judge of the nations: “I have trodden the winepress alone, from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath.” Isaiah 63:3. Thus comes an end to the unbelievers.

What comfort do God’s people have according to verse 16?

The Lord is our refuge and our stronghold. We will not be harmed because of God’s promise. We look to this day with hope and joy.

10. Some might consider the prophecy in this book to mean that the people of the physical state of Israel are to be protected in these last days. Why would this not be a good interpretation of this message?

Scripture must interpret Scripture. To hold that all Jews or those who are in Jerusalem will be saved does not hold with other portions of Scripture.

- Concerning Israel, 2:11 says “the day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” Israelites and heathen nations alike who forsake the Lord, who remained unrepentant, will not be able to withstand the final judgment.

- Romans 9:24 says God prepared some in advance for glory “not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles”. All who trust in God’s mercy will find refuge

- John 18:36 says “my kingdom is not of this world” leading us to understand the use of the word “Israel” to be a spiritual Israel composed of all who believe, rather than a physical Israel, for indeed no county enjoys perfect security from every enemy.

11. What will you remember about the book of Joel?

Read together Psalm 50:15 “*Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor me.*” Consider committing this verse to memory.

Closing Prayer

References:

Eickmann, Paul E., *The People’s Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 125-177

Eickmann, Paul E., *The People’s Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 125-177

Lesson 6 – Amos 1-3

God's Justice and Righteousness Will Prevail

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Amos

1. What do we know about Amos?

- *Amos was a prophet who worked in Judah, the southern kingdom, during the reign of King Uzziah, aka Azariah, (792-740 BC). The history of this time period is found in 2 Kings 14-15 and 2 Chronicles 26.*
- *Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa, 6 miles south of Bethlehem, 12 mi from Jerusalem. He also cared for sycamore fig trees (7:14) While tending his flocks, God called him to take a message to Israel, now ruled by King Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). We don't hear of Amos in any other part of the Bible.*
- *It was a time when Judah was expanding, restoring its borders to former sizes. It was a time of idolatry, extravagant living, immorality, corruption of judicial procedures and oppression of the poor. It was shortly before the Assyrian captivity of Israel in 722. The people were following in the steps of Jeroboam I, the founder of the northern kingdom and we read throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles how the rulers "followed in the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit." Thus the sins of Judah thrived in a time of military victories, expanded territories and renewed national pride.*
- *Amos' name means "burden bearer." Israel had continued in their great sins, falling further and further from the LORD. The message he was to take to them would be a difficult one to deliver. His message is addressed also to the southern kingdom as we see references to both Judah and Jerusalem.*
- *Amos' key message is that The Great King, who rules the whole universe, will judge his unfaithful, disobedient, covenant-breaking people.*
- *Contemporaries were Hosea and Jonah in Israel (northern kingdom) and Isaiah and Micah in Judah (southern kingdom).*
- *Archeologists have found evidence of the earthquake he mentions in 1:1 (also mentioned in Zechariah 14:5, more than 200 years later.)*

Read Chapter 1-2:3

2. Amos was only a shepherd. Why should the people even listen to him?

The message came as a vision from God. These words were not from Amos, but through Amos. Amos was called by God to speak God's message to the world of his day; today God calls ordinary men to become pastors to preach his message to our world. We owe them the same respect because God has sent them to us.

3. The phrase "For three sins ..., even for four, I will not turn back my wrath" is repeated several times in the first 2 chapters. What do you think it means?

There had been a constant escalation of sins. Now the fourth sin, yet another sin, is the one that brings God's long patience to an end and judgment is imminent.

Judgment against three heathen enemies:

- 1:3-5 – Damascus/threshed Gilead/go into exile

Damascus was the capital of Syria (Aram) to the northeast; constant enemy for past 200 years who took much of the Israelite land and treated them with great cruelty. Gilead was the Israelite area between Damascus and Israel and was the first to be invaded. Aram would fall to the Assyrians. The king and his family would be destroyed and the country would be taken into exile (Kir unknown)

- 1:6-8 – Gaza/delivered to Edom

Gaza was the main city of Philistia, southwest of Israel and Judah. Besides all of the other things we know about the Philistines, this also indicates they sold Israelites into slavery in Edom. Edom is south of Judah, descended from Esau (Gen 25, Deut 2). The other cities listed indicate all of Philistia will be punished or destroyed. Gaza would fall to the Assyrians.

- 1:9-10 – Tyre/covenant of brotherhood

Phoenician port city northwest of Israel known for slave trade, sold Israelites when north fell to Assyria. At the time Solomon began building the temple, a treaty was made (1 Kings 5:1-12) between the Phoenicia and Israel. Tyre would fall to Alexander the Great.

Judgment against three hostile heathen “cousins”
(Edom from Esau, Ammon and Moab from Lot)

- 1:11-12 – Edom –

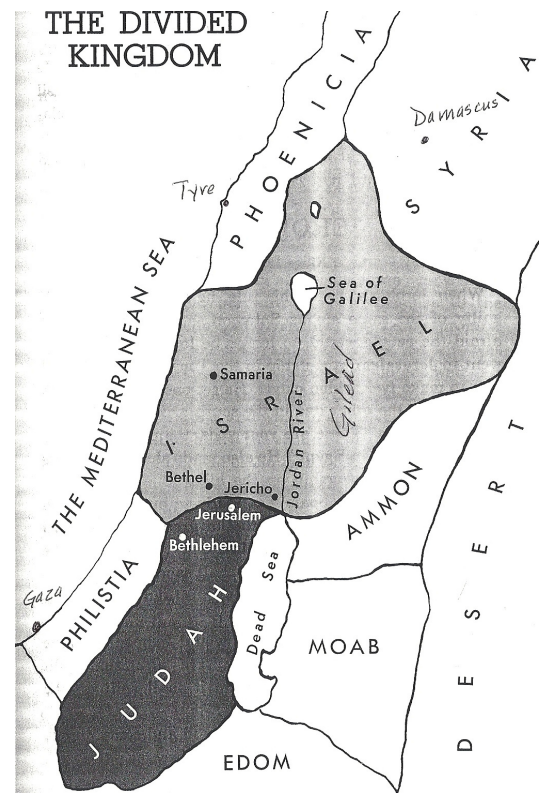
frequently at war with Israel with unrelentingly vicious attacks.

- 1:13-14 – Ammon –

Country east of Jordan that made brutal attacks on Israel, especially against their women and children. Rabbah was capital city.

- 2:1-3 – Moab –

East of Israel, had the reputation of burning the bones of those they killed in battle. Kerioth is main city.



4. God is punishing these unbelieving nations, but how were they to know what they were doing was wrong if they didn't have God's law?

The requirement of living a decent, upright life is written in the hearts and consciences of all people. May God keep us from silencing our consciences when it is pricked by our actions.

What might the attitudes of the Israelites have been when they heard about what was being prophesied about their enemies?

Smug, cheering, they'll get what they deserve, let me help, here are some more things to add to the list of their sins...

How might we handle such a prophecy against one of our enemies?

The same? As a warning that we will also be judged for our actions? Lead us to repentance?

Read Chapter 2:4-16

5. From 2:4-5, how are the sins of Judah different than those of the previous six nations? Are they as grievous?

They have rejected God's laws and are becoming more and more like their heathen neighbors. Amos has used the sins of the neighboring nations to illustrate how Judah also is guilty and would suffer the same destruction. The message now is getting more personal. All sin is grievous to God but as people so totally reject his grace, they approach the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit, for which there is no forgiveness available.

6. What are the sins of Israel in:

- 2:6 –

judges were taking bribes and their judgments were paltry (price of sandals)

- 2:7 –

poor were mistreated, incest

- 2:8 –

garments taken in pledge for a loan were not to be kept overnight out of regard for the poor, but this being ignored in heathen temples; drunkenness and debauchery in worship of false gods, i.e. the laws of God were being ignored and people were being mistreated.

Read Chapter 3

7. To whom in particular is Amos talking according to 3:2?

He speaks to both Israel and Judah, those whom he chose. The covenant which promised blessings for obedience also included curses for disobedience (Lev 6). Because they were chosen, were special, they especially deserved his wrath when they turned to unbelief. Thank you Lord, for choosing me, forgive me for my sins and let your light shine through me.

Of what do the cause and effect pairings of verses 3-6 warn? (See also Luke 12:48)

Disaster does not come by chance (vs 6), but as judgment against unfaithfulness. Though we can't understand God's plan, we must know that he is in control of all things and nothing happens by chance. Just as surely, Jesus will come again on Judgment Day as our Savior and Deliverer or as the one who tells unbelievers to depart forever.

8. In verses 9-10, why do you think God has Amos threaten to summon witnesses from heathen nations to look into Samaria?

To shame the Israelites, God asks these enemies to witness their disgraceful behavior toward one another, and all while zealously worshiping. They have completely fallen away from the LORD.

What are some of the pictures of the complete destruction that will come to Israel?

-1- Strongholds will be plundered (11)

-2- As a lion destroys a sheep (12)

-3- So the rich have only a corner of their bed or couch left (12)

-4- the altars of Baal will be thrown to the ground (14)

-5- houses, vacations houses, mansions would be destroyed, along with everything in them (15)

9. God is angry, at the limit of his patience and promising much destruction. But do you find any comfort in Amos' message so far?

God is a just God; God keeps his promises; God is merciful and patient, slow to anger; God proactively sends messages to bring his people to repentance; God has chosen us and considers us family

Closing Prayer

Lord, help us recognize our sins and turn to you in true repentance and gratitude.

References:

Eickmann, Paul E., *The People's Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 179-214

Lesson 7 – Amos 4-9

God's Justice and Righteousness Will Prevail

Opening Prayer

Read Chapter 4

1. Some things to note:
 - v1-2 – *the lifestyle*
gluttonous, self-serving
 - v4-5 – the attitude about worship
prideful sin rather than humble praise
 - v 6-11 – God's many warnings
In Deuteronomy 28:15-48, God promises curses on those who do not obey
 - v 12 – “*Prepare to meet your God...the Lord God Almighty is his name.*”
This is the God who rules all things, not just a powerless god like the ones they have turned to.
This should make us quake in our boots!

Read Chapter 5

2. Some things to note:
 - v1-2 – What is God's lament?
Israel is no longer the LORD's virgin bride, his choice morsel
 - v4-6 – A plea to seek the Lord
Bethel was where God appeared to Jacob (Gen 28:10-22); at Gilgal Israelites were circumcised and first celebrated the Passover in the Promised Land (Josh 5:2-12); Beersheba was the home of Abraham and where God appeared to Isaac (Gen 26:23-24) and Jacob (Gen 46:1-3). These had been important places for the Israelites to praise their LORD, but now were places for idol worship. In spite of all they had done, the LORD still extends the gospel invitation. Our God is an awesome God!
 - v7-13 – Corruption of the legal system
references to the corruption of the courts and abuse of the helpless, in contrast to the justice and mercy of God, the Creator of all things, as well as his judgment on those who displease him. When God gave them the Promised Land, the fields were planted and the homes were built; now what they had planted and built they would not enjoy because it would go to the conquering armies.
 - v18-21 – What will the “*day of the Lord*” be like for impenitent people?

Instead of a day of salvation from all evils, it will be a day of new evils even worse than what they have now; a day of judgment, not deliverance. A day they will be separated forever for the Lord.

-v21-27 – What is God's message in these verses and how does it apply to us today?

God hates and despises worship and offerings that don't come from the heart. When we just go through the motions of worship and giving, he turns is back on us and does not accept them; he doesn't even listen to our music! True worship is our life, a never-ending stream of praise that comes from thankful, trusting hearts. God knows our hearts and sins of unbelief will not go unpunished.

Read Chapter 6

3. vs 1-7 – What does God say about complacency and how does this apply to us today?

The "great" will be the first to fall. Satan knows how to distract us and keep us from recognizing and repenting of our sins. When our spiritual concerns are replaced by self-sufficiency and pride, when we spend our time basking in luxuries instead of doing God's will, we can expect God's wrath. In this country God has blessed us with amazing wealth and yet his church in America seems to be growing weaker, our poor suffering more, and our morality declining. Is it time to take to heart Amos' words of warning, repeated in Matthew 21:43?

vs 8-14 – Misplaced pride –

in verses 9-10, one would think a home with 10 men could defend itself, but not so. Any fugitive left in the house would be afraid to draw the LORD's attention to the house for fear that he would finish off the few remaining there. Vs 12ff – anyone wanting to do something must proceed with care, yet the Israelites have gone forward foolishly, even as they take pride in destroying cities..."we have taken LoDebar" (nothing)...they have really done nothing.

Give some examples of how we as a church might be guilty of the same inward moral decay coupled with pride in outward success.

More pride in our buildings than concern for what we teach in them; pride in our social/financial standing outweighs repentance; a widening gap between us and God...

Read Chapter 7

4. In verses 1-6, God showed (1:1) Amos two visions concerning the coming judgment but Amos intercedes for Israel even though the plagues have already begun. Amos doesn't condone the actions of the Israelites but still loves them enough to intercede. Do prayers for mercy change God's mind?

Think of Sodom and Gomorrah. God asks us to bring our petitions to him, especially those for the souls of his people. He tells us to pray and he tells us he will answer our prayers. This gives us hope as we ask God for mercy.

5. In verses 7-9 Amos tells us of a third vision concerning a plumb line. What do you think it means?

God, the Master Mason, created a perfect Israel, and the plumb line is his law. The law shows that the wall of Israel is now so far from straight, it needs to be torn down. The coming judgment is just.

What application does this have for our lives?

We must measure our hearts and our behavior against God's plumb line, his law, and not against our own standards.

6. Amaziah the priest wants to send Amos (vs 10-17) away because he doesn't want to hear what Amos is saying. How would you respond if met with such strong opposition to God's true Word?

2 Tim 4:2 – we are to preach the Word with faithfulness and patience, for the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Even as so many are preaching today only what they want to hear, not what God tells us we are to hear. Amos says he would rather be tending his sheep and trees, but God has called him to deliver this message and that is what he is doing. God also calls us when he tells us to go and make disciples. (Matt 28:18-20) The power to remain true to his Word comes from God himself, not through anything we do. Thank you Lord, for giving us the truth; keep it among us.

Read Chapter 8

7. In the fourth vision, a basket of ripe fruit, God says the time is ripe for the destruction of Israel. So why did God even send Amos to preach about this if he already made up his mind?
1) God is showing how the punishment is just, similar to reading the charges in a courtroom 2) God is giving us a warning to repent and turn from our evil ways.

In looking at the signs of the coming judgment that Amos tells us about signs of nature in verses 7-10 (Note history tells us there was a total eclipse at the time of Amos, in 763 BC.) At what other events do we hear of darkness, earthquakes, and other signs from nature?

When Jesus died on the cross there was an earthquake and darkness; and we are told these are signs that will happen at Jesus' second coming in Matt 24:7, Mark 13:24.

What would "a famine of hearing the words of the Lord" look like?

When people refuse to hear the Word of God, finally they cannot hear it because God takes it away. This is the famine Amos is describing in verses 11-14.

Read Chapter 9

8. In the fifth vision God describes the total destruction of Israel. He talks of the same earthquake that Amos mentions in 1:1 and 8:8. Those not killed by the earthquake will be killed or carried off by the Assyrians. Compare and contrast the words of Psalm 139:7-10 with those of verses 2-4.

We can't go any place where God can't find us – this is a great comfort when we seek him; this can also strike fear in the hearts of those who try to escape his wrath.

In verse 7 God says his chosen nation, Israel, is really no different than any other nation. He has provided for them all but by their actions, Israel has given up its claim on the special blessings from God. Lord, from this preserve us! Yet, what promise does God give us in these last verses of chapter 9? To what does "in that day" refer?

He won't totally destroy the house of Jacob but will preserve a remnant so that he can send us his promised Savior. Most of the people will be sifted out but a remnant will return; most will perish but a few will heed the warning and repent. In that day, when Jesus comes again, there will be abundant harvests (the blessings of salvation in pictures we can understand) and we will be taken to heaven to dwell securely with our LORD forever, never to be uprooted again. We have confident hope!

10. What have you learned from our study of Amos?

Closing Prayer

Lord, help us recognize our sins and turn to you in true repentance and gratitude. Have mercy on us, Lord.

References:

Eickmann, Paul E., *The People's Bible Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 214-273

Lesson 8 – Obadiah

God's Judgment on a Proud and Rebellious People – God's Grace in Keeping his Covenant Promise

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Obadiah:

1. What do we know about Obadiah?
 - Shortest book in the Old Testament
 - The first prophet, after Moses, to put this message into writing
 - Obadiah seems to be an expansion on the predictions against Edom in Amos 9:12
 - Obadiah's name means "servant of the LORD", a common OT name.
 - The date of Obadiah is disputed. The Concordia Study Bible and the Lutheran Study Bible, along with some scholars put his writing during the Babylonian Captivity (605-586 BC). However, the People's Bible Commentary and other scholars listed below place him 250 years earlier, about 845BC. In placing it earlier, they cite the positioning of the book in the OT, the observation that Jeremiah appears to have read and made use of Obadiah, and the fact that Obadiah doesn't speak about the destruction of Jerusalem as was done by the Babylonians but rather the plundering of the city; surely such a major event would have been more explicitly mentioned had it already occurred.
 - The theme concerns the coming destruction of Edom, a centuries old enemy to the south of Judah and home of the descendants of Esau, twin brother of Jacob. Edom was an arrogant and cruel country that gloated over the Israel's devastation by foreign powers.

Read Obadiah

2. From where did Obadiah get the message he delivered?

Verse 1 says he had a vision from the LORD. These are not Obadiah's words or thoughts but they come from God himself and express his will. Obadiah's words are verbally inspired! The lack of surety around the timing of Obadiah's life is of little concern when we are confident his message comes from God himself.
3. Who is Edom and where is Edom?

The Edomites were descendants of Esau, twin brother of Jacob, sons of Isaac, grandsons of Abraham. (See Genesis chapter 36.) Edom was southeast of the Dead Sea (near Petra today) and was located on a key caravan route. They treated Israel with great cruelty and hostility for many centuries.
4. Who remembers how "the violence against your brother Jacob" (vs 10) got started?

Even before birth, they jostled each other in the womb; their mother, Rebekah was told this meant the younger (Jacob) would be stronger and would rule over the older (Esau); Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of stew; Isaac blessed Jacob but said that Esau would live in a desert area as a hostile nation. Esau would live in continued defiance of God's will throughout history as they fought with and encouraged the enemies to destroy Israel.

Since Isaac's blessing on his two sons said they would be at odds with each other, should Esau/Edom be blamed for their attitude toward Jacob/Judah? Why?

There were plenty of warnings given to Edom, just look at verses 12-14, Romans 1:18-21 – we are without excuse; Romans 3:9-20 – we are accountable for our actions. God's destruction of Edom was just.

5. Look at these pictures of Sela, the capital of Edom, today known as Petra. Why do you think they might have cause to be proud about their security (vs 3-4)?

This city is in a dead end ravine, walls 200 feet high, passage to enter sometimes as narrow as 12 feet, 5000 feet above sea level. They lived in a rugged area that was easily guarded and virtually inaccessible to any enemies.

Additionally they had significant copper and iron deposits, and the King's Highway, an important trade route, ran through the middle of the land. It would have been easy to be proud. What are some temptations that increasing wealth and success may bring into the life of a child of God?

Pride, arrogance, self reliance, security outside reliance on God, greed...



Entry to the dead-end canyon leading to Petra (Sela) and the cave homes of people who lived there

6. According to verses 5-9, what type of destruction was Edom going to experience?

They would be deceived by their enemies, including those who would plot against them as they ate together in apparent friendship. These invaders would not take only the easy, obvious things as a thief might, but they would take everything, nothing left behind. The warriors would be slaughtered. The people would be driven out of the land.

How do Psalm 127:1 and Psalm 33:12 relate to the sins of Edom?

They left God out of their plans! They took his blessings but gave him no credit for them.

7. Verses 19-21 talk about the restoration of Israel. In what two ways can we understand this?
1) those scattered by wars and the Babylonian Captivity would reclaim their land (536 BC) 2) there will be a spiritual restoration fulfilled in the Messiah, when people from all nations will be taken to heaven – Jews and Gentiles, both. (Ephesians 3:6). This restoration is in progress as we preach the gospel to all nations.
8. Who are the deliverers Obadiah mentions in verse 21?
All of us who carry God's Word of salvation out into the world – that's you and me! All who preach the gospel are deliverers who will free the people from the assaults of Satan
9. How has this study of Obadiah brought you closer to Jesus?

Closing Prayer

Edom paid the price for spiritual arrogance and indifference; Israel was punished for unfaithfulness; even so, God was faithful to his promises and patiently called his people to repentance. He gave us a Savior. Lord, move me to be your witness and do only your will in my life.

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Lesson 9 – Jonah

God's Compassion When Dealing with Jonah and with Nineveh

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Jonah:

1. What do we know about Jonah?

- *Jonah is never mentioned as author; he is referred to only once, in 2 Kings 14:25 when King Jeroboam II restored the borders of Israel "in accordance with the Word of the LORD...spoken through his servant Jonah..."*

- *A Galilean prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel, from Gath Hopher, near Nazareth, he was the first apostle sent to the Gentiles*

- *Jonah lived during the reign of King Jeroboam II, 793-753 BC; he was a contemporary of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah*

- *In Israel this was a time of spiritual poverty under an evil king, when the kingdom was being eaten away by Assyria. In 722 BC Assyria, a savage nation, defeated Israel completely and took them into captivity.*

- *As Assyria reached out to conquer more and more land, they neglected the affairs at home and there were numerous revolts and great turmoil. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. Interesting fact about Nineveh: it is one of the most ancient cities in the world, founded by Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:9-12) shortly after the Flood.*

Read Jonah 1:1-16

2. God tells Jonah to tell the Ninevites that God is angry with them. So where does Jonah go (vs 3)?

Nineveh was 600 miles northeast of Israel. Tarshish is Spain – 2,000 miles west! Tarshish was the end of the known world. "Run away!" hardly even describes what he did! Why did Jonah flee? He didn't want these Gentiles to have salvation. He would have been happy to have them go to hell.

Obviously Jonah's heart and mind were not in tune with the will of God. What lessons are there in this for us?

God's will is not for us to understand. God's will is not optional in our lives. Deciding which parts of God's will we want to agree with and carry out is a very effective tool that Satan uses to pull us to himself. God's will is going to happen with or without us and we can only suffer if we decide not to participate. God forgive us!

3. Why do you think Jonah knew that he was the cause of the storm?

His sins had convicted him. For Jonah, as for us, admitting our sin is the first step in repentance. God had aroused his conscience and he was responding appropriately. By telling the sailors to throw him into the sea, he was not threatening suicide but was rather throwing himself to the mercy of God.

Discuss the consequences some may fear that then hinder them from acknowledging their guilt.

Disruption of family/friendships, loss of job/prestige, financial loss, legal trouble, shame ...

Read Jonah 1:17-2:10

4. Why do you think so many Bible critics scoff at verse 1:17?

It doesn't make sense! It's illogical. It just couldn't happen that someone could survive in the belly of a great fish for 3 days and nights. They will use such "ridiculous stories" as a way to discredit the entire Bible and make it nothing more than a book of fairy tales. Or they change the story into an allegory trying to make it say something more than God says. In one way or other, they discredit the Bible. Further, Jesus verified this account is historical in nature (Matthew 12:38ff).

What is the danger in accepting, or not challenging their accusations?

If any part of the Bible is not true then we can have no confidence in any of it, because we can never know which parts are only stories, only allegories. Much of the Bible defies logic but God tells us every word comes from him and by the power of the Holy Spirit we must believe it all. Even if we can't understand, by faith we believe. We can't argue any points of faith and expect to win because they are true by faith, not by human reason.

5. Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 is one of the highlights of the book. Many use the following as a model for their prayers:

- A – Adoration
- C – Confession
- T – Thanksgiving
- S – Supplication

How does Jonah show adoration?

Three times he uses the name "LORD", which is the God of covenant grace and mercy. He prayed with hope and confidence, knowing God would hear him even if he was deep in the bottom of the sea.

How does Jonah confess?

He doesn't confess in so many words, but his words are those of a penitent sinner, knowing he has been given what he deserves. Yet he puts his trust in God and knows with confidence that his salvation comes from the LORD.

How does Jonah give thanks? (can you imagine giving thanks if you were in his situation?)

verse 9 – with a song of thanksgiving he will sacrifice to the LORD from whom his salvation comes; the entire prayer is upbeat and thankful

What is Jonah's supplication?

It is absolutely amazing that Jonah has no requests! He doesn't ask for deliverance but rather says a prayer of praise and thanksgiving – thanksgiving that he will be spared from eternal death.

6. Jonah's prayer contains portions and thoughts from many Psalms. Read these verses from chapter two and then read the Psalm references. Compare the words and thoughts.

vs 2 – <i>in my distress...you listened</i>	Psalm 30:2-3, Psalm 120:1
vs 6 – <i>from the pit</i>	Psalm 103:3-4, Psalm 18:16

vs 7 – <i>to your holy temple</i>	Psalm 23:6, Psalm 5:7, Psalm 18:6
vs 8 – <i>worthless idols</i>	Psalm 135:15-18
vs 9 – <i>song of thanksgiving</i>	Psalm 107:1

What application does this have to our lives?

The benefit of knowing large portions of Scripture by heart is a huge blessing. So often we need to have it at our finger tips – Jonah couldn't quite pull out his scrolls and begin studying! He had to have them in his head and in his heart so they came flooding back as he needed them. We are never too old to memorize. What a blessed way to spend our time.

Read chapter 3

7. God gives Jonah another chance. Why do you think God went to such extremes to have Jonah go to Nineveh?

1) Certainly Jonah would not forget what God had done for him as he ran away, was given opportunity to repent and do God's will. Jonah had a chance to personally see that God was merciful and slow to anger 2) God cares for all people, Jew and Gentile alike, and this was a very large city filled with people who did not know him. God wanted to give them the opportunity to live with him in heaven – God wants ALL people to be saved 3) God wanted to move Israel to repentance, using Nineveh as an example

Jonah said "Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed." There may have been more that he said, but even if this is all he said, it was sufficient. Where do you see law in this sentence?

The destruction of the city is the punishment for breaking the law.

Do you see gospel in this sentence? Explain.

Yes, the 40 days are God's period of grace to repent and come to him for forgiveness. Verse 5ff says the Ninevites believed God and the law does not create faith. When we witness, we can be brief and to the point. We can also trust that God will use our words to accomplish his will when we focus on God and not on ourselves.

8. An entire heathen city, with an estimated population of 500,000, is brought to repentance in only one day. This is truly a miracle; something we would say is humanly impossible. But with God nothing is impossible. Luke 11:30 says "Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites." In addition to his message, how might Jonah himself have aided in this huge change in the Ninevites?

God may have used Jonah's experience in the belly of a fish as a sign to these heathens that his message was from the one true God. It is very possible that the condition of his skin and other outward appearance would testify to the truth of the story that may well have made its way to Nineveh even before Jonah got there.

Why would the king require the animals to fast as well as the people (vs 7)?

Hungry animals will be very noisy and remind the owners of their own cry for mercy. Historians mention how ancient peoples cut the hair of their animals just as they cut their own hair when in mourning. This wouldn't have been unusual.

Some would say that the repentance of Nineveh was not sincere. Spaude (People's Bible) says:

"...the word "repentance" is used in Scripture in both a narrow and a wide sense. Whenever it is coupled with "faith" or "believe", it has the narrower meaning:

sorrow over sin...Whenever “repentance” is used alone, however, it usually has the wider meaning: sorrow over sin and faith in the Savior for forgiveness.” (p 75).

From this Spaude would say the repentance was sincere. Verse 10 gives us further proof of their repentance.

Read chapter 4

9. After the joy of chapter 3, chapter 4 begins on a very sad note. Jonah is angry because he doesn't think God was fair in forgiving the Ninevites. After all, they didn't keep any of the laws, weren't circumcised and just plain didn't deserve God's mercy. Can you think of other examples from the Bible when people had a similar "it's not fair" attitude?

Brother of the prodigal son when his father threw a party for the returning son, laborers in the vineyard when the guys starting late in the day got paid the same as those who worked all day.

Knowing that Jonah would have been familiar with the works of the prophets, why else might he have been angry?

He would have known about the prophecies concerning Assyria destroying Israel and may have been angry that he had any role to play in their pardon.

What striking differences do you see between Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 and the one he said in verses 2-3?

The first was of great praise and thanksgiving, very unselfish with all praise and wisdom going to God. The second was focused entirely on himself, accusing God of not understanding and of doing the wrong thing.

Have you ever found yourself praying in a similar way?

Makes one think of James 3:10 – with the same tongue we praise and curse, this should not be! What a blessing for us that the Lord IS compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love.

10. Did God answer Jonah's prayer?

Yes, but not in the way Jonah had asked. He wasn't killed but God worked with him to bring him back to himself.

Outline the steps God used in working with Jonah.

The God of power and might provided a vine for shade, sent a worm to eat the vine and sent a scorching east wind; the God of grace and mercy gently showed Jonah how he loves the people of Nineveh, whom he created, just as much as he loves Jonah. They are all God's children.

What can we learn about disciplining our children from the way the Lord worked with Jonah?

Don't treat them as they deserve. Give them a little, help them realize what they have is given out of love and not because they deserve it. Help them see they deserve nothing. Have compassion. Love them even when they are difficult to love.

11. What messages will you take away from the book of Jonah?

God's love and mercy as he works to prune and hone each one of us and bring us closer to him, God's love and mercy as he works with whole populations, Jonah's prayer in chapter 2... Oh, maybe the story of the great fish, even though it is such a tiny part of the whole book. Don't forget that Jonah serves as a picture of Jesus' resurrection.

Closing Prayer

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Lesson 10 – Micah

Israel's Judgment and Salvation

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Micah:

1. *What do we know about Micah?*
 - Micah was from Moresheth, an insignificant village on the border between Judah and Philistia, 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem
 - For Judah this was a time of political instability, social injustice, moral degeneracy and spiritual poverty. Idolatry was wide spread and worship was a mere formality, with people simply going through the act of worship and sacrifice but their hearts were not in it.
 - Judah had been invaded by Israel and King Ahaz appealed to Assyria for protection. Thus they gave up their independence and annually paid huge amounts to Assyria for their protection.
 - Micah was a prophet in the Southern Kingdom of Judah and was a contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah. He was working in Judah during 722 BC when Assyria carried the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity.

Read Micah chapter 1

2. As with other prophets, Micah presents his credentials – the words he spoke came from God himself. (1:1) Which sin is the underlying cause of both the social and the spiritual problems of Israel and Judah? What message is there in this for us today?

Wealth of the country brought with it a spiritual poverty, marked by the growth of widespread idolatry and disheartened worship, as people looked more and more to themselves and their material possessions than to their true LORD. As a natural progression of the sin of idolatry, social evils followed, marked by a greedy wealthy class and a victimized poor class with little mutual trust among anyone. These two sins seem to feed on each other, even today, as people move further and further away from their LORD. Where there is no love for God, there is no love for people either.

3. Note the play on words with the names of the cities in verses 10-15:

Gath – “Tell Town”	Beth Ophrah – “Dust Town”	Shaphir – “Beautiful City”
Zaanan – “Exit Town”	Beth Ezel – “Neighbor Town”	Maroth – “Bitter Town”
Jerusalem – “City of Peace”	Lachish – “Chariot Town”	Moresheth Gath – “Gift Town”
Aczib – “False Town”	Mareshah – “Conqueror Town”	Adullam – “Refuge Town”

Try to read these verses substituting the meaning of each city name.

Read Micah chapter 2

4. How do the prophecies of God's plans in this chapter align with the common picture of a loving God who would never let anything bad happen to his people? (See also Isaiah 42:8, Romans 6:23)

God is a loving and merciful God. He gets no pleasure from punishing his people – he would have all men be saved. Yet he detests idolatry and will not tolerate it. He has promised punishment and death to those who turn from him. Sin is serious and those who play with it will be held accountable.

What words or phrases show us the gospel message in this chapter?

In verses 12-13 - God will "surely bring together the remnant", care for them "like sheep in a pen", Jesus will "break open the way" and will lead those who repent to heaven. These verses don't refer only to those few who returned from captivity but rather to all believers, to Spiritual Israel, to you and me.

Read Micah chapter 3

5. Power corrupts. Give examples that this applied in Micah's day and how it applies today?

The way the leaders took away the jobs, houses and money of the people (2-3), the way the prophets pronounced whatever they got paid to say(5), the way the priests took bribes and told fortunes for money(11). There is little different today in government, some church bodies, those who make themselves out to be leaders. Praise God we have the same power that Micah relies on in verse 8!

Because of these gross sins, Jerusalem would be completely destroyed; this happened in 586 BC when Babylon leveled the city and took the people captive. (2 Kings 25 and Lamentations)

Read Micah chapter 4

6. Verses 1-8 talk about God's mercy in promising a restoration for all penitent people. What are some of the pictures of this restoration that we see in this chapter?

Many people both Jews and Gentiles will be in the church (1-2), it will be a lasting kingdom (1), repentance brings peace among believers (3), each believer will have an inner peace (4) as they walk with the Lord in faith (5), the people will get their strength from the LORD (7-8).

But first, Israel must endure the consequences of their sins.

Read Micah chapter 5

7. Verse 2 is a familiar Christmas reading; it's always interesting to see familiar passages in their context. What is the message of this chapter?

- *A Savior would come from the house of David, from Bethlehem, to reconcile all people with their LORD (2)*

- *This Savior would be God himself and would have all of the power and majesty of God.*

- *vs 5 - He will shepherd his sheep (the Church) through more than enough ("7 or even 8") leaders – think of these prophets, Paul, Luther, our pastors, missionaries and God-fearing parents throughout the ages.*

- *The believers will be greatly blessed, but they must make use of these blessings or, like a shower, they will be gone.*

Today the church still is engaged in battle with enemies of Christ. Where does the church find its weapons to use in this ongoing battle? (Also see Ephesians 6:10, 17)

God's people will not depend on military strength or anything else for their power, but will depend entirely on God for their victories. Defensive weapons come from being in the Word, offensive weapon is the Word itself.

Read Micah chapter 6

8. According to verse 8, what is our duty to God and to our neighbors?

Live according to his standard as set down in the law; show mercy as God has shown us mercy (this includes forgiving one another); look to God with humility, recognizing his forgiveness through Christ and seek his guidance in doing his will.

Read Micah chapter 7

9. How does the world of Israel, described in the first six verses, in some ways also describe our world today?

Seems there are so few believers, abundance of lovelessness, bloodshed, greed, graft, corruption, lack of trust. Lack of love and respect in the family

How does the Christian respond to such corruption?

In verse 7 Micah said he watches in hope for the Lord. We are able to put our hope in the Lord when we confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness – verse 9. When one has his heart focused on God, he gains the strength to withstand the assaults and he may even have the opportunity to make changes in the world he touches. We especially have opportunities to tell the unchurched why we have such hope in the future because we will not live our lives as does the rest of the world – verses 11-13.

How does the believer respond to God's blessings in his life?

Verses 14–20 - praise God and feast on the richness of his Word; ask God to continue to show us his mercy with complete confidence that he will; ask God to increase the size of his Church

10. In the future, what will you remember about Micah?

We can think of Micah's wonderful example of Godliness in such horrible circumstances. God's judgment of the world is just, but he put into place a plan by which those who remain faithful can be reconciled with him. Through Jesus, we are able to look with confident hope to the day we will be with God for eternity. In the meantime, we look to him to help us along our path of life.

Closing Prayer

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Lesson 11 – Nahum

God Controls History for the Good of His People

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Nahum

1. What do we know about Nahum?

- *We know nothing about Nahum except what he tells us in 1:1, his name (a common name) and that he is from Elkosh. We don't know where this city is but most scholars place it somewhere in Judah.*
- *His name means "comfort"*
- *He wrote to the people of Nineveh for the benefit of the people of Judah, shortly before the fall of Nineveh, about 663-612 BC. Amazingly, the city was still at its peak of glory and the only superpower of its time, so his message would be quite shocking and unbelievable. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been taken captive by Assyria at this time. Nahum's message of destruction for Nineveh, capital city of Assyria, was meant to give comfort and hope to the people of Judah as they see how God is always in control*
- *Nineveh was very old at this time, having been settled by descendents of Noah's son, Ham. (Gen 10:11-12). It was a huge city, 30 miles long and 10 miles wide with more than 120,000 inhabitants, built along the Tigris River. It was a wealthy city built by slave labor and plunder taken from neighboring countries during their especially vicious and cruel battles*

Read chapter 1

2. As with other prophets, Nahum begins by establishing that his message comes from God; he is acting as the Lord's mouthpiece.

What 4-6 characteristics of God do we see in the first 11 verses?

- *He is jealous (2) – demanding the exclusive devotion that is his alone as the Creator of this world, and he will stand for nothing less*
- *Vengeful (2) – he will stand for nothing less than what he is due and he will not forget as time passes as we humans often do*
- *Slow to anger (3) – he gives many warnings and shows great mercy, does not delight in punishing his people*
- *Powerful (3-6) – all of nature obeys him, he makes the earth quake, the volcanoes flow*
- *Good to those who trust in him (7) – he loves us! Our protection and deliverance is one of his top priorities*
- *He is always in control (9-11) – not only does he control nature, he also controls people and nations; only his will is done. Even solid rock, which does not burn, cannot hinder God's plans. God himself actively directs and participates in all things here on earth*

Does any of these characteristics surprise you?

Maybe a more serious/punishing God than we often think about....

3. Both Judah and Nineveh had sinned greatly. Why do you think God is treating them so differently?

God reminds Judah that Assyrian dominance was not by chance, but rather because he had sent them to humble and afflict Israel and Judah. This tyranny was Judah's penalty for disobedience and ingratitude. God made a promise to bring a Savior into the world and he will keep his promise. He was still showing mercy and was being slow to anger with his people. He is telling them to celebrate their freedom by worshipping and praising the God who gave them their freedom. For Nineveh, their time had come; they had their chance to come to the Lord (think of Jonah) but had continued to defy him. Now the LORD would tolerate it no longer.

Read chapter 2

4. Nahum describes the fall of Nineveh with brilliant pictures of the frantic activity as they are attacked by the Medes and Babylonians, who were known to dress their warriors in red. The troops are moving so quickly they stumble over each other. As Nineveh grew, they had built a dam to store up water in the rainy season and let it come into the city in the dry season. Now the enemies use that water to flood Nineveh where most buildings were made of mud brick. The people are carried off into slavery and the great wealth of the city plundered.

The lion was the symbol of Assyria. Why was this an appropriate symbol?

A lion is feared by all and shows no fear of other animals. A lion attacks its prey with ferocity and carries off the remains to its lair. A lion hunts just for the sake of hunting, not just to feed itself and her family. A lion is known as the king of the jungle for a reason. This is the same way that Assyrian acted.

How can we be sure Nineveh fell because of an act of God, not simply because an enemy had superior firepower?

Nahum is describing this whole attack with such accuracy it is as if it had already happened. God gave him the words to write at a time when Nineveh would have been smug in its laughter at such a picture. And verse 13 expresses very clearly that God is in control and will use other nations and natural catastrophes to carry out his plan.

Read chapter 3

5. How does Nahum's writing style, especially in vs 1-3, help the picture of destroyed Nineveh?

His short, clipped phrases, filled with action and vivid pictures makes the scene of destruction very clear. No extra words get in the way of the picture. You can just feel the action. Prose could never create such vivid pictures and the sense of speed and excitement.

To what does Nahum compare Assyria in vs 4-8 and why is it an appropriate picture? *Nineveh is compared to "the wanton lust of a harlot", whose appetite can never be satiated and who would use anything at her disposal to get what she wanted. The shame of this life style is what Nineveh forced upon others and now it would experience the shame for itself.*

Note: Thebes, situated on the Nile, was the capital of ancient Egypt and home of the Pharaohs. It was a world class power and its neighbors, Cush, Libya and Put were aligned

with it. But their pride in their strategic position and military power did not stop Assyria from conquering it in 663 BC. Nahum says Nineveh should learn from Thebes.

Do you find any significance in having a man whose name means “comfort” write this book?

It is a great comfort to know that God is in control; we can leave vengeance and punishment to God. It is also a great comfort to know that God will keep his promises.

God dealt with Nineveh’s pride, cruelty and idolatry in a very convincing way. What lessons do you learn about God from this book?

- *The God of Nahum’s time is also the God of our times*
- *He will not tolerate people or nations who are godless, haughty, and defiant; he will bring them to judgment*
- *We should never consider the lack of speed with which God appears to address evil as tolerance or a lack of power to change things; he is full of wisdom and love and knows the best ways and the best times*
- *God is merciful and slow to anger, full of grace, and he has promised us his deliverance; we can have complete confidence that he will keep his promises to us just as he kept his promise to Judah*
- *Our strength comes from God alone, not from any government, earthly institution or wealth*

6. How has this book brought you closer to Jesus?

Closing Prayer

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Lesson 12 – Habakkuk

The Righteous will Live by Faith

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Habakkuk

1. What do we know about Habakkuk?

- He has a name that would have been strange to the Hebrews, and we really know nothing about him except that he was a prophet and he wrote this book. By his words, we also know that he had a strong faith and trusted in God implicitly.

- His name is mentioned in the apocryphal book *Bel and the Dragon*, where an angel lifted him up by his a hair, transported him to Daniel while he was in the lion's den; he gave Daniel some food, and then was returned. An interesting little story, legendary rather than historical.

- We estimate he wrote at about the end of the Assyrian empire, just as Babylon was beginning to take power. This makes him a contemporary of Nahum (Northern Kingdom), Zephaniah and Jeremiah (Southern Kingdom). He would have been in the Southern Kingdom as Israel had already been taken captive by Assyria.

- Good King Josiah had attempted reforms in Judah but after his death his son, King Jehoiakim brought back all of the godless attitudes and wicked behavior that we have talked about in previous studies. Habakkuk would have been writing at this time.

Read chapter 1:1-11

2. Habakkuk too, begins by establishing that his message comes from God; he is acting as the Lord's mouthpiece to carry a message to Judah.

These first two chapters record a conversation between Habakkuk and God. What is Habakkuk's first complaint and how does God answer him?

Habakkuk has been praying for a long time and doesn't understand why God tolerates such evil. The Lord is being disgraced and the people are suffering. How long must he keep praying? Why doesn't God answer his prayers?

God responds that he hadn't been inactive as evidenced by what was happening in world events. He would respond soon, within Habakkuk's life time. He had been showing grace and mercy to many with repeated warnings, accompanied by comfort for his people, asking them to trust that he would act in his time. God uses nations to punish nations and he would use Babylon to punish the wicked society that had Habakkuk so upset. It would be a fearful, horrible devastation by a merciless oppressor.

Read 1:12-2:1

3. How does Habakkuk's second conversation with the LORD begin?

He begins with a confession that God is using the Babylonians as his agents, acknowledgement that all things work according to his will and a confirmation of his faith that God takes no pleasure in evil.

Yet, Habakkuk has a second question. What is it?

Habakkuk is expressing his faith and trust in God but wants to know why God is using this approach, why he is using a nation even more cruel than Judah to punish his people. The righteous and the evil will both suffer under this judgment. And in the end, God would still not be glorified because Babylon would not recognize him as the Almighty LORD.

Read 2:2-20

4. Habakkuk confidently waited for God's response. How did God respond?

God begins with an assurance that what he is going to say will certainly happen (v3). The righteous must confidently believe, in faith, that God will never leave their side and that he will supply all of their needs even though they will endure great persecution. God has great displeasure with Babylon also – his standards never change! Because of their sins, the Babylonians would also fall under God's judgment, affected in the same way they had mistreated other countries. God would be glorified!

God hates evil and wants all to be saved. From your knowledge of the Old Testament prophets and Bible stories did God ever send the gospel message to Babylon?

We can think of all the messages that Daniel brought, and also those of Nehemiah and other exiles taken to Babylon. Their messages reached King Nebuchadnezzar, but in the end were rejected.

What message did God give Habakkuk in verse 20, which applies so well to us also?

God ends his response with a beautiful message for us all: don't complain but know that I am in control; be silent and let me carry out my plans.

5. What general principle of life is God telling us in verses 13-14 and 18-20?

Whatever we build with our hands and minds will come to nothing. Nations will rise and fall. Idols are foolishness because people are worshipping the created, not the Creator. Only God's glory, all he has told us about himself, will remain forever.

What traits might we see in ourselves that parallel those of the Babylonians?

We can be arrogant, trusting in our wealth/power/position more than we trust in God. We think the world revolves around us alone. We feel accountable to no one but ourselves.

What would Habakkuk tell us if he were sitting in the room with us?

Habakkuk would certainly say "Repent! Fall on the mercy of your Mighty LORD".

Read chapter 3

6. Habakkuk's prayer is really a psalm, set to music, for use in worship. As a prophet, he would have been teaching the righteous how to trust and praise God through his own outpouring of praise. What is his primary message?

The Lord has cared for his people forever; he has rescued them from many calamities; he has control of all nature and all peoples. Habakkuk longs for God to come again in power and glory to rescue Judah and make good his promise of salvation.

What does Habakkuk's irrepressible joy mean in the context of injustice?
God will handle it

In God's use of wicked Babylon?
He's in control and that is his plan; my job is to trust and praise

Of our own expectations?
God's will be done, not mine. I worship the Lord

7. Which verses of this chapter would make a good Thanksgiving message, especially in times of great difficulties?

In 17-19 Habakkuk says even in times when there are no crops, animals, or food we still rejoice in God as our Lord and Savior because of his grace. It's not about me; it's all about God and who he is. He wrote these words at a time when Babylon may already have been attacking Judah and certain destruction was at hand; yet he was joyful in the Lord as he waited patiently for the day of calamity. Now that's a confession of faith!

8. How has the message of Habakkuk brought you closer to Jesus?

Closing Prayer

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Lesson 13 – Zephaniah

Be Silent before the LORD, for the Day of LORD is Near

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Zephaniah

1. What do we know about Zephaniah?

- From his genealogy in 1:1, Zephaniah may have been the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah, a good king who tried to reform Judah. If this is true the current king, Josiah, also a righteous king, would be a cousin.

- Josiah ruled from 640-609BC. He was only 8 years old when he became king. Initially he was under the influence of advisors who carried on the sins of his father, Amon. As he became older he began some reforms. While repairing the temple he found the Book of the Law, read it, and began much needed reforms. Zephaniah may have worked with Josiah to institute these Godly changes in the country.

- Zephaniah's contemporaries would be Nahum, Habakkuk and Jeremiah.

- Nineveh fell in 612 BC and Assyria was finally defeated by the Babylonians in 605 BC. The first Jews, including Daniel, were deported at this time. Zephaniah would have lived during these days.

Read chapter 1

2. Zephaniah begins by establishing that his message comes from God; he is acting as the Lord's agent. We read Zephaniah's words and the people heard his voice, but what he says comes straight from God and we hear his words as if from God himself. What a comfort that we don't need to decide if Zephaniah, or any of the other writers of Scripture, are correct or just men offering their own ideas and thoughts.

In verses 4-6, God says he will stretch out his hand against which people?

Against Judah, against the House of David, the people he especially blessed and called his own.

Why do you think he started with this nation?

Because he had given them much and they had been singled out as the nation from whom the Messiah would be born. They had been given the knowledge of how to please the Lord, godly leaders, and many warnings. They should have been the light to the world.

Which three groups in particular displeased God in this nation? (vs 4-6)

1) those who worshiped idols 2) those with divided loyalties, who worshipped both the LORD and idols at the same time (vs 5), and 3) those who were indifferent (vs 6)

Where do we see these groups in the church today?

1) those who put their trust in anyone or anything other than God, 2) those who confess faith but who also dabble in the occult, in spiritualism, in horoscopes; or wear clothes or jewelry that conflict with the praise we give to God 3) those who claim to believe but don't come to worship or

the Lord's Supper regularly, or those who claim to believe but lead lives that contradict their claim; those whose faith plays only a marginal role in their life

Judah is the sacrifice which the Lord has prepared (vs 7); it is their blood that will be shed, and the invited guests are the people of Babylon, who will take joy in plundering the riches of Judah.

3. The judgment described in this book can be applied to two separate situations. What are they?

God brings his judgment on ungodly nations by using other nations. This is seen in Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. The same thing has happened throughout history. The message of Zephaniah also applies to the last day when Jesus will return on Judgment Day. At that time, God will also wipe the earth clean, no one will be able to hide from God's judgment. God's judgment will far surpass anything an invading army could do. Zephaniah's warnings apply to us just as much as they applied to the people of his time.

4. What are some of the descriptions of the "Great Day of the LORD" in verses 14-18?

- Chaos, noisy (v14)
- Day of wrath, distress and anguish, trouble, darkness, gloom (v15)
- Distress, people slaughtered like an animal killed by a car (v17)
- Sudden end to everything, all consumed by fire (v18)

What is the reason for this day of judgment for Judah?

(vs17) because they have sinned against the Lord – a willing rebellion against God and all he stands for. If God were not a just God, but one who lovingly overlooks our sin, there would be no reason for Jesus to die for our sins!

Read chapter 2

5. Chapter 1 leaves us with a helpless feeling; no one could escape the coming disaster. What hope is presented in the first three verses of this chapter?

Now, while there is still time, bow low before the LORD and repent, fall on his mercy.

Why do you think so many would not do this, both then and in our day?

Sinners, left to themselves, don't recognize their sins as wrong and are not upset by them. By nature, sinners are unresponsive to God. Sinners tend to see the judgment as some time in the distant future, not as absolute and fierce as the Bible says, and they easily minimize their sins when compared to those who have done much worse things.

In light of Zephaniah's words, should we fear the Great Day of the Lord?

God's law tells us that God is serious about his demands of us. Only through the Holy Spirit can we come to God in humility and repentance, trusting in the salvation that is ours through Jesus. We should fear the last day if we are unrepentant. In faith and repentance, through grace, we can look forward to the Great Day of the Lord as an end of this world and the beginning of eternal life in heaven. It will be a "Great Day!"

6. Zephaniah pronounces a judgment on the countries surrounding Judah, to the west (Philistia), east (Moab and Ammon), south (Cush) and north (Assyria). What do you picture when you read about the end of Philistia in verse 7?

The destruction of the God's enemies will bring peace to God's people – a picture of the last day when all evil goes away and we live in harmony in heaven.

What picture do we see as Moab and Ammon are destroyed in verse 11?

There will be many Gentiles who will also be saved through grace.

What happens to those who are haughty and defiant, like the Assyrians who at Zephaniah's time were the height of civilization?

They will disappear forever

Read chapter 3

7. If anyone in Judah still didn't get the message, Zephaniah makes it clear in the opening words of chapter 3 that they are included in the judgment. What is the message of the first five verses?

The people, the leaders, the prophets and the priests all ignored God and his law; yet the LORD remained faithful to them day after day.

8. From verses 5-8, how do we know that God does not take pleasure in the destruction he was announcing?

*He remains faithful to his unchanging word (vs 5) and in verse 7 he says that surely what has been said will move them to change their hearts, bring them to repentance and lead lives according to his will. But he is faithful to his word; without repentance the unbelievers will be consumed by fire. In your opinion, what one quality do you think God wants restored in his people today?
To live according to his will, in repentance and in trust, praising his name.*

9. Verses 9-13 bring the beautiful gospel message of salvation. How do we know that this salvation comes from God alone? Also see Ezekiel 36:25-27.

Verse 9 says "I will purify." It is clear from Zephaniah's words, and those of many other writers of the Bible, that humans will never change on their own; indeed, they cannot change.

What are some of the pictures of the world after judgment day?

- *All will call on name of the Lord, serve together, and understand each other (9)*
- *All people, Jews and Gentiles, will bring offerings (10)*
- *Only believers will remain; the meek and humble (11-12)*
- *There will be no evil or wrong (vs 13)*

What moves Zephaniah to break out into a song of praise in verse 14ff?

The Lord has taken away our punishment, he protects us from harm, he takes delight in us!! And we live with him forever. Hopelessness and despair turns into rescue, restoration and joy.

Read verse 17 together and then reread it, substituting your name for the pronouns. What impression does this have on you?

10. How has Zephaniah brought you closer to Jesus?

Closing Prayer

Lord, preserve us, work the desire for repentance in our hearts that you may bring us home.

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Lesson 14 – Haggai

Put God First

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Haggai

1. What do we know about Haggai?

- *The Book of Ezra provides the historical setting for Haggai. The Jews were just returning from 70 years of Babylonian captivity. The first group of about 50,000 was led back by Zerubbabel in 536 BC and he was named their governor. The rebuilding of the temple began, with opposition from neighbors who feared the religious and political implications of a rebuilt temple. But after 18 years of half-hearted work, the work lagged because the people were more interested in building their own homes. Haggai's message is "Build God's house!" because he was concerned that people put God first and themselves second. The temple was finally dedicated in 516 BC.*

- *Based on 2:3, some think Haggai may have seen Solomon's temple before it was destroyed. This would make him at least 70 years old at the time of his ministry which covered about four months in 520 BC*

- *Zechariah (we look at him next week!) worked with Haggai to encourage the people to honor God first*

- *Haggai's name means "festive"*

Read chapter 1

2. What is a prophet?

Someone who speaks for God.

What evidence do we see in the first ten verses of this chapter that shows God was using Haggai to get his Word to the people?

1-The Lord came through Haggai, 2-This is what the Lord says, 3-Then the word of the Lord came, 5-this is what the Lord says, 7-this is what the Lord says, 8-says the Lord, 9-declares the Lord

Compare the attitude of the people of Haggai's time with those in Exodus 36:2-7.

The people at the time of Moses gave more than was needed and had to be told to stop bringing things for the altar. Haggai had to confront the people with their selfishness and lack of enthusiasm for building the temple. It had nothing to do with the wealth of the people or the current economic situation, but everything to do with the attitudes of the people and their priorities.

How might we take to heart the Lord's words in vs 5?

We also do well to seriously think about our offerings (time, talents and money) to the Lord's work. Do we give from our hearts in joyful thanksgiving and praise, do we give grudgingly or out of sense of duty, do we give only when there is something left over after everything else is taken care of? God is asking us to put him first. In the New Testament times we are blessed to have Gospel-motivated giving, using what Christ gave us as our example. Our priorities are a reflection of our faith.

Compare the results of working for ourselves first with putting God first.

The harder we work for ourselves the less we have and the less we are satisfied. When we work for God, the blessings multiply and overflow. (vs 8-9) Through our labors, God is glorified. He knows the motives of our hearts. The beautiful thing about working for God, is that he blesses his many people with complementary abilities so that the end result is a thing of beauty and a blessing to all.

Verse 14 lists the only way any lasting and good work for the Lord is going to get done. Why is it good for us to remember this today when we set up programs?

If the motivation for things is purely to please God they succeed according to his will. If they are done for any other reason, God is not praised. Not only is he not praised, Amos 5:21-23 says he hates such offerings and will not accept them.

3. Why is it always a miracle when people listen to and obey what a pastor says in a sermon?
He is an ordinary man but has been given an extraordinary call. God is using him to teach his people what the Word says. Only through the Spirit do we listen and learn, and then act. Here we see how Haggai's sermon moved the hearts of the leaders and the people to respond to the Spirit's message.

What confidence do we have when we put the work of God ahead of our own comforts? (vs 13)

God is with us! "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31) He will ensure everything works together for our good. (Rom 8:28) No worries!

Read chapter 2

4. Haggai mentions three imperatives in verses 4-5. What are they and why are they important for us to remember today?
Be strong, work, do not fear. It takes strength to overcome the inertia of the world and our flesh, our laziness and our desire for self-fulfillment. Fear can tie our hands and sap our energy. Fear of the size of a project, the cost, or our ability to bring it to completion. Fear of speaking the saving gospel message to those who do not know their Savior or thinking it is hopeless to even try. But giving these entirely over to God allows us to work and make progress. Putting our trust in God makes us acknowledge that all power and all success come from him alone.
5. Agree or disagree: We can infer from Haggai's message that a congregation going into a building project should always strive to build the most spectacular building possible.
We want to take to heart what Haggai says about putting God first in our lives, but it's not the beauty or grandeur of the building that matters. We recognize that the materials we are using belong to God in the first place and the gifts we use to make them beautiful also come from God. Haggai points out that God would not be pleased when what we give back to him pales in comparison to what he gives us. However, the glory of the church is simply the people gathered in worship, stirred by the Spirit to desire to praise God and serve him with their gifts.
6. What is inspiring and comforting about hearing God tell us that the glory of his present house will be greater than the glory of the former houses?
We can look at great cathedrals from centuries ago and think they were so grand. We can look at our forefathers, at Luther, Paul and others and think their work played such a pivotal role in the Church. Yes, there were great things and great people in the past that God used to his glory. But

we are also assured that we can produce great things in our day, too. The Church may look to the past in thanksgiving but we must be working today, with an eye on the future. Our work is just as important today, and it is the work the Lord will bless in his way.

What does it mean when God declares “in this place I will grant peace” in vs 9?

The chaos of the world will continue around us but those who believe know a peace that comes only from God. We know a peace that comes from the confidence of eternal life, which this world cannot take away from us.

7. What is the message of verses 10-14?

It's much easier for an evil thing to make a good thing evil, than for something good to make an evil thing good. Consecration does not rub off, but defilement does. Because the people are currently slacking off, he sees their work as defiled; they aren't working with their hearts in the right place.

What is Haggai saying they should do? (vs 15-19)

Don't delay! Once again he implores the people to think carefully about what they are doing. Look at the results of a lukewarm attitude – nothing is right. Get busy today while there is still time to repent because the day is coming when it will be too late. The hearts of believers can be changed as they are reborn to live productive lives, pleasing to God. And with repentance comes God's willingness to bless. (vs 19).

Agree or disagree: The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Intentions don't count, only actions

8. What is a signet ring (vs 23)

A signet ring was used as a seal or signature to show ownership and authority. It was frequently used as a guarantee of full payment by an important official or a wealthy man.

Notice that Zerubbabel's name is recorded in the genealogy of Jesus, both in Matthew 1:12 and Luke 3:27. As a son of David and of Zerubbabel, how is Christ like God's signet ring?

Just as the Lord said Zerubbabel would be like His signet ring – his guarantee that the promised Messiah would be born, Christ is our guarantee of full payment for our sins, ensuring our position in heaven.

9. How has Haggai's message brought you closer to Jesus?

Closing Prayer

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Lesson 15 – Zechariah, chapters 1-5

The Return of the Lord

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Zechariah

1. What do we know about Zechariah?

- Zechariah's name means "The LORD (Yahweh) remembers" and he is sometimes called the prophet of Holy Week as there are many prophecies of things that happened during that week
- He was born in Babylonia and returned to Judah in 538 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. He worked with Haggai to help rebuild Jerusalem and the temple; he was also a contemporary of Ezra
- Luther calls him one of the most comforting prophets
- He was both a prophet (1:1) and a priest, succeeding his grandfather, Iddo, as priest (Nehemiah 12:10-16)
- The purpose of his book is similar to that of other prophets: to rebuke the people of Judah, to encourage them to complete rebuilding the temple and to bring about spiritual renewal
- The book begins with 8 visions he had one night. They are not dreams as he had them while he was fully awake (4:1). Yet they seem surreal and strange, much as a dream might.

Read chapter 1

2. Does Zechariah's plea that the people be better than their forefathers apply to us today?

Many do not have good Christian men as fathers and it is obvious that Zechariah's message would apply to them. It is so difficult to live to a different standard than the one you see every day! But even those who have fathers (and mothers) that set good examples would do well to heed this message. Our parents are only human and they certainly sin daily just as we all do. God's Word sets the standard by which we live. We thank God for the blessing of good parents but we also know that God will help us live according to his will.

3. Vision 1 – *The Man Among the Myrtle Trees*: The horses are angels, sent out by God, to look after the safety and welfare of his people (Ps 91 talks about the work of the angels). God's people are troubled as many of them are still in Babylon (vs 12). It's the oppressing nations that are at ease (vs 11). Because God loved his people so very much, he was jealous for them (vs 14), and became angry with them; he used the Assyrians and Babylonians to punish them. But the violence those nations showed against the Jews has made God even more angry (vs 15). How can God's response in verses 16-17 help us when we have huge difficulties in life?

We take comfort in knowing that God loves us just as much as he loved the people at the time of Zechariah. As he did with the ancient people, he also sends us warnings to return to faithfulness. The problems in our lives are not meant as punishment, but rather as a way to bring us back to faithfulness. God wants to fill our lives to overflowing with prosperity. Think of him as an earthly

father who would much rather hand out gifts than discipline, but who also realizes that discipline is necessary. There is also the comfort of knowing that God chooses us to be his. If he didn't love us, he wouldn't care and would just leave us to our own devices. But he does love us and wants us to be with him!

4. Vision 2 – *Four Horns and Four Craftsmen*: The four horns are the nations that devastated Israel – Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia and Greece. But the four craftsmen are the Lord restoring Israel. How does this vision show the difference between the approach of Satan and the approach of the Lord?

Satan is determined to destroy and uproot us as we hear in Ephesians 6:12 “Our struggle is ...against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil.” The Lord, on the other hand, takes what is ruined, bent, and without hope (our lives) and restores and redeems it. The Lord will terrify Satan and his followers, throwing them down to hell.

Read chapter 2

5. Vision 3 – *A Man with a Measuring Line*: The measuring line is a very powerful symbol of what the Lord has planned for the rebuilding of Jerusalem – for heaven. What are some of things he tells us about the future?
- *So many people in heaven walls won't be able to contain them all (vs 4) and they will be from many nations (vs 11)*
 - *No need for walls in heaven because nothing is stronger than God's power (similar picture in Revelation 21-22)*
 - *Believers are summoned and welcomed by God – he calls us “the apple of his eye”! And even the angels seem to know people are special (vs 7-8)*
 - *God will defeat and subdue his enemies (vs 8-9) – much as the slaves of Babylon plundered them when they fell*

Verses 10-13 say Immanuel, which means “God with us”, is coming to earth to live with us. What comfort do we get from this?

He came to show us the way, to keep us safe as we go through life, and finally to take us to heaven to live with him (Isaiah 41:10 – “Do not fear for I am with you, do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”)

Read Chapter 3

6. Vision 4 – *Clean Garments for the High Priest*: What is some of the symbolism that you see in this vision?
- *Sinful man saved seen as a burning stick snatched from a fire;*
 - *our sin makes us as disgusting as a smelly man with filthy clothes,*
 - *because of our Savior we are given clean rich garments from head to toe*
 - *Jesus is the Branch that connects us to God and makes this transformation possible*
 - *Seven eyes – God is looking at all his people all around the world*
 - *Jesus is the Rock upon which his church is built*

Do you find this vision comforting? Why?

God will have no dirt in his courtroom. Not just the High Priest, but all of the people will be given clean clothes. Satan's accusations will mean nothing because God is in control and rebukes him.

Our sins were removed in a single day, Good Friday, and we now have peace, security and contentment

Read Chapter 4

7. Vision 5 – *The Gold Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees*: The bowl has an abundant supply of oil from the seven channels, symbolizing the fullness of God's power that will never run dry. It is the light, God's Word, which shows us the way through life and to eternal life. With God's help, Zerubbabel (from the line of David) rebuilt the temple and then Joshua, the high priest, could continue the work of the priesthood. The two olive trees seem to symbolize the priestly and royal offices of the Messiah. Why would this vision move Luther to call Zechariah one of the most comforting prophets?

God's Word is all powerful and will never go away. It shows me the way to live this life and how to get to heaven. The patience of the angel shows how God is also so very patient with me. Nothing is too big for God – he makes the mountain flat. He sees to it that his Word continues in this world by providing the temple, the priests – by giving us the command, the words, the motivation to go out and share the gospel with all nations...

Read Chapter 5

8. Vision 6 – *The Flying Scroll*: How does the message of the flying scroll apply to us today?
God's commandments have not changed. When we steal we are telling God he made a mistake, or we are dissatisfied with how he distributed material goods. God hears each flippant misuse of his name. These are cancers that eat away at us and greatly displease God.

Do you need a billboard or a flying scroll for God to get your attention?

Vision 7 – *The Woman in a Basket*: The wickedness of the people is being kept track of (measured). What a blessing it is for us to know that wickedness is contained and does not have free reign in our lives. God will rid the world of evil on judgment day and heaven will truly be holy-without sin. What do visions 6 and 7 have in common?

God warns us about sinning in vision 6. Nothing is hidden from him just as a huge banner flying behind a plane is not hidden from anyone. And in God's time, he will rid the world of all evil, sending Satan and his followers to that place prepared for them, hell. We are safe in God's care.

9. What will you remember about the message of these visions?

Closing Prayer

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Hartzell, Eric S. *The People's Bible Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991. 31-64

Lesson 16 – Zechariah, chapters 6-9

The Return of the Lord

Opening Prayer

Read chapter 6

1. Vision 8 – *Four Chariots & A Crown for Joshua*: The chariots are angels sent out from God, anxious to do their work. The enemies of Israel usually came from the north and thus God fights for his people and there will be peace in the end. (vs 1-8). Verses 9-15 speak of a coronation. Though we have men's names listed, Jesus is the only one who fits the description of these verses. Jesus is the Branch. What connection can be made between the temple that God commanded his people to build in the Old Testament and the temple about which the New Testament speaks? (See 1 Peter 2:5 and Revelation 21:22)

The OT temple was a physical temple, and it was destroyed time after time. The NT temple would be built with living souls, and God is using his people to build this temple of living souls. This temple will never be destroyed.

According to Peter, what is the purpose of this NT temple?

We derive our life from Jesus. With the Spirit in our hearts, we are to do God's bidding, to worship him and live our lives as sacrifices to him. In this way, we will lead others to faith while glorifying God.

What warning that we heard so often in the books of the other prophets is repeated in the last sentence of the last paragraph?

Obeys the LORD! When God tells us something, he really means it. We MUST listen! We so easily slip in this most important condition of happiness and success!

Read chapter 7

2. God continues to speak to Zechariah. The people want to know if they were to continue fasting as they had done while in Babylon. We've heard God's answer in our studies of other prophets. God doesn't want empty worship! How do we know if our worship is God-pleasing?

If our worship comes from humble hearts, acknowledging our sin and knowing that only our Savior can make us clean, then our worship is pleasing. If we worship to glorify God it is good, if we do it for any other reason, it is not good.

Read chapter 8

3. God loves us dearly and wants us for his own; he is jealous of the other gods we put ahead of him. He loves us so much he comes looking for us when we've been unfaithful. God is merciful and promises a beautiful place for us where crops prosper, where violence and sickness will not take the lives of the old and where children will play joyfully. On this side of

heaven the world will never be perfect but we are encouraged to be strong until this New Jerusalem is ours. Listen to the prophets (and our pastors) to learn what pleases God and then put it into practice. Be joyful in worship, reveling in God's forgiveness. Encourage others so they also can share this New Jerusalem.

Verses 9 and 13 talk about having strong hands. What does this mean and how do we get strong hands?

In Hebrew this would be "be encouraged", or get out and do the work of the Lord with energy. The only way we can have strong hands is if we are holding the hand of our Savior, using his power, guidance and encouragement to do his work.

Can you give any examples from your life when you definitely knew God was holding your hand?

What picture do we see in verse 23 and how does it happen?

When we live our faith every minute of every day, we will stand out in this world and people will know we have something special in our lives. Our lives and faith will attract strangers near and far who will want to know what we know – a God that loves us and showers us with spiritual as well as material blessings. This is mission work at its best.

Read chapter 9

In this last half of the book we will see numerous prophecies of the Messiah

4. Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath are cities to the northeast in Syria; Tyre and Sidon are in Phoenicia, along the coast to the north; Ashkelon, Gaza, Edron, Ashdod are all in Philistia to the south. God promises that the day is coming when the true faith would win out and his people would reign unmolested and undisturbed. What blessed sleep this promise gives us also!

What is the 2-fold fulfillment of 9:9?

1) When Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday 2) When Jesus comes on the last day. When we look at the scope of the peace described in the following verses we know there is more than just Palm Sunday.

Describe the picture we see in vs 9-13.

We think of Palm Sunday, with Jesus coming into Jerusalem. Imagine the shouting as the home team makes the winning points. Imagine everyone straining and bustling around to see a big rock star. This is what did and will accompany Jesus' entry. Can we even fathom a whole world without war, without fear, without sin, with abundant good?

Can you think of a hymn verse, commonly sung during Reformation, that we have pictured in vs 14-15?

*God, the Mighty Warrior, will save his people. – Second verse of A Mighty Fortress:
With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected;
but for us fights the Valiant One, whom God himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord (Lord of lords), and there's none other
God;
he holds the field forever.*

5. So far, do you agree with Luther that this is a comforting book?

Closing Prayer

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Hartzell, Eric S. *The People's Bible Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991. 65-94

Lesson 17 – Zechariah, chapters 10-14

The Return of the Lord

Opening Prayer

Read Chapter 10

1. Why is God especially hard on the shepherds or leaders in vs 1-3?

There are some that take credit for what only God can do – control the weather, for example, or provide food and prosperity. They lead people astray and into the hands of Satan; therefore God's anger burns against them. But with God as the leader (vs 4-5), his people will remain faithful and will conquer the enemy.

God did scatter and reject his people (vs 6-12) because he could not tolerate the sin and rebellion of his people. But he also has compassion and mercy and will bring them back, so many it seems as if there won't be room for them all. How does God say he will strengthen his people and bring them back (vs 12)?

With his Name – with the Law and the Gospel – God's Name determines how we walk through this life

Read Chapter 11

2. Why are the trees and the fields being destroyed? (see also Romans 8:22)

Not just the people but all of creation is suffering because of sin

God wants very much to save his people, but they are rebellious. They prefer to follow shepherds who betray them and lead them away from God instead of following the true Shepherd, the Messiah. Following these shepherds is their punishment because God will finally let them have their own way.

3. What do you think the two staffs, one called Favor (or Friendship) and one called Union, symbolize?

God very much wants to be friends with his people and he wants to be one with them. Because we have separated ourselves from him, this is only possible through the Messiah. But for those who also reject their Savior, on Judgment Day God will break those staffs and send the unbelievers to hell, permanently separated from him.

Of what do verses 12-13 remind us and how does this fit into the picture of the staffs? (See also John 10, Matthew 27:10)

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is willing to lay down his life for his people and yet is rejected and stoned and eventually crucified. The 30 pieces of silver was the price of a slave, a paltry sum; and also the amount that Judas took to betray his Savior. The money given Judas was used for a

potter's field, cheap land where the poor were buried. This was all Judas (and many in our world today) thought of the Good Shepherd.

The terror this chapter brings into our hearts (the law) is meant to lead us to repentance so there is room in our hearts for God's comfort, his gospel. Lord, be my Good Shepherd and lead me.

Read Chapter 12

4. In 2 Corinthians 12:10 Paul said "When I am weak, then I am strong". Give examples from verses 1-9 of how this is possible.

God's power is limitless. 1) vs 1 He created the world 2) vs 2 God's power is compared to just a cup that yet can send people reeling 3) vs 3 God's people will be like a rock that cannot be moved even though it bloodies the hands of those who try 4) vs 4 God will make the enemy too weak to fight 5) vs 6 those who fight against God will be consumed as quickly as a woodpile set on fire 6) vs 8 the most feeble will be strong as God's power escalates beyond measure to protect them

5. Compare vs 10 with John 19:37.

By the working of the Spirit in our hearts, we will mourn for the Savior we pierced and crucified. Look at vs 11-14. Is this the way we respond to having pierced Jesus? Why or why not?

Read Chapter 13

6. When is "on that day"?

Throughout the time of the prophets and judges, evil was driven out but came back again. Martin Luther also drove out evil only to have it reappear. Some of these prophecies have been fulfilled in some ways throughout history but the final day of cleansing will be when Jesus comes back on Judgment Day

Verse 4 says false prophets will do anything to avoid being discovered. Have you ever tried not to be labeled a Christian? How did it make you feel?

7. Compare vs 7 with Mark 14:27. Who was the shepherd that was struck and when did it happen?

The Shepherd is Jesus, the Son of God, the one God just said was "close to me". Jesus quoted part of this verse on Maundy Thursday when telling his disciples what would happen to him over the next days.

When times get hard, why is the phrase "The Lord is my God" in vs 9 the best help?

The refiner's fire burns out the impurities and makes the result perfect. Not too much fire to destroy and not too little to leave the impurities behind – just the perfect amount. Being made perfect is sometimes painful when life hands us difficult times; it's definitely a comfort when we are weak and cling entirely on God and his promises. As we focus on the cross we can be confident the trials of life won't destroy us but rather that God says we are his precious people for whom he paid a high price.

Read Chapter 14

8. After the evils of war and destruction (vs 2) there will be a great reversal and God will fight for his people and conquer every enemy. What similarities do you see between vs 6-11 and Rev 21:23-22:2?

Jerusalem will be lifted up (earthquakes), a river of living water will flow through it, the Lord will be the only king over the whole earth, the day is known only to the Lord, a day without daylight or darkness and without seasons, there will be many people in the city and it will never again be destroyed.

On the great Day of Judgment, those who do not worship the True God will be destroyed. There will be no distinction between sacred and secular because everything will be used to serve the Lord. This is our purpose in life – to praise the Lord with great joy.

9. What have you learned from our study of Zechariah?

Closing Prayer

References

- Hartzell, Eric S. The People's Bible Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991. 95-122
- Hartzell, Eric S. The People's Bible Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi Study Guide. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993. 17-21

Lesson 18 – Malachi

Prepare for the Coming of the Lord

Opening Prayer

Introduction to Malachi

1. What do we know about Malachi?
 - Malachi's name means "my messenger" and he is the last prophet from God until John the Baptist, 400 years later.
 - The temple had been rebuilt 75-80 years ago and more Jews had returned from Babylon, including the priests. Under the leadership of Nehemiah, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt 10-15 years earlier. Ezra had read the Book of the Law at the dedication of the walls and many people had committed to change their ways and follow God's commands. However, just a few years later the people have become disillusioned with their lives and no longer trusted in God's promises. Their priests had become corrupt and their worship had deteriorated. They no longer took the Law seriously.
 - Into this environment, God sent Malachi to reprimand, reassure and warn God's people.

Read chapter 1

2. In the first six verses, the Lord says he loves his people. They question it. Then the Lord points to his love of Israel and his hatred of Esau (Edom) as demonstrated by the destruction of their land. How does this response show God's love?

God's love can appear elusive, especially when we face difficult times. (Similar to the common question, "How can a loving God let these bad things happen?") But God's love is a fact. Malachi uses a comparison between Israel, who has been returned to their land and who has been given a promise of a Savior, with that of Edom, who has been destroyed and has no hope of a Messiah. A God of love holds his people responsible for their choices. Edom chose to reject God and they suffered the consequence. He still holds out hope to the Israelites. He tells us to look at what we have, not what we don't have.

3. God wanted the first and the best to be brought to him as a sacrifice. Why?
 - Because he is the Lord Almighty and this is how he is to be honored. This is how he said he wanted to be honored.*

He told the priests they showed only contempt for him (vs 6) with their defiled offerings. What yardstick should we use to know if our offerings are good enough for God?

Our offerings are good and acceptable if they come from our hearts. Hartzell says "Mud pies are acceptable to the Lord if given from a childlike heart of love that sees them as beautiful" (pg 130). Our gifts are acceptable if they are the best we can do, if the old man in us cries out saying they are too good/too much, if the new man in us is thrilled with the offering, if they are as good or better than we would give to those we love most here on earth. Love gives exorbitant gifts.

Have you ever been guilty of “junk for Jesus” giving?

Read chapter 2

4. God condemns the priests and speaks harshly to them because of their despicable actions. From verses 1-6 what does God expect of those called as pastors and workers in the church?

Listen to God, set your heart to honor God's name (2), show the people life and peace through God, care for the people, show reverence and awe of God (5), instruct the people with the truth, live an upright life turning away from sin (6). Because the priests had so violated God's requirements of them, he curses them.

But we know that only God truly knows what's in someone's heart. If an unbelieving pastor, or a pastor deep into sin for which he has not repented, bless me or give me Holy Communion, am I still blessed and are my sins forgiven?

The power of God's Word does not come from the person speaking but from God himself. Yes, I receive the blessing and the forgiveness in these examples. However, there is also a chance that I will be led astray by such a person and for this I must beware, and for this that pastor will be held accountable.

Do you think false prophets are ever exposed?

Verse 3 says they will be humiliated and verse 9 says they will be despised and humiliated before all the people. This will happen in God's time; maybe we will see it and maybe it won't happen until Judgment Day, but God will expose them.

5. God talks about two kinds of unfaithfulness. One is spiritual adultery as described by Judah “as marrying the daughter of a foreign god”. Give an example of spiritual adultery that exists in the church today and what is God's response to it?

Love of money, pride position; without repentance, the offerings and prayers of such people are not received!

Malachi also talks about marital unfaithfulness that leads to divorce. What three elements of marriage does Malachi point out to us?

The sanctity of the commitment and passion between a young couple who come before God and promise faithfulness; the enduring companionship throughout life; and the blessing of children that comes from this union - children who will become the next generation of Christians who will keep praising and serving him.

Why does God say he hates divorce?

Because he created marriage as a blessing (see above) for his people and a way to order his creation. He modeled it after his relationship with his church and uses the comparison as an example for how people should love, sacrifice and forgive one another. Divorce dishonors him by dishonoring his will and his gift and it causes chaos and destruction in the family (Malachi calls it violence.) We should note, however, there is a distinction between a person using divorce to break a marriage (which is what Malachi is speaking of here) and a Christian seeking a divorce to recognize legally what has taken place morally when a spouse has broken the marriage bond by adultery or desertion. A misuse of this passage can wrongly dump a lot of guilt on someone whose spouse may have broken the marriage bond and who had to seek a divorce to recognize legally that the marriage was already broken morally.

6. What makes God weary?

He grows weary when his beloved people whine and complain.

Self reflection – do you think you have ever made God weary?

Read chapter 3

7. When Jesus came, he came suddenly even though his coming had been prophesied for thousands of years and John the Baptist had been sent to prepare the way. When Jesus comes again, it will be just as sudden. God wants perfect purity. What pictures does Malachi give us to show how we are being prepared for that day?

A refiner's fire that burns the impurities out of the metal, or the launderer's soap used to scrub and beat a cloth until it is soft and clean.

We have all felt that refiner's fire and launderer's soap in our lives. How can we be certain that we are acceptable to God and not the ones he talks about in verse 5?

Because God promises us we are! God wants all to be saved. The heart that desires to be refined and cleaned by the blood of Jesus will stand before Jesus that day and will be welcomed into heaven. Also look at the verses 16-17 where we are told once again that God will take us home to him. Oh, Holy Spirit, continue your work in my heart and in my life!

8. God tells the people they are robbing him by not bringing their whole tithe and offering. Why is God interested in getting money?

He's not! He doesn't need our money – it's his and he can take it all back any time he wants. He wants the love and the attitude that comes with faithful, first-fruits giving. He wants our gifts to reflect our faith and trust in him.

What giving challenge does he put in front of the people?

Just give with full faith and trust and they will be rewarded with bursting barns. These blessings may not always come in the form of physical excesses like bursting barns, but the spiritual rewards will be unfathomable. The names of those who trust will be written on a scroll of remembrance (vs 16) and they will be taken to God on the last day (vs 17)

Read Chapter 4

9. How is a soul set free like a calf let out of the barn?

Have you ever seen a young calf out for the first time? Seeing our Lord on Judgment Day will make us frolic with uncontrollable joy. There will be no more evil – it will be burned to chaff – no more pain, no more struggle. Everlasting life with our Savior in heaven – it can't get any better than that!

Why is the closing message of the Old Testament so important (verses 4-6)?

God tells us he has given us everything we need for life in Scripture (his complete revelation through his Word, both law and gospel). God sent Elijah to call everyone to repentance, he will send (sent) John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elijah (read Luke 1:17), to prepare us all for Jesus. There will be faithful believers until the last day. Through faith in Jesus, we are ready for his Second Coming, whenever it happens.

10. How has Malachi's message brought you closer to your Savior?

Closing Prayer

References

Hartzell, Eric S. The People's Bible Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991. 123-151

Hartzell, Eric S. The People's Bible Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi – a Study Guide.