

THIS STUDY OF THE MINOR PROPHETS IS A COLLABORATIVE
EFFORT OF PARTNERS AND STAFF OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP.
WE APPRECIATE ALL WHO VOLUNTEERED THEIR TIME TO
RESEARCH, WRITE AND CREATE THIS STUDY. WE HOPE
YOU ARE ENCOURAGED AND INSPIRED AS YOU READ THESE
OVERLOOKED BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, GROWING
IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WORD AND HOW TO
LIVE JESUS-CENTERED LIVES.



OVERLOOKED

A BIBLE STUDY OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

ROMANS 15:4

**FOR EVERYTHING THAT WAS WRITTEN IN THE
PAST WAS WRITTEN TO TEACH US, SO THAT
THROUGH THE ENDURANCE TAUGHT IN THE
SCRIPTURES AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT THEY
PROVIDE WE MIGHT HAVE HOPE.**

WELCOME TO A STUDY OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

The 12 books known as the Minor Prophets are full of instruction and encouragement. They are called minor because they are short books but they pack a major message! With great spiritual depth they reveal humanity's tendency to wander from God and make clear His displeasure with our sin.

Reading the Minor Prophets gives us a glimpse into the lives of the Israelites, the chosen people of God. Their story reveals a repetitive cycle of sin, exile and redemption. Chasing other gods, slipping into idolatry and rebelling against God's law they compromised their identity to blend with the people around them.

Don't we do the same? In the face of God's extravagant love and endless grace, we seek more! We become restless. Dissatisfied. We look around to see things that look better. And we drift. We immerse in our culture and begin to look like the world rather than citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Each of the prophets were God's messengers delivering His message to His people during specific times in Israel's history. While the time and location have changed, our tendency to drift from God is the same. Their story is our story! Their message of repentance and restoration are relevant.

Reading these small but truth filled books, we see the wandering Israelites from God's perspective. More sobering, we see God's perspective on sin. We come face to face with the danger of choosing our way rather than God's because sin always brings consequences.

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WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

The Bible, unlike any other book ever written, comes directly from the heart of God - its words are God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Though penned by men, it was given by the Spirit of God to tell us about God so that we may live as children of God. The Bible captures the story of humanity, our sinfulness and rebellion against our creator, and God's great rescue plan to save us through His Son, Jesus.

We read the Bible, not only because Jesus commands us to (John 8:31-32), but because by doing so, we gain a deeper knowledge of our heavenly Father. Often times we approach reading the Bible as a task to check off a list or a quest for Biblical knowledge but it is so much more! God has given us His Word so that we may know Him.

The 66 books of the Bible are intricately and purposefully written to reveal the nature and character of our Creator and how we, as Christians, are called to live. God's Word is inerrant, without error or fault in all of its teaching (2 Timothy 3:16, Proverbs 30:5) and is sufficient in meeting all of our spiritual needs (Psalm 19:7-14). The principles found on its pages guide us in our walk with Christ. Through the lens of God's holy Word, we are able to see the world for what it is - sinful and in rebellion against Him - and the hope we have in Jesus Christ because of His sacrifice for us.

The Bible is not a self-help guide to better living and happiness. It is the transforming Word of God to His children bringing hope, revealing His character and helping us live more like Jesus.

As you approach your Scripture reading over the course of this study, ask these questions:

**WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE REVEAL
ABOUT GOD AND HIS WAYS?**

HOW SHOULD I APPLY THIS IN MY LIFE?

**WHAT WILL I DO THIS WEEK AS A RESULT
OF LEARNING THIS TRUTH?**

GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY

Wondering how to start? Or if you will be able to finish? Here are some suggestions to help you get the most out of this Bible Study.

DAILY

Set aside time each day to read the Bible passage and work on the questions. Make an appointment with yourself and keep it!

PRAYy

Ask God to help you learn His Word, love Him more and learn how to be His disciple.

ATTEND

Make a commitment to join the teaching and circle discussion each week. The teaching will give you better insight and a deeper understanding of the passage. Joining others in circle discussions will expand your perspective as you hear others share what they are learning.

ENGAGE

We are not meant to go through the Christian life alone. Be a part of the community of believers, the Church, learning and growing together. Make connections and form friendships as you encourage and pray for others.

Each week, we will study one (occasionally two) of the Minor Prophets. The books vary in length - some are short and some are long. You decide how much to read and when. It is best to read through the entire book at one time from start to finish. For shorter books, it is awesome to read through the entire book each day of the week. The important thing is that you are looking into God's Word regularly and consistently.

Work through the questions at a pace that works for you. Engage God's Word. Let the questions stimulate your thinking. It's not about answering a question - it's about growing in your understanding of God and His ways! Give yourself permission to linger over things that grab your attention! Most importantly, enjoy your study time!

THE

KINGDOM

DIVIDED

The tribes of Israel continually struggled with discord after their exodus from Egypt. Disunity and conflict were not uncommon during the years in the Promised Land and into the time of the judges. The reigns of King Saul and King David included dissension between Judah and the Benjamites. Unrest continued during the reign of King Solomon, David's son. The wisest man on earth, Solomon led Israel to great success but he did not end well. His sin and rebellion led to the division of the tribes of Israel. God, who is always in control, allowed the kingdom to divide "Because they have forsaken me...and have not walked in my ways" (1 Kings 11:26-40).

When the nation of Israel divided, the northern kingdom was called Israel (also, Ephraim in the Bible). God used the Assyrians of the north to bring judgment against the northern tribes. The southern kingdom was called Judah. God used the Babylonians to punish them, carrying them off into exile.

The northern kingdom, though superior in material wealth, was corrupt and wicked, engaging in idol worship and pagan practices. Not one king was godly, leading to their eventual decline. The southern kingdom, however, was a spiritual epicenter. Many godly kings ruled throughout its history causing it to outlast the northern kingdom of Israel.

From God's perspective, the kingdom was divided because they did not keep His commands or honor His ways. From a human perspective, there was discord among the tribes of Israel, disunity and political unrest causing the split.

The Minor Prophets brought messages of correction to the northern and southern kingdoms. God, through His messengers, called His people to turn back to Him. While the writings of the Minor Prophets often seem harsh, there is always a message of hope because God is a God of restoration and hope.

JOEL

SLOW TO ANGER, ABOUNDING IN LOVE

REND YOUR HEART AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS. RETURN TO THE LORD,
YOUR GOD, FOR HE IS GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE, SLOW TO ANGER
AND ABOUNDING IN LOVE, AND RELENTS FROM SENDING CALAMITY.

JOEL 2:13

The book of Joel is written around a strange and catastrophic event: a swarm of locusts has overtaken the land - destroying, devouring, and devastating everything in its path. This terrible event should bring the nation to its knees; they should feel the depths of devastation deeply seeking God in prayer pleading for His redemption. Not only because their food and livelihood has been destroyed, but because this catastrophe is a shadow of the judgement to come on the Day of the Lord.

The prophet Joel, whose name means “Yahweh is God,” brought this message to God’s people to remind them: there is a God, and you are not it. Throughout this book, Joel makes clear that God is Sovereign and in control. Yahweh has authority over Judah (Joel 1 and 2) and all nations (Joel 3). The Lord is not passive or distant, but presides over the details of all that happens to His people using the forces of nature and invading armies to accomplish His purpose.

We do not know the date of the writing because Joel did not mention the ruling kings. Most scholars think that the absence of names of kings suggests a time period before the Assyrian’s and Babylonian’s came onto the scene. If that hypothesis is true, Joel would be one of the earliest of the Minor Prophets. He seems to be from Judah and perhaps lived in Jerusalem. That would explain his familiarity with the temple and rituals performed there.

Joel is the first to develop the biblical idea of “the day of the Lord.” In fact, it is a key theme throughout the book (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14, 18). It is clear that the “day of the Lord” was near, or at hand but had not yet come. It was still future. Prophets often spoke of present judgment or destruction as pointing to a still greater and future judgment to come (described in Revelation).

Joel gives remarkable details that help us understand the magnitude of that future day. With vivid imagery, Joel speaks of “blood and fire and billows of smoke, the sun turned to darkness, and the moon to blood” before the coming of the Lord. Joel’s words impress upon us the sobering reality of God’s judgment on sin.

Using the imagery of a locust plague, Joel masterfully and artistically combines poetry and prophecy to warn of a coming calamity. The people of that day understood the dire warning in his message having endured the devastation brought on by locusts.

The message Joel gives God's people is this: Our God is the God of justice. For those who rebel, there will be judgment, but for those who repent and are reconciled, there is overwhelming mercy.

QUESTIONS

Compare Joel 1:1-4 with Exodus 10:1-20. What reaction should these events have produced in the people of Israel?

How could Joel 2:1-11 describe an army of locusts and an army of people?

Read verses 2:12-13. What are the characteristics of God in this passage?

“Even now...” In the midst of our rebellion, God stands ready to extend mercy to us. What attitude, past sin, or current rebellion will you confess to the Lord to receive forgiveness and the abundant grace He offers?

Read Joel 2:13. To “rend” means to break or tear. In your own words, describe what it means to “rend your heart?” (See Psalm 51:17)?

Joel and other Old Testament prophets speak frequently about “The day of the Lord.” This phrase can refer to: 1) a present catastrophe, 2) near future event (such as the destruction of Jerusalem), or 3) the final period in history when God will defeat all forces of evil. Read 1:15, 2:1, 11, 31, 3:14. How is the day of the Lord described?

Read Joel 2:19-27. How does this passage encourage you regarding past mistakes or wasted years? Spend time thanking God that He alone can redeem what has been lost.

How have you experienced God's compassion and grace in your life?

Read 2:27 and 3:16-17. Think about your current season of life. How has your heart turned from God? What do you need to repent of? Will you turn to Him, your Refuge?

What is the most important thing that you have learned in Joel? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- GOD'S LOVE IS GREATER THAN HIS ANGER TOWARD SIN.
- GOD'S GRACE IS GREATER THAN HIS WRATH.
- GOD ALWAYS RESPONDS TO REPENTANCE WITH GRACE.
- GOD REDEEMS AND RESTORES WHAT HAS BEEN LOST.
- GOD IS YOUR REFUGE.

OBADIAH

GOD IS OUR DEFENDER

THE PRIDE OF YOUR HEART HAS DECEIVED YOU.

OBADIAH 3

God hates pride. It is rebellion, an attitude of independence from God, leading to every other vice. The prophet Obadiah, whose name means “Worshiper of Yahweh” or “Servant of Yahweh,” brought a message of judgment to Edom. Very little is known about Obadiah but his message was clear: God punishes all who harm His people.

Edom, Judah’s neighbor, lived in an area that was nearly impenetrable to invading armies. Their inaccessible mountainous home gave them a sense of security and independence which led to pride. As descendants of Esau, they were blood relatives of Israel. Rather than come to the aid and defense of their brothers, Edom repeatedly harassed Israel and even joined invading nations taking Jews captives for the enemy and plundering Jerusalem.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. The date of the writing is difficult to pin down but most scholars date the book in the 840s BC making it one of the earliest written. Obadiah was a contemporary of Elisha. He used poetic language to deliver a message of coming judgment to Edom (1-16) and promised hope to Judah (17-21).

The book of Obadiah helps us understand a truth about God that is sometimes difficult for modern day people to grasp: when we choose to defy God, judgment is certain. From this book of the Bible, we learn about the destructive power of pride and the consequences of living a self-serving life without concern for others. Pride, arrogance, indifference, and defiance will be judged.

Obadiah also contains a message of hope. Although Judah experienced devastation at the hands of the Edomites, God promised restoration. Those faithful to God have hope for a future because God is Sovereign. Those today who have trusted in Jesus Christ for their salvation are God’s children enjoying His love, protection and eternal security.

QUESTIONS

In verses 10 and 12, who is “your brother Jacob”? Read Genesis 25:19-28 for insight. Note: in Genesis 32:28, Jacob’s name is changed to Israel.

Numbers 20:14-21 provides insight into Edom’s continued mistreatment of Israel. Summarize the Numbers passage.

What sins does God hold against Edom in Obadiah 1-14?

What is the source of Edom’s pride (3,4)?

How do we commit the same sins as Edom today? Draw an asterisk beside the one that is the greatest struggle for you.

Obadiah tells us that judgment comes against all who oppose His people (15-21). What does this teach you about God?

What character traits of God do you see in the book of Obadiah?

How do these traits of God increase your affection for Him?

What is the most important thing that you have learned in Obadiah? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- GOD JUDGES THOSE WHO HARM HIS PEOPLE.
- GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND IN CONTROL. ALWAYS.
- EVIL WILL BE PUNISHED.
- GOD WILL ESTABLISH HIS ETERNAL KINGDOM.
- FULFILLED PROPHECIES PROVE THE RELIABILITY OF GOD’S WORD.

NAHUM

REFUGE IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

THE LORD IS GOOD, A REFUGE IN TIMES OF TROUBLE.

HE CARES FOR THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM.

NAHUM 1:7

Nahum was a prophet to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Like the prophet Jonah 100 years earlier, Nahum brought God's warning of judgment against Assyria's evil oppression. Nineveh had repented in Jonah's day but the change did not last. They had easily drifted back to cruelty and wickedness.

Not much is known about the prophet Nahum, whose name means "comfort," except that he was from a town called Elkosh. Nahum is thought to be educated because of his communication skill and descriptive language. Using powerful similes and metaphors, the book of Nahum is written like a poem. Nahum brings a message of warning to the Assyrians and a message of hope to the Israelites living in Judah and Nineveh.

Nahum foretells the fall of the great city of Nineveh. Their destruction occurred several decades later as the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar, conquered Assyria. The book was most likely written toward the end of evil King Manasseh's reign or at the beginning of the good King Josiah's reign. Living around the time of Zephaniah and Jeremiah, Nahum's prophecy against the city of Nineveh would have comforted the people of Judah as they faced the cruel Assyrians.

Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire which had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. Known for their brutality and gruesome ways, Assyria cast a shadow of dread over its empire and beyond.

After 200 years of Assyrian captivity, God announced, through Nahum, that judgment was coming to the great city of Nineveh. This message brought hope to the people of Judah revealing God's character and His desire for justice and righteousness to triumph over evil. It proved God's sovereignty over all situations, even when circumstances seemed the most desolate and bleak.

There is no question that believers today find themselves overwhelmed and facing dark, painful situations. We find ourselves wondering when God will show up. When will justice be served? When will peace envelope those who are suffering? The book of Nahum reminds us that God's unseen hand is always working, and that His promises of justice, hope and peace do not come back void.

QUESTIONS

Read Nahum 1:2-8. Summarize what you learn about God's character from these verses.

How do verses 1:3 and 1:7 help you understand God's wrath against evil? How does this truth help you as you see evil flourish in our world today?

What does Nahum say will happen to Nineveh (2:8-10)?

Because of their persistent sin, the Lord Almighty is against them (2:13). Where are you indulging in known sin? Where is God calling you to repent, to turn back to Him?

Read "Woe to Nineveh" in Nahum 3:1-7. What were some of the sins the Ninevites committed? What is God's response?

Where do you see similarities to the sins of Nineveh in the world today?

The book of Nahum reminds us that God sees all and God knows all. Although we do not see evil immediately punished, we can trust that God's justice against unrepentant people will ultimately prevail (Read 1:3). What is your response to the fact that "the Lord is slow to anger," that He gives people time to repent?

Reflect on Nahum 1:7. How does this verse encourage you? In your circle of influence, who needs to know that God is a refuge?

What is the most important thing that you have learned in Nahum? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- GOD'S JUSTICE IS ALWAYS RIGHT AND ALWAYS CERTAIN.
- GOD'S RIGHTEOUS AND JUST KINGDOM WILL TRIUMPH.
- GOD WILL PUNISH EVIL.
- GOD IS SLOW TO ANGER.
- OBEDIENCE IS COSTLY BUT NOT AS COSTLY AS DISOBEDIENCE.

JONAH

RUNNING SCARED

SALVATION COMES FROM THE LORD.

JONAH 2:9

Jonah was a prophet of God but in this book he does not prophesy. The book of Jonah tells the story of his life, a life that was very unique when compared to the other minor prophets. While most prophets spoke judgment against foreign nations, God called Jonah to take a message of repentance for salvation to the great city of Nineveh. This was not the message that Jonah wanted to deliver! Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a ferocious enemy of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Jonah did not want to extend grace to the enemy. When Jonah heard what God was calling him to do he ran in the opposite direction!

Jonah's disobedience resulted in him being swallowed by a big fish. He was inside the great fish for three days and three nights. The whales mouth is referred to by Jonah in some translations as the depth of Sheol which means "depth of hell." He knew that only God could deliver him from this place. Held captive inside the fish, Jonah cried out to God! God heard his cries and commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land (2:10).

God told Jonah, a second time, to go to Nineveh to proclaim a message of destruction warning them to repent. This time, Jonah obeyed. When the king of Nineveh heard the message, he ordered the people to pray to God earnestly and repent from their evil ways. The people of Nineveh cried out to God asking Him to have compassion on them. The Lord heard their cry, relented of His anger and extended His grace.

The book of Jonah vividly shows that God's saving grace is for all who will turn from their wickedness. God desires that none would perish but that all would come to Him for life!

QUESTIONS

Jonah ran hard in the other direction when God asked him to go to Nineveh. How have you responded when God has asked you to do something difficult? What happens when we run from God?

In Jonah, we see an example of God using one person's disobedience for ultimate good. Summarize in your own words what happened, noting the good thing that resulted.

Jonah records Jonah's prayer from inside the fish. What stands out to you? Notice the language, the tone, and focus. What do you learn from Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 that you will use in your prayers to God?

God heard Jonah's cries and answered. How has God responded to your cries for help? It might be something significant or something small, a "yes," a "no" or a "not yet."

Having disobeyed, Jonah repented and cried out to God. God, in His mercy, gave Jonah a second chance. Read Jonah 3. What was the result of Jonah's being restored to ministry and mission? When has God given you a second chance? What lesson do you learn from Jonah about moving forward with God and leaving mistakes in the past?

In chapter 3, the king of Nineveh responded to the message from God. What was the result of the king believing God?

Read Jonah 4:1-4. Why was Jonah angry? Reflect on Jonah's prayer in chapter 2. Compare God's heart toward the lost with Jonah's heart. What stands out to you? What will you apply in your life from this reflection?

What is the most important thing you have learned in Jonah? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- GOD DOES NOT WANT TO DESTROY SINNERS.
- GOD DESIRES THAT ALL WILL TURN TO HIM AND BE SAVED.
- YOU CAN'T RUN FROM GOD!
- GOD GIVES SECOND CHANCES.
- NO ONE IS BEYOND GOD'S MERCY.

HABAKKUK

WHY GOD, WHY?

THE SOVEREIGN LORD IS MY STRENGTH. HE MAKES MY FEET LIKE THE FEET OF THE DEER, HE ENABLES ME TO GO IN THE HEIGHTS.

HABAKKUK 3:19

As we grow in our understanding of God, we see more clearly how messed up our world really is! God's goodness is evident all around us through the stories of grace in our own lives and others, in the majesty of the natural world around us and in the signs and wonders throughout human history. We see and know that God is good. And while there is so much good to be thankful for, there is still much that is wrong, corrupt, distorted, and broken. Why does our all-powerful God allow evil to persist in our world?

Habakkuk asked the same question. A prophet whose name means "embrace," Habakkuk lived in the southern kingdom of Judah during a time when corruption and unrighteousness were pervasive. The country's leaders, who were supposed to be following God's law, had forsaken it and wickedness prevailed. So, Habakkuk went to God and cried out! The book of Habakkuk is unique among the prophets because it is not a message from God to His people, but rather a dialogue between Habakkuk and the Lord. Habakkuk asks the questions we ask today and God's answers to him help us see things from God's perspective.

Habakkuk asks God two questions and God answers. Why does evil flourish in the world? And, why does a good God use a wicked nation as a means of judgment? From the dialogue, we glean a better understanding of God. God's response to Habakkuk's concerns reveals His holy character. He assures Habakkuk that there will be punishment for the violence and evil of Judah, and He affirms that there will eventually be an end to all evil. Habakkuk's interaction with God shows us that while we may have deep questions and even doubts, God's faithfulness endures - His plan will always be greater than what we see in front of us or what we think we understand. We can and must trust our God.

The book of Habakkuk ends with a psalm - the prophet's reflection on all that God has taught him and God's faithfulness throughout the history of His people. Even though Habakkuk now knows that invasion and destruction by the Babylonians is coming, he also has confidence in the Lord's restoration and salvation of Israel. He knows that in the end, God wins. It is with this attitude in his heart that Habakkuk writes, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (3:18).

QUESTIONS

Habakkuk asks the Lord why He tolerates injustice. In your own words, describe Habakkuk's assessment of the law (Habakkuk 1:4).

What does God say He is going to do in response to the "injustice" and "wrong" of Judah that Habakkuk is asking about (1:6)?

In chapter 2, God's response includes five "woes" - list each and summarize in your own words.

Reflect on Habakkuk's attitude in 2:1. What is your attitude toward God when you do not understand His ways? Give time to this question. What can you learn from Habakkuk's posture of waiting and how might that help you?

Habakkuk brings his doubts and questions before God. Read how God responds in verses 1:5 and 2:3. What is the primary message of God's response?

Where are you waiting for God to intervene in your personal life, family or culture? How does 2:3 help you?

Often, when we face seasons of difficulty or trial, God's response is "Wait, be patient. I will work out my plans in my perfect timing." What attributes of God are present in Habakkuk that apply to our seasons of waiting?

In Romans 1:17, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4. What does it mean to live by faith? (See also Galatians 2:20, 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). Wrestle with what this means and how it looks lived out.

What is one area of your life where you have doubt or are waiting? How can you live by greater faith in that area over the next week?

What is the most important thing that you have learned in Habakkuk? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- GOD'S PLANS ARE BETTER THAN OURS.
- GOD MAY NOT ANSWER EVERY QUESTION BUT HE GIVES PEACE TO THOSE WHO TRUST HIM.
- HONEST QUESTIONS ARE NOT INCOMPATIBLE WITH FAITH.
- GOD'S TIMING IS ALWAYS PERFECT.
- THE RIGHTEOUS LIVE BY FAITH.

HAGGAI

PUTTING GOD FIRST

Then the Lord sent this message through the prophet Haggai: “Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: Look at what’s happening to you! You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!”

HAGGAI 1:3-6

Haggai (pronounced ha-gi) is the first of three post-exilic prophets meaning he delivered God’s messages to the people returning from exile in Babylon. He is often paired with Zechariah as they spoke similar messages calling God’s people to finish the building of the temple.

When the nation of Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar in 586BC, Jerusalem was destroyed and most of its inhabitants resettled in Babylon. The kings after Nebuchadnezzar were eventually defeated after living for 70 years in captivity as Jeremiah had prophesied. Cyrus who ruled Media and Persia defeated Babylon and allowed a Jew named Zerubbabel to lead a group of exiles to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1).

The exiles began rebuilding God’s temple when they first arrived. However, some enemies living in the land tried to stop their progress (Ezra 4:1-5). So the people shifted their focus to working on their own houses. For 16 long years they neglected God’s temple and spent their energy on their individual pursuits. They focused on their own comfort, needs, and homes instead of making the Lord’s house a priority.

God raised up prophets like Haggai and Zechariah to point out how the people were spinning their wheels in personal pursuits and neglecting God. Haggai’s message resonates in our own lives as we too find that when we focus on satisfying ourselves, we end up only full of regret. However, when we position our priorities in the proper order – making God first – we experience abundant blessings.

Some of Haggai’s message can seem to have prosperity gospel overtones like this: If you don’t obey God you won’t have material blessings; If you do obey God, you will have material riches.

We must remember that the tone of his prophecy was written to a particular audience (Jewish exiles) at a specific time in history. The whole of Scripture does not support the idea that obedience to God always produces financial gain. Obedience brings blessings, but often those blessings are spiritual and internal rather than material and external.

Haggai is set apart from most of the other biblical prophets in that he didn't indict God's people for their idolatry or oppression of the poor. His sole intent was to motivate them to put God first in their lives by finishing the temple. He is one of the few prophets whose message was actually heeded. The people responded to his words when he called them to action.

He further encouraged the people a few months after they started the overwhelming project with this message:

BE STRONG. GET TO WORK. DON'T BE AFRAID. (HAGGAI 2:4-5)

Once they committed themselves with a "yes" to putting God first, the Lord provided the energy and enthusiasm needed (1:14; 2:5). We too will find that if we put God first in our lives, our lives will be full.

QUESTIONS

How did Haggai describe the lack of satisfaction in the lives of the people even though they lived in luxurious houses (1:3-6)?

How are you currently struggling with contentment or feeling satisfied in your life? Is there any area you can identify where you need to be proactive about putting God first? (Think time, talent, treasures)

Read Haggai 1:12-13. How did the people respond to Haggai's message (12)? What promise did the Lord speak through Haggai afterwards (13)?

A few months after they started rebuilding, God sent another message through Haggai in chapter 2. What were God's key points through Haggai in 2:4-5?

How do those truths resonate in your own life today? Which one of them do you most need to take to heart as you seek to obey God in your current circumstances?

Perhaps the people rebuilding the temple were discouraged when they looked back and remembered how glorious the temple was in the past. After all, it had taken 46 years for Solomon to build initially and the amount of silver and gold used was staggering. What does the Lord say about the temple in Haggai 2:8-9?

Read John 2:18-22. What connections can you draw in how the greater glory of the temple might have been fulfilled ultimately?

Read Haggai 2:10-14. What seems to be more contagious according to these verses...sin or righteousness?

How have you noticed sin to be more contagious than right living in your own life?

What did the Lord call the people to do in Haggai 2:18? 2 Peter 1:4 says, "And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires." While we were not living in Haggai's day, we also have received some precious promises from the Lord according to Scripture. How is the Lord calling you to think carefully about His promises to you?

What kind of promises did the Lord make to His people once they set their hearts to return to Him according to Haggai 2:19?

How is God's power and sovereignty highlighted in Haggai 2:20-22?

What is the most important thing that you have learned in Haggai? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- GOD WON'T TAKE SECOND PLACE IN OUR LIVES.
- OUR LIVES BECOME FULL WHEN WE PUT GOD IN HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE AS FIRST IN OUR LIVES.
- ENEMIES OFTEN ARISE TO DISCOURAGE US FROM DOING THE WORK THE LORD HAS CALLED US TO DO.
- WHEN WE FOCUS ON SATISFYING OURSELVES, WE END UP ONLY FULL OF REGRET.
- GOD DOESN'T ASK US TO FOCUS ON WHAT WE CAN DO - HE IS ASKING US TO CONSIDER WHAT HE CAN DO.

HOSEA

REDEEMING LOVE

FORGIVE ALL OUR SINS AND RECEIVE US GRACIOUSLY,
THAT WE MAY OFFER THE FRUIT OF OUR LIPS.

HOSEA 14:2

Hosea means “salvation.” He was a prophet to the northern kingdom (Israel) during the 8th century serving during the reign of King Jeroboam II. His ministry spanned the reigns of several kings of the southern kingdom (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah). He was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah, Micah, Amos and Jonah. Hosea was a faithful follower of Yahweh, obediently doing what God asked, even at great personal cost.

Understanding the historical and cultural context in which Hosea prophesied helps us better understand his story and the work to which God called him. Wicked kings of Israel had levied heavy taxes on the people and oppressed the poor. The result was a society deeply divided between the “haves” and the “have nots,” the lavishly rich and the desperately poor. During the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel’s economy was rebounding but the nation was still disobedient to God. Political unrest and social chaos were brewing as Israel continued on her adulterous path of unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Into the madness, Hosea brought a message of judgment and of hope.

Hosea’s message connected closely with his personal life. Married to a woman who would be unfaithful, his life depicted the unfaithfulness of the nation Israel to their faithful, loving God. Although Gomer, Hosea’s adulterous wife, betrayed his trust, he continued to love her. Continuing to pursue Gomer, Hosea demonstrated the patient and restorative love of God for His chosen people.

Hosea is the most poetic of the Minor Prophets. His use of expressive imagery and dramatic illustrations develops a gripping story of reconciliation. Structured around five cycles of judgment and restoration, the prophet reminds the people that they will be restored when Israel returns to the Lord (1:10-2:1, 2:14-23, 3:1-5, 11:8-11, 14:1-7).

Hosea makes clear that God will judge sin but will restore His people to Himself. God’s unselfish love for a self-centered people is clearly seen. Just as Gomer turned away from Hosea, the people of Israel continually turned away from God to follow other gods (4:12-13, 8:5-6). Hosea reveals the redeeming love of God and illustrates what forgiveness and restoration looks like in a close relationship. No one is beyond God’s offer of forgiveness. No one should be beyond ours.

QUESTIONS

What did the Lord ask Hosea to do and what reason did God give for the command (1:2)?

The Old Testament frequently used the metaphor of an adulterous wife to describe Israel. As God's chosen people, what does it mean to go after other lovers instead of God (Hosea 2:5)? What did the people seek from other lovers rather than from God?

When has dissatisfaction or lack of contentment caused you to look to other people or things rather than God? How does a habit of thanksgiving and prayer provide protection against wandering from God?

Hosea 2:1-13 describes God's punishment of Israel. What happens next (2:14-23)? From these verses, what is most meaningful to you as you consider God's desire to restore His people to Himself?

Read Hosea 3. The passage ends with a reference to the “last days” which often points to the time in the future when God will right all wrongs. What does this chapter tell you about God’s desire or ultimate plan for His people?

Chapters 4-14 deals with Israel’s sin and coming judgment. Prophets and priests were leading the people along a path of destruction, into more sin and wickedness. Why did this happen (4:5-9)?

God calls the Israelites stubborn. They would not follow or obey Him. What can we learn from the Israelite’s example?

Hosea 5:4-7 describes a people far from God. What do you learn from this passage to help you stay focused on God?

Hosea 6:1-3 describes a false repentance. The people were saying the right things but did not have right hearts. What does God desire of His people (6:6)?

God desires that we be whole-heartedly devoted to Him and yet we are all prone to wander from Him. How have you seen this pattern in your life?

Israel called out to God to save them but they did not change their behavior. What does it mean to repent (8:2-3)?

Hosea chapters 6 through 10 describe Israel's punishment. Reading these sad chapters, what do you learn about God? About humanity's tendency to drift from God?

Hosea 11:1-4 is a beautiful picture of the Father's love for His child, Israel. What words or phrases are most meaningful to you? How does this passage help you understand God's love for you?

Hosea 14 is about repentance and restoration. What does Israel need to do (14:2)? What will happen if they repent (Hosea 14:4-8)?

What is the most important thing that you have learned in Hosea? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- OUR SIN REQUIRES JUDGMENT.
- PRACTICING JUSTICE AND MERCY SHOWS FAITHFULNESS TO GOD.
- GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE AND GRACE OVERCOMES THE PENALTY FOR OUR SINS.
- GOD'S SAVING ACTS IN THE PAST PROVIDE HOPE FOR HIS SAVING ACTS IN THE FUTURE.
- OBEDIENCE IS OFTEN COSTLY BUT NOT MORE COSTLY THAN DISOBEDIENCE.

MICAH

ACT JUSTLY, LOVE MERCY

HE HAS SHOWN YOU, O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD; AND WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE, AND TO LOVE KINDNESS, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD.

MICAH 6:8

In the small town of Moresheth, near the border of Philistia and Judah, the prophet Micah received words from God to declare to the people regarding their rebellion and violation of their covenant with Him. Speaking on God's behalf, Micah gave warnings of the coming judgment that was to befall both kingdoms as a consequence of their sin. Micah's ministry was primarily to Judah, the southern Kingdom. He spoke out against the rampant injustice and exploitation of the poor. Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He ministered alongside the prophet Isaiah and had a large influence during a critical time in Judah's history.

The book of Micah reads like a courtroom case: God as the judge and His people on trial for their sins against Him. Living in the agricultural part of the country, Micah had a deep concern for the poor and less fortunate of society. This led him to specifically address the leaders and the prophets for the ways they were corrupting the kingdoms and taking advantage of the poor. Enticed by money and power, both kingdoms unjustly favored the wealthy, ruled through bribery, and deprived the poor of their land, security, and hope. These actions violated the Law of Moses, which was given to Israel in the desert while they awaited entrance to the Promised Land.

Micah was confronting a culture that had turned to love of material wealth rather than love for God and His ways. The resulting greed led to an incredible spiritual and moral decline. As punishment for their rebellion, Micah warned Judah of the impending judgment and wrath of God upon them. This judgment would happen when the nations of Assyria and Babylon would conquer and destroy both kingdoms, sending them into exile. This harsh warning signified the weight of their sin and how justice had to be served.

Micah's message to the people of that day applies to us as well. We must guard against the pull of our culture that entices us toward greed and oppression of others.

Though judgment was imminent, Micah's message to God's people did not end there. Written as a series of oracles, or sermons, Micah concluded each warning of judgment with the beautiful prediction of hope and restoration for Israel. The

three oracles are marked by “Hear” or “Listen.” Make note of these sections as you read the passage. Though God is a mighty Judge, He is also a good and loving Shepherd who promises a future of complete healing and restoration for His children.

Providing one of the most significant prophecies of Christ’s birth (5:2), Micah paints a beautiful picture of what the future holds under the reign of Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace (5:5) and the restoration of God’s people in the Millennial Kingdom (4:1-5:15). As followers of Christ, we have hope in what is to come. Though there is judgment for our sin, there is hope for restoration because of what Christ has done and what God has promised.

QUESTIONS

What sins did Micah speak against in 2:1-2? Notice the progression from thoughts to actions. What thoughts are you entertaining today that may lead to sinful action tomorrow?

Justice and mercy are each attributes of God, a part of His holy character. While God’s punishment often seems harsh, what does Micah 2:12-13 say about the remnant of Israel those who are faithful to God?

Read Micah 3. Micah exposes the sins of the leaders, priests and prophets. For each group, list the verses where they are identified and the sins that are condemned.

Micah 5:2 prophesied the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. What do you learn about Jesus in these verses? How does 5:5 describe Jesus? To what degree have you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ? Where do you hold back? Why?

Read Micah 6:3-5 and review God's statement to Israel. What is He asking in verse 3? Does their response in verses 6-7 seem like an appropriate answer? Why or Why not?

Read Matthew 23:23 and compare Jesus' condemnation of the religious leaders' hypocrisy with Micah's calling out of the people of Judah. In what ways are Jesus' and Micah's messages similar? How are they different?

What does it mean for us today to do justice? To love mercy? To walk humbly with God (6:8)? How would your relationships, home, and community be different if you did these things?

List the characteristics of God found in Micah 7:18-20.

How have you recently experienced the forgiveness of God? Where do you need to experience His mercy and compassion?

What is the most important thing you have learned in Micah? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- OUR SIN REQUIRES JUDGMENT.
- PRACTICING JUSTICE AND MERCY SHOWS FAITHFULNESS TO GOD.
- GOD MUST BE THE FOCUS OF OUR WORSHIP.
- GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE AND GRACE OVERCOMES THE PENALTY FOR OUR SINS.
- GOD'S SAVING ACTS IN THE PAST PROVIDE HOPE FOR HIS SAVING ACTS IN THE FUTURE.

AMOS

HOPE IN HEEDING GOD'S WARNINGS

"THE TIME IS SURELY COMING," SAYS THE SOVEREIGN LORD,
"WHEN I WILL SEND A FAMINE ON THE LAND—NOT A FAMINE OF
BREAD OR WATER BUT OF HEARING THE WORDS OF THE LORD."

AMOS 8:11

The content of the book of Amos doesn't resemble today's feel-good messages telling us we are all okay. Instead this shepherd and fruit-picker (7:14) who was likely more comfortable in fields than on platforms, preached coming judgment for Israel and her surrounding neighbors.

In the midst of what seems like a book of doom and gloom, we find a clear message that there is hope in heeding God's warnings. God is love, and His love includes good discipline. He sent Amos out of the physical fields and into the spiritual harvest during a time of prosperity in the land of Israel. The hearers of his message enjoyed abundance that led to arrogance and apathy.

The Lord was clear about their sins. He pointed out their injustice, hypocrisy, neglect of the poor, pride, and idol worship. He forewarned them about the consequences of their disregard for His boundaries. He reminded them that discipline can lead to hope if they would return to Him. He called out over and over for them to come back to Him (4:6,8-10; 5:4,6).

His message is a reminder to us that He is God and we are not (Amos 4:13; 5:8). He gets to make the rules, and our job is to obey (Amos 5:14-15; 5:23-24). We can obey not out of fear of punishment but trusting that He is truly good and wants what is best for us. His boundaries lead to abundant life. Nathaniel William Taylor said, "Submission to God's divine will is the softest pillow on which to rest."

God longs for us to rest in Him, but sends warnings when we get off course. Through the prophet Amos, God warned of discipline and judgment 85 times. The Lord gave Amos several visions. One was of a plumb line. This was a tool with a cord and a weight at one end. Gravity pulled the weight to determine if a building was straight. In Amos's vision, the Lord revealed that he had measured, and the people were not embracing the straight standard of living that He had given them (Amos 7:8).

Amos said the worst kind of famine possible was coming for his people. It wasn't a lack of food, but a famine for hearing God's word (Amos 8:11,13). God was giving a warning to His people so that they might return to Him. Because they disregarded God's boundaries, judgment was coming. Today, we can rest in hope that we have never out-sinned God's grace. Because of Jesus, there is always an opportunity to turn from our sin and return to God so that we find hope in Him.

QUESTIONS

Amos was faithful with God's message. What are some ways the Lord is calling you to be faithful with His message?

What were some of the offenses God found against the people of Judah and Israel according to Amos 2:4-8? What was the punishment? What does this reveal about God's concern for the poor?

Read Amos 3:1-3. How is the Lord calling you to walk in His direction today? Consider distractions, decisions, etc.

What key phrase do you find repeated in Amos 4:6-11? How is the Lord calling you to return to Him in your life and circumstances?

What do you learn about God's character from Amos 6:13-14, 7:8-9 and 9:5-6?

What does God desire more than sacrifices or songs according to Amos 5:22-24?

What words of hope do you find in the final message of the book (9:11-15)?

What biblical warnings found in Amos's pages bring conviction and hope as you consider your spiritual life currently?

What is the most important thing that you have learned in Amos? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- HOPE IS FOUND IN HEEDING GOD'S WARNINGS.
- GOD'S BOUNDARIES LEAD US TO ABUNDANT LIVING.
- GOD GETS TO MAKE THE RULES FOR LIVING BECAUSE HE IS GOD AND WE ARE NOT.
- WHEN WE COME BACK TO GOD, WE FIND LIFE.
- GOD CARES ABOUT HOW WE TREAT THE OPPRESSED IN OUR LAND.

ZECHARIAH

NOT BY MIGHT BUT BY MY SPIRIT

“NOT BY MIGHT NOR BY POWER, BUT BY MY SPIRIT,”
SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY.

ZECHARIAH 4:6

The name Zechariah means “Yahweh Remembers.” The grandson of a priest, Zechariah is one of three post-exilic prophets. He prophesied to the people of Judah when they returned to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile in Babylon. The young Zechariah, along with his grandfather, returned to Jerusalem in the first group of Israelites making the return after King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree granting them permission. Like his grandfather, Zechariah was a priest. As priest and prophet, he was very familiar with the temple and temple worship.

Zechariah’s contemporaries were Haggai and Malachi. Zechariah’s message was more encouraging than Haggai who pointed out the Jew’s self-centeredness and sins. Rather, Zechariah encouraged the struggling Hebrews to persevere in rebuilding the temple.

The book of Zechariah is divided into two sections. Chapters 1-8 occur during the same time as Haggai’s ministry. It included warnings to stop sinning, to earnestly pursue purity before God. The first section also spoke of judgment on Israel’s enemies and blessings on the people of God. The messages in chapters 9-14 are undated but came later in Zechariah’s life. Providing encouragement and hope, the chapters describe the first (9:9) and second (9:10-10:12) comings of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In fact, it contains the most references to the coming Messiah in all the minor prophets. Using vivid imagery and stark details, Zechariah speaks of the One whom God would send to rescue His people and set up an earthly kingdom.

Zechariah is a book of hope for the discouraged. He reminds us that God’s promises will be fulfilled because He controls the future. As you read the words of this Minor Prophet, watch for promises pointing to the first coming of Messiah. Celebrate that Jesus came to rescue and redeem! Take comfort that He will return a second time to judge evil and reign as King over all the world!

QUESTIONS

Chapters 1-6 contain 8 visions describing judgment for enemies of Israel, God's blessing of Jerusalem, and a call for God's people to pursue purity. Read each of the visions and briefly summarize what each tells you about God.

Vision 1 (1:7-17):

Vision 2 (1:18-21):

Vision 3 (2:1-13):

Vision 4 (3:1-10):

Vision 5 (4:1-14):

Vision 6 (5:1-4):

Vision 7 (5:5-11):

Vision 8 (6:1-8):

Summarize the message of chapter 7. How would you describe true spirituality from God’s perspective (7:9-10)?

Read chapter 8. Summarize the promised blessing given in verses 1-8, 9-17 and 18-23.

Chapter 9 begins the second division of the book of Zechariah. These oracles, or messages from God, point to the Messiah and His second coming. How is the coming ruler (Messiah) described in verses 9:9-10? What about this description is most impressive to you?

List the promises for God’s people in 10:6-12. Circle your favorite promise.

The final chapters of Zechariah focus on the coming Messiah and His future reign. What are you most looking forward to in eternity?

Following promises to His people in 12:1-9, God makes a statement about the people of Jerusalem in 12:10-14. What is significant about verses 12:10-14?

Zechariah 14 speaks of the ultimate victory of the Messiah over all the earth! Christ's return could happen at any minute. If you knew with certainty that He was returning tomorrow, how would that change the way you live today?

What encouragement do you receive from the book of Zechariah? What action are you compelled to take?



KEY CONCEPTS

- GOD ALONE IS OUR HOPE AND SECURITY.
- GOD'S LOVE LANGUAGE IS OBEDIENCE - WHEN WE DO THINGS HIS WAY, HE DRAWS NEAR TO US.
- LEARN FROM PAST MISTAKES- DO NOT REPEAT THE SINS OF OUR FATHERS.
- GOD IS A PROMISE KEEPER.
- GOD REFINES THOSE HE LOVES.

ZEPHANIAH

MIGHTY TO SAVE

THE LORD YOUR GOD IS WITH YOU AND IS MIGHTY TO SAVE.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17

Zephaniah, like many of the prophets, spoke of judgment for sin on all people and a promise of restoration for God's chosen people. Zephaniah warned the people of Judah that the "day of the Lord" could come at any time. Other prophets also warned of the "day of the Lord" but no other book in the Old Testament spoke of that day more often than Zephaniah. Like many prophecies, the prediction of the "day of the Lord" had both near and future implications. Zephaniah's words served to warn the people of his day of Judah's eventual fall into Babylonian captivity. And, it spoke to the future judgment of sin and restoration of all creation.

Zephaniah prophesied to Judah, the southern kingdom, during the reign of King Josiah. Zephaniah, whose name means "Yahweh has protected," was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum, and Habakuk.

King Josiah was a good, godly king following the example of his forefather, King David. King Josiah carried out reform during his reign. When he discovered the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:8-10) he realized how corrupt the people had become and began implementing reforms and changes that would outlaw idol worship and acts of rebellion against Yahweh. He cleared the land of idolatry, the worship of false gods (2 Chronicles 34:3-7), and led the people in renewing their covenant with God.

Zephaniah's prophesy called them to repent of their wickedness and return to God.

The book of Zephaniah contains some of the most intense verbal images of both destruction and redemption contained in the Old Testament. Written as poetic prose, it warned the people of God's judgement and his promise of complete destruction for this idolatrous nation.

Along with the message of destruction, Zephaniah also provides a message of hope. He speaks of a remnant, a group of people committed to loving and following God in spite of the corruption surrounding them. God promises to save, redeem and restore His own - those whose affections are for Him.

QUESTIONS

Zeph. 1:4-13 describes judgment against Judah. What sin(s) were they guilty of?

Religious syncretism is a blending of multiple belief systems into a religious practice (1:4-6) that is continually evolving in response to cultural shifts. Where are you tempted to compromise God's truth with prevailing cultural opinions? Where do you see this happening in others around you?

Judah was enjoying wealth and had become complacent (1:11-13). Because they lived in comfort, they became indifferent to God. How does your comfort and security (financial, relational, emotional) affect your dependence on God in prayer?

It is easy to become wrapped up in work, activities or relationships that challenge our affections for God. Think of someone or something that has taken the priority that God should have in your life. How will you shift your dependence to God?

Repent means to turn back to God and His ways. Zephaniah 2:1-3 is a call to Judah to repent. What three things are they told to do?

Chapter 2 speaks of judgment to come but there are evidences of God's mercy, grace and compassion. Re-read chapter 2 and write out examples of God's love.

In verses 3:3-4, Zephaniah addresses officials, prophets and priests. How are each of these groups described? How does their behavior differ from godly leadership?

Compare 3:11 and 3:12. How does God deal with pride versus the meek and humble? Where is God calling you to resist pride? Where do you need to prayerfully cultivate a meek and humble attitude?

What is the most important thing that you have learned in Zephaniah? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- GOD JUDGES SIN.
- GOD'S MERCIES ARE NEW EACH DAY.
- GOD DELIGHTS IN THE RIGHTEOUS.
- GOD'S WORD IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE-GIVING TRUTH.
- GOD IS A JEALOUS GOD - HE WILL NOT SHARE OUR AFFECTIONS.

MALACHI

A WAKE-UP CALL

BUT FOR YOU WHO REVERE MY NAME, THE SUN OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL RISE WITH HEALING IN ITS WINGS.

MALACHI 4:2

The book of Malachi is the final book of the Old Testament. Malachi is a prophet of God whose name means “my messenger.” He wrote to the people of Judah, the southern kingdom, about the corruption of the temple sacrifices. Because of similarities with the sins denounced by both Nehemiah and Malachi, it is believed that these two prophets were contemporaries.

During Malachi’s ministry, the Persians controlled Judah but allowed the Jews the freedom to continue their religious practices. One hundred years earlier, Israel had been freed from Babylonian captivity and allowed to return to their homeland. In the course of time, their temple had been rebuilt under the watchful eyes of Ezra, the priest and Zerubbabel, the Governor. The people had been hopeful for their future back in their homeland. They had the promises of God to prosper and bless them and the freedom to worship Him once again. Everything should have been good and right in the land of Judah.

But the promises of God Almighty and the freedom from captivity weren’t enough to keep the people of Judah content and obedient to their covenant with God. The lack of social status, autonomy (still under Persian rule) and a poor economy due to crop failures caused the people to become disheartened and apathetic.

The four chapters of Malachi are a disputation between God and His people. Throughout the chapters, God makes proclamations and the people, in dispute, answer with a question. In verse 2 of the opening chapter, God says “I have loved you” and the people responded, “How have you loved us?”

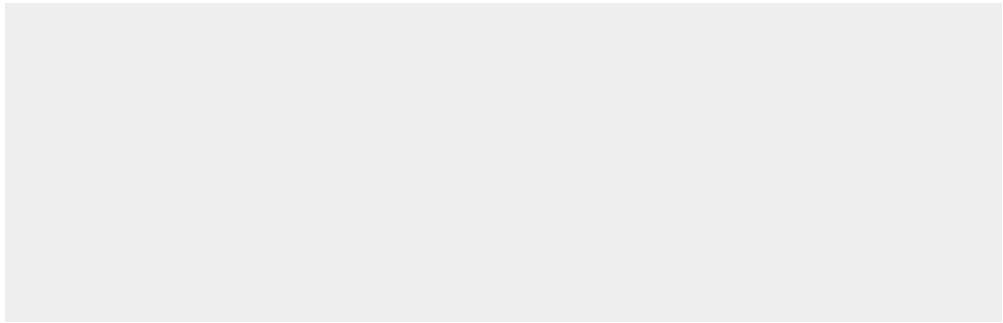
The Lord Almighty reminds His people that He chose them. Reminding them of the blessing of Jacob over Esau, God reiterates that even though Jacob was the younger son, His favor rested with him. Not because of anything the brothers did or did not do, but because of His sovereign right, He had chosen them.

God’s opening message to the people who were turning their backs on Him was a declaration of love. These are the same people who were breaking every law He established to help them flourish and prosper. But because God is constant and never changes, and because of His great love for His people, He continued to go after them until they turned back to Him. But, this loving God is also a jealous

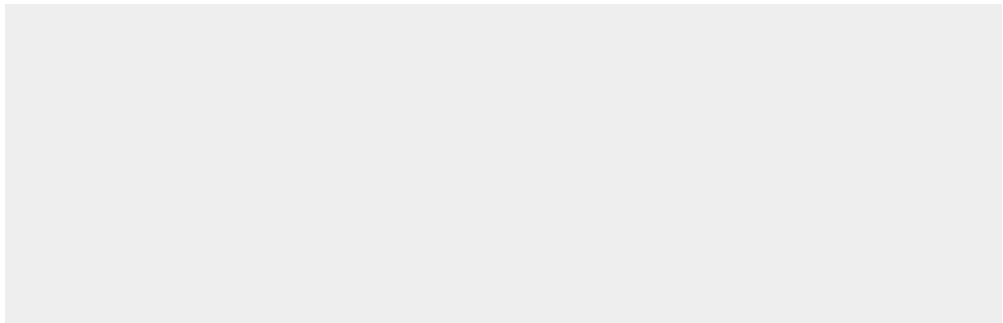
one, He will not stand by and have His name be diminished. In 1:11, Malachi wrote, “My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun.” Through Malachi, God rebuked the people for their unfaithfulness. The opening words of chapter 4 remind the people who was in charge and what would become of the arrogant and evildoers.

QUESTIONS

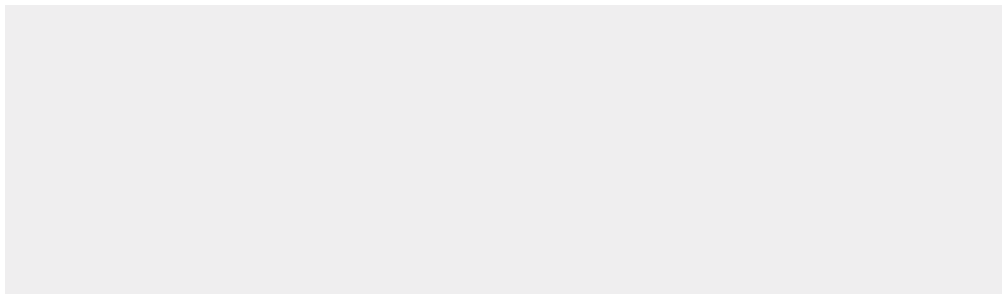
Read Malachi 1:2,3. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated.” Why do you think God used this example to explain His love for the people of Judah? See Romans 9:10-13 for insight.



In our culture, what does “God’s love” mean? Why is it important to understand the biblical definition of God’s love?



What do verses 1:10, 11 reveal about God’s heart, character and purpose?



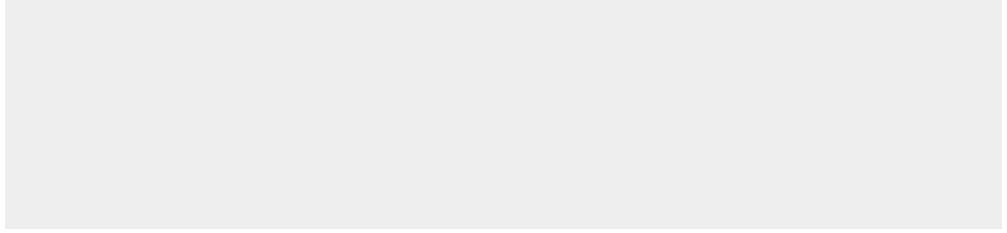
The name “The Lord Almighty” is written 23 times in the 4 short chapters of Malachi. What point is God trying to make?

What does it mean in 2:8 that the priests had “turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble?” Where do you see examples of this today?

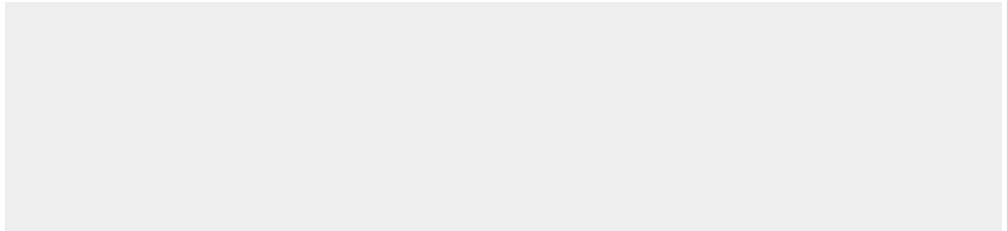
In Malachi 2:10, God speaks of His covenant with Israel and the responsibility within the relationship. How has Judah committed adultery against God (2:11)?

Why does the Lord refine His people in Malachi 3:2-3? Why is the Lord’s discipline or “refiner’s fire and launderer’s soap” a good thing? When have you resisted the Lord’s discipline? How will you respond in the future?

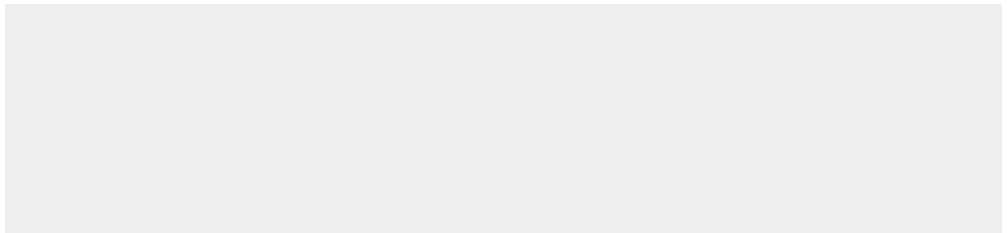
How are the people robbing God (3:8)? What is the result of withholding from God and what is the result of giving to God (3:10-12)?



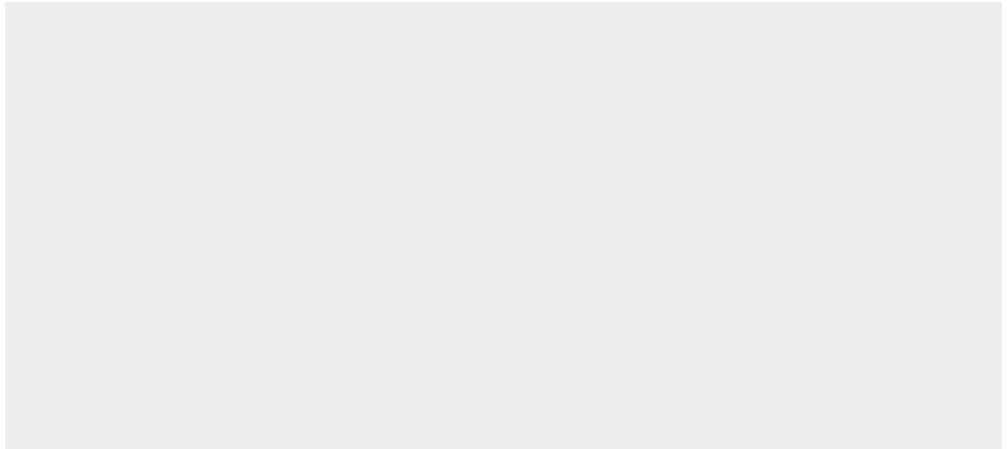
Read Malachi 3:16-18. How do those who fear the Lord respond and what is God's response to them?



In Malachi 4, the prophet announces the great Day of the Lord. Two groups of people will face the Day of the Lord. How will their experience differ?



As one who follows Christ, how does the Day of the Lord encourage you?



What is the most important thing that you have learned in Malachi? How will this change how you live?

KEY CONCEPTS

- GOD'S LOVE IS UNCHANGING.
- GOD IS SOVEREIGN IN ALL HE DOES.
- GOD WILL PUNISH EVIL.
- GOD IS OUR SOURCE OF HOPE.
- GOD DESIRES ALL PEOPLE TO TURN TO HIM.

NOTES