

BIBLE STUDY | WINTER/SPRING 2025

The Character of God

REVEALED IN THE MINOR PROPHETS



CHRIST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

How to Use This Book	4
<hr/>	
Introduction	5
<hr/>	
Timeline of the Prophets	6
<hr/>	
Week 1 Hosea: God's Unfailing Love Naomi and the Joy after Sorrow	7
<hr/>	
Week 2 Joel: God's Plan for Restoration	11
<hr/>	
Week 3 Amos: God's Heart for Justice and Mercy	15
<hr/>	
Week 4 Obadiah: God's Promised Kingdom	19
<hr/>	
Week 5 Jonah: God's Immeasurable Compassion	23
<hr/>	
Week 6 Micah: God's Merciful Forgiveness	27
<hr/>	
Week 7 Nahum: God's Certain Judgment	31
<hr/>	
Week 8 Habakkuk: God's Perfect Justice	35
<hr/>	
Week 9 Zephaniah: God the Author of Redemption	39
<hr/>	
Week 10 Haggai: God's Presence with His People	45
<hr/>	
Week 11 Zechariah: God's Future Plans	51
<hr/>	
Week 12 Malachi: God's Unmatched Glory	57
<hr/>	
Resources Used in This Study	62

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We have three recommended ways for engaging with *The Character of God Revealed in the Minor Prophets* – **dig in**, **go deeper**, and **deeper still**.

DIG IN

- If you are in a study group, join your group weekly to enjoy conversation, discuss the lesson, and talk through the Foundation Questions. If you are doing the study individually, work through the Foundation Questions at your own pace.
- Listen to or watch the teaching each week. The teaching is available on SoundCloud and YouTube. You can subscribe on those platforms or visit christpres.org/group-resources, where you can find all the Bible study resources. You'll also receive a weekly email with a link to the teaching.

GO DEEPER

- Read the weekly Scripture and go through the Observe and Reflect questions to deepen your dive into God's Word.
- Feel free to complete questions throughout the week or all in one sitting. If you are in a group, your group may discuss some of these questions each week.
- Read the Application Summary.

DEEPER STILL

- We recommend the following resource as a companion to your study: *The Minor Prophets (2 Volume Set)* by James Montgomery Boice

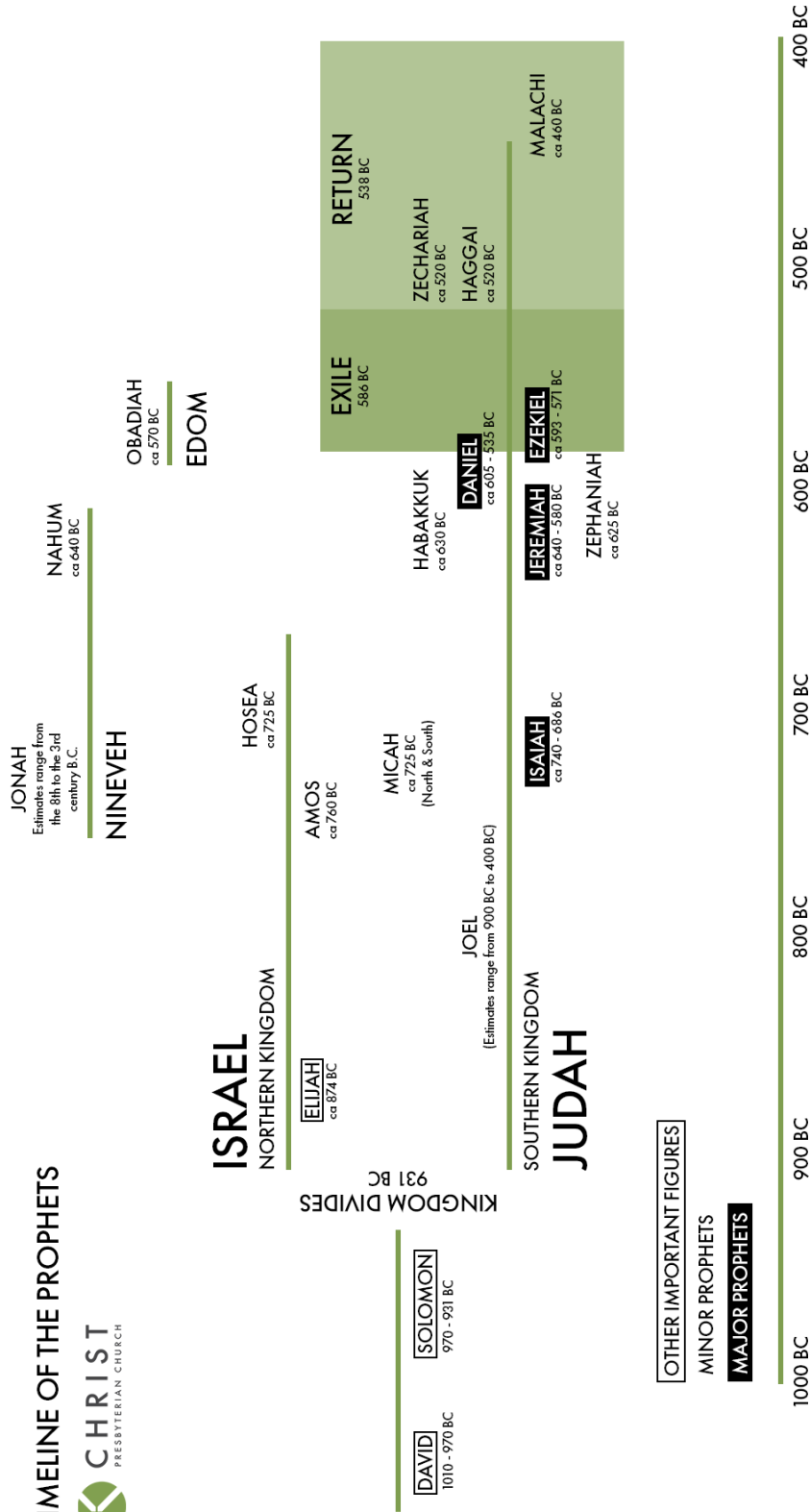
INTRODUCTION

When trying to understand the lay of the land when it comes to the Bible's prophets, it's vital first to understand the role of the prophet. The word most frequently used to describe the prophet in the Bible is "spokesman." So, a prophet is a spokesman with the distinct call to be the ambassador of God. The prophet spoke on behalf of God, and their words were to be received as God's words, nothing less. Like all of Scripture, the books of the Minor Prophets reveal facets of God's character: his mercy, love, compassion, judgment, and anger. Throughout the Minor Prophets, we experience the tension of God's required judgment and his covenantal promises of mercy.

It's essential to understand that the Bible's prophets spoke oracles of judgment and salvation. The prophet spoke words of judgment to God's people for not adhering to the Mosaic covenant—their promise to obey God and all his commandments, and in so doing, they would receive the blessing of God. On the other hand, the prophets spoke oracles of salvation because of God's covenant to Abraham that he would make a great nation (ultimately the Church) from his family and bless all the families of the earth through him.

Finally, in considering the message of the Bible's prophets, it's essential to understand how their message fits into the greater narrative of the Bible. The greater narrative of the Bible is the story of Jesus, and in the Old Testament, the prophets whispered the story of Jesus. God called Israel his "firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22). So when Israel divided in 931 B.C., it was as if God's firstborn son had died. His people were defeated and even carried away from their land—exiled out of the city as if they were crucified. Eventually, the Lord's people were able to return to their land and rebuild it as if they were resurrected. These events are what the prophets spoke of—undoubtedly meaningful in the moment—but ultimately whispering and foretelling the story of Jesus and his redeemed Church.

TIMELINE OF THE PROPHETS



WEEK ONE

HOSEA: GOD'S UNFAILING LOVE

Date: ca. 725 B.C. | **Original Audience:** Ephraim (The Northern Kingdom of Israel)

Purpose and Occasion

Hosea was primarily concerned with Israel's worship of Baal, a foreign and false God. Israel is the Lord's bride, but Israel has been unfaithful to her Husband. Hosea calls Israel to leave behind their adulterous life and return to their first love, the Lord.

Major theme

Hosea's life exemplifies and serves as a living metaphor for the Lord's compassion for his bride, Israel. God instructed Hosea to marry Gomer, a woman who was emblematic of Israel—unfaithful. Though she was unfaithful, Hosea was commanded to take back his wife to provide a powerful visual for the Lord's people: Gomer's isolation and exile foretells of the isolation and exile of Israel, but it serves as a means to restoration and unfailing love.

Read the book of Hosea, chapters 1–14

FOCUS PASSAGES

HOSEA 1:1–11

¹ The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beerai, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. ² When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord." ³ So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. ⁴ And the Lord said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. ⁵ And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." ⁶ She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. ⁷ But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen." ⁸ When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹ And the Lord said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God." ¹⁰ Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." ¹¹ And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

HOSEA 3:1–5

¹ And the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." ² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. ³ And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you." ⁴ For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. ⁵ Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.

HOSEA 11:1–4

¹ When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ² The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. ³ Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. ⁴ I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.

HOSEA 14:8–9

⁸ O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit. ⁹ Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.
2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?
3. What did this text show you about God's people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. Why do you suppose the Lord asked Hosea to go through the pain of marrying an unfaithful bride instead of just describing the hurt of Israel's unfaithfulness?
2. What parallels do you see between the Church of today and Hosea's bride? What parallels do you see between Hosea's treatment of his bride and the Lord's treatment of his people?
3. Israel's unfaithfulness was their pursuit of other so-called gods. What are the modern so-called gods which might tempt the Church today? What steps can the Church take to pursue faithfulness to the one true God?
4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Hosea the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Hosea was a prophet to Israel who prophesied around 725 B.C. Hosea's oracles were articulated within the larger scope of biblical prophecy before the fall of Israel and Judah in 722 B.C. and 597 B.C., respectively. Hosea's call was unique in that he was not only called to express God's words by mouth and pen but also to live out a real-life metaphor of God's relationship with his people. Throughout Scripture, God speaks of himself as a husband, or bridegroom, to his people, whom he characterizes as his bride. With that analogy, the Lord instructs Hosea to marry a "wife of whoredom." As shocking as that seems, it parallels God's relationship with Israel. Though he remains a faithful husband, his bride continually seeks intimacy with the nearby "gods." This imagery paints a painful picture that Hosea lives out. In so doing, God would give his people a window to see and understand the atrocities they commit toward the Lord; despite that view, they persisted with their infidelity. Hosea speaks of the hurt but also reflects the Lord's unwavering, long-suffering, steadfast love. Though his bride exhibits unfaithfulness, he woos her back, covers her shame, and restores her. These actions would parallel God's mercy to his people. Though they continued in unfaithfulness and became subject to God's judgment by way of the nations that conquered them, he would draw them near, cover their shame, and restore them to their land. This narrative would also mimic what the Lord would do on a much bigger scale as Hosea also foretold of Israel's coming Messiah, who would remove sin's shame and restore the Bride of Christ—the Church comprised of every nation, tribe, and tongue.

WEEK TWO

JOEL: GOD'S PLAN FOR RESTORATION

Date: Estimates range from 900 BC to 400 B.C. | **Original Audience:** Judah (The Southern Kingdom of Israel)

Purpose and Occasion

Little is known about Joel except for what is written in the book itself. Its contents suggest that Joel was from Judah and calls for its inhabitants to lament and return to the Lord amidst a national calamity. A plague of locusts destroyed much of the land, which affected the ability of God's people to present offerings in the temple. While Joel wrote these words in response to a specific event, his writings were forward-looking and used continuously throughout Judah's history, particularly during times of tragedy and judgment.

Major theme

"The day of the Lord" is a phrase that is repeated numerous times throughout the book. In context, Joel is referring not only to a final day of judgment for the nations but also to God's ongoing judgment of Israel—past, present, and future. "The day of the Lord" is a double-edged phrase as the Lord's presence can bring judgment, deliverance, or even both—destruction for the nations or salvation for God's people.

Read the book of Joel, chapters 1–3

FOCUS PASSAGES

JOEL 1:1–20

¹ The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: ² Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? ³ Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation. ⁴ What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. ⁵ Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. ⁶ For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. ⁷ It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white. ⁸ Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. ⁹ The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord. ¹⁰ The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes. ¹¹ Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. ¹² The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man.

¹³ Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. ¹⁴ Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. ¹⁵ Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. ¹⁶ Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? ¹⁷ The seed shrivels under the clods; the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down because the grain has dried up. ¹⁸ How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep suffer. ¹⁹ To you, O Lord, I call. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field. ²⁰ Even the beasts of the field pant for you because the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

JOEL 2:12–14

¹² "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³ and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. ¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?

JOEL 2:28

²⁸ "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.
2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?
3. What did this text show you about God's people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. What does it mean when Joel tells the Lord's people to "Rend your hearts and not your garments"? What did it mean in its original context, and what might it mean for today's Christian? Is there a difference?
2. How can it be that the Lord, on the one hand, will use foreign nations to deliver his judgment against his people, then turn around and judge those foreign nations for their role in their oppression against them?
3. The apostle Peter quoted from the book of Joel in Acts 2: 17–21. What is the significance of Peter quoting from this passage? What was going on at the time? How was Joel 2 fulfilled in Acts 2?

4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Joel the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

The book of Joel is only three chapters long but could be divided in half between chapter one, paired with the first half of chapter two, and the second half of chapter two, paired with chapter three. Joel's prophecy begins with an invasion of locusts, which devastates the land of Judah (1:1–12), followed by a call for repentance (1:13–20). While the description of this calamity should be read literally—the land was ravaged by locusts reminiscent of those in Egypt (Exodus 10:1–18)—Joel begins to seamlessly blend the literal and the figurative as we move into chapter two. The destruction of the locusts became emblematic of “the day of the Lord” when armies—foreign nations, not locusts—would invade the land in judgment against the Lord's people. Joel pleads with the Lord's people to pursue the Lord in genuine repentance (2:12–17). His call for repentance is summarized by saying, “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 (2:13).”

In the book's second half (2:18–3:21), a second prophetic theme emerges, proclaiming a day of judgment against the enemies of God's people—even the very enemies the Lord used to judge his own. The nations would be held accountable for their sins against the Lord's people (3:2–16), and Judah would again enjoy the Lord's inheritance, protection, and spiritual blessing.

While it's challenging to identify the specific sin Joel addresses, its themes are applicable throughout Israel's history; his message is relevant across numerous eras, including ones of the distant future, even beyond our present time. The New Testament borrows from the book of Joel to speak of the “end times” (Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; Revelation 6:9; 9:2). The promises of Joel 2:28–32 are realized in Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21), which is, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The book of Joel is indeed a source of hope and comfort while also offering a warning. The Lord will not let injustice go unpunished; however, he is slow to anger and abounds in mercy.

WEEK THREE

AMOS: GOD'S HEART FOR JUSTICE AND MERCY

Date: ca. 760 B.C.

Original Audience: The Israelites in the Northern Kingdom (Israel), though Amos was a shepherd in the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

Purpose and Occasion

Amos traveled to Israel to prophesy against the wealthy who oppressed the poor. Israel's extreme wealth had come from that oppression and disregard for the marginalized in their society, and the Lord used Amos to warn the Israelites about the coming "day of the Lord," when they would be judged for their cruelty.

Major theme

As God's people, the Israelites were covenantally bound to act like it, by leading with justice, mercy, and faith. The Israelites had done the opposite, building tremendous wealth by oppressing and acting unjustly against their neighbors. Amos calls them to repent and behave like God's covenant people.

Read the book of Amos, chapters 1–9

FOCUS PASSAGES

AMOS 2:6–11

⁶ Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— ⁷ those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; ⁸ they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined. ⁹ "Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. ¹⁰ Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. ¹¹ And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?" declares the Lord.

AMOS 5:12–15

¹² For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins—you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate. ¹³ Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time. ¹⁴ Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. ¹⁵ Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

AMOS 9:11–15

¹¹ "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, ¹² that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the Lord who does this. ¹³ "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. ¹⁴ I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵ I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the Lord your God.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.
2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?
3. What did this text show you about God's people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. What aspects of God's character are most on display in the book of Amos? What did you learn about God through this book?
2. Amos calls the Israelites to live as the people of God. In what ways does he call them to do so? Are any of those areas that you feel the Lord calling you to live differently?
3. We know that our salvation is not secured by our works, but Amos (and also the passages read in James) remind us that the way we live matters. How do you think about the relationship between salvation and works? What questions come to mind as you read?

4. Why does God place such emphasis on justice and mercy? Evaluate your own life. How do you prioritize (or not) a posture toward justice and mercy in your daily choices? What are ways you can grow in this area?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Amos was a simple shepherd, not a professional prophet, who had a life-changing experience with the Living God, who gave him a very important message for the people of Israel. Amos prophesied toward the northern kingdom of Israel before the exile, somewhere around the 700s B.C. The Israelites lived in a golden age with a thriving capital city of Samaria, abundant riches (for the wealthy, at least), and plenty of acted-out (if not true) righteousness. Amos storms in with dire warnings about what it really means to be the people of God and the consequences they face for their selfishness, pride, and disregard for the poor and marginalized. In Amos, we see the indicative-imperative framework of Bible study this way: God's love and his choosing Israel are the indicative (the foundational truth); the imperative (the action in response to the truth) is that they be the people of God. The expectation is that they love and seek righteousness and justice. They care for the poor and marginalized. They don't take advantage of their neighbors. And in this, Israel has failed. We often fail in these ways, too. Amos's specific lens focuses on what it means to be the people of God and the inward transformation that occurs when we believe. When we understand the depth of our sin and its incompatibility with God's perfect character, we feel our own need of judgment—and the refreshing fall of mercy that God offers us out of his perfect love through the person and work of Jesus. And then we, because we have been changed and redeemed, become givers of mercy to those in need. The restoration God promised the remnant of the Israelites at the end of the book of Amos describes the restoration of all things we, as believers, will experience in the new heavens and new earth. What hope we have with which to look forward, but what mission we have to fulfill in these days.

WEEK FOUR

OBADIAH: GOD'S PROMISED KINGDOM

Date: ca. 570 B.C.

Original Audience

The writings of Obadiah are a series of divine judgment poems spoken against the people of Edom, a neighboring nation to Israel—with *familial ties*—who took advantage of Jerusalem's fall to Babylon; they plundered the land and committed violence against the captives instead of having mercy on their "brother."

Purpose and Occasion

The prophet Obadiah had two distinct messages within his relatively short message. Obadiah directs the first half of his word to Edom and warns them to desist from their hostilities against Judah before the Lord visits them in judgment. The second half of Obadiah's message is a word of hope for God's beleaguered people, and a forward look when God's kingdom will include *all* nations.

Major theme

The nations that oppose the Lord's people will meet judgment, yet God's covenant people, who have already experienced his judgment, will be restored.

Read the book of Obadiah, chapter 1

FOCUS PASSAGES

OBADIAH 1:1–21

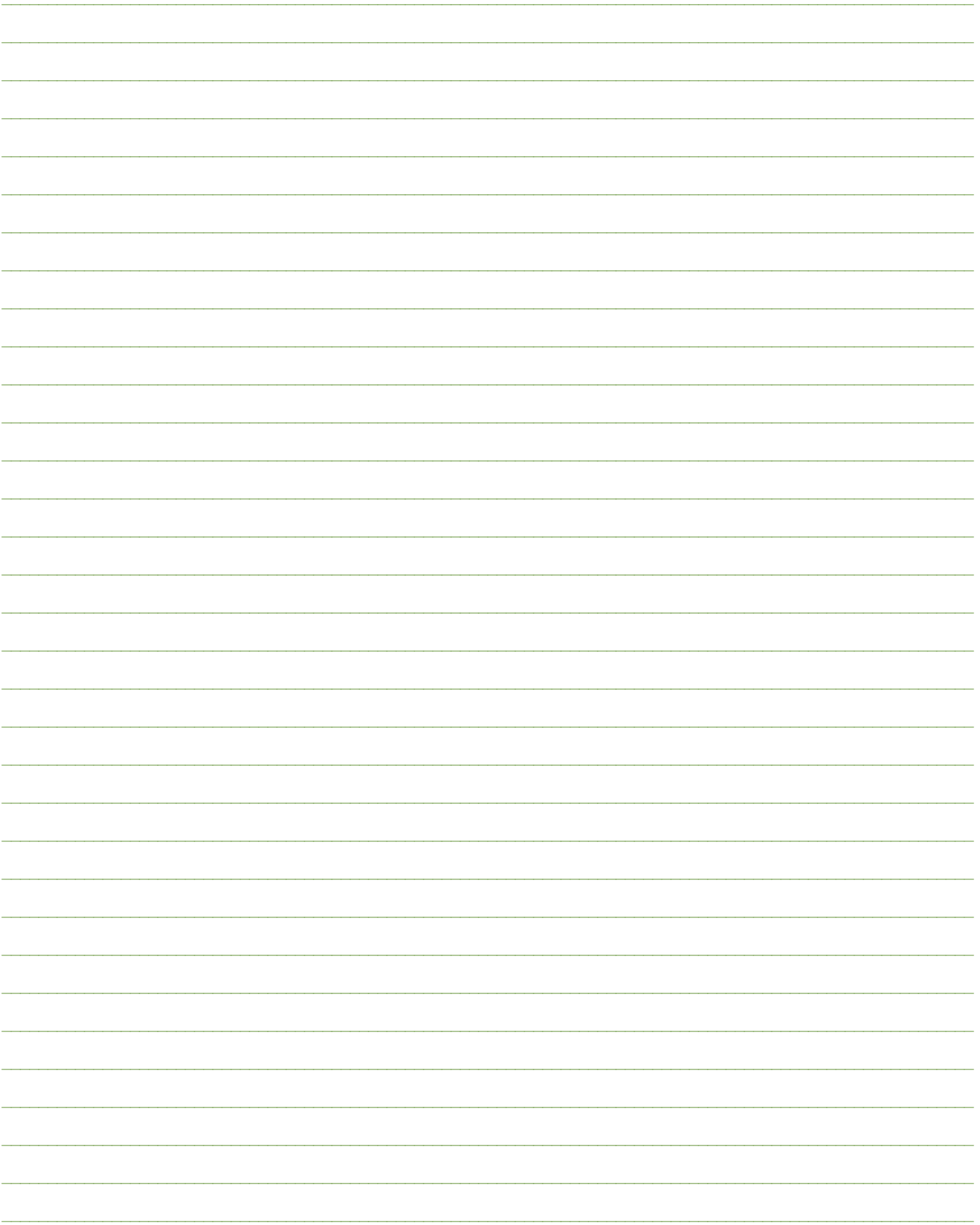
¹ The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: "Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!" ² Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be utterly despised. ³ The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" ⁴ Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the Lord. ⁵ If thieves came to you, if plunderers came by night—how you have been destroyed!—would they not steal only enough for themselves? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? ⁶ How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out! ⁷ All your allies have driven you to your border; those at peace with you have deceived you; they have prevailed against you; those who eat your bread have set a trap beneath you—you have no understanding. ⁸ Will I not on that day, declares the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of Mount Esau? ⁹ And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter.

¹⁰ Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. ¹¹ On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. ¹² But do not gloat over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; do not boast in the day of distress. ¹³ Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity; do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity.

¹⁴ Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress.

¹⁵ For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head. ¹⁶ For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually; they shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been. ¹⁷ But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape, and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions. ¹⁸ The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau, for the Lord has spoken.

¹⁹ Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah shall possess the land of the Philistines; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria, and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. ²⁰ The exiles of this host of the people of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negeb. ²¹ Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.



FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.
2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?
3. What did this text show you about God's people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. What does the book of Obadiah teach us about how the Lord's justice works? What is the purpose and function of his judgment and discipline? Is there a difference between the two?
2. In what ways does the book of Obadiah give the people of the Lord hope, especially through trial and misfortune?
3. Israel was "God's people," yet there was an expectation put upon the people of Edom. How might this speak to where all of history is headed?

4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Obadiah the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament yet it is dense with meaning and hope. The prophet initially directs his message to the people of Edom, who have a history with the people of Israel—both nations can be traced back to the family of Abraham. Jacob and Esau were Abraham’s grandchildren who had a tumultuous relationship with one another (Genesis 25–27). Jacob would eventually be named “Israel,” and his brother became “Edom.” Both spawned nations who had a volatile relationship with one another, just as their forefathers did. However, Edom’s greatest betrayal against their ancient brother occurred when Jerusalem fell at the hands of Babylon (2 Kings 25). Instead of defending the Lord’s people, Edom took advantage of their weakness and even participated in the atrocities brought about by the Babylonian invasion. Obadiah delivered accusations and a stern warning of impending judgment to the leaders of Edom (1:1–14).

The book of Obadiah can be divided into two parts; the first half addresses the leaders of Edom and their pride, and Obadiah tells them, “As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head” (v. 15). But this warning comes with a peculiar twist; Obadiah’s words of warning come not only to the leaders of Edom, but to “all the nations” (v. 15). Edom suddenly becomes a symbolic picture for all the nations who act as they do, and they, like Edom, will be judged by the Lord for their acts of violence against the Lord’s people.

The second half of Obadiah’s message is a message of hope—one that tells the Lord’s people that his judgment leads to restoration, that he will bring about a new act of salvation in Jerusalem—a very similar message to Obadiah’s prophetic predecessors, Joel and Amos (Joel 2:32; Amos 9:12). Obadiah’s message concludes by speaking of the restoration of God’s Kingdom—a new Jerusalem populated not only by a faithful remnant but people from all the nations.

WEEK FIVE

JONAH: GOD'S IMMEASURABLE COMPASSION

Date: Estimates range between the 8th and 3rd centuries B.C.

Original Audience

The writings of Obadiah are a series of divine judgment poems spoken against the people of Edom, a neighboring nation to Israel. The book of Jonah is considered by some to be a parable but is most likely a prophetic narrative similar to stories about Elijah and Elisha. The original audience would have been contemporary to Jonah.

Purpose and Occasion

Jonah tells the extraordinary story of a prophet who disobeyed God, was swallowed and spit out by a fish, and then obeyed God by prophesying to Nineveh but became angry when God spared the evil Ninevites. Jonah is an anti-hero, angry with God but desperate for the same grace God gave the Ninevites when they repented.

Major theme

God's steadfast compassion and plan of salvation is not just for the people of Israel but for all who repent and believe.

Read the book of Jonah, chapters 1–4

FOCUS PASSAGES

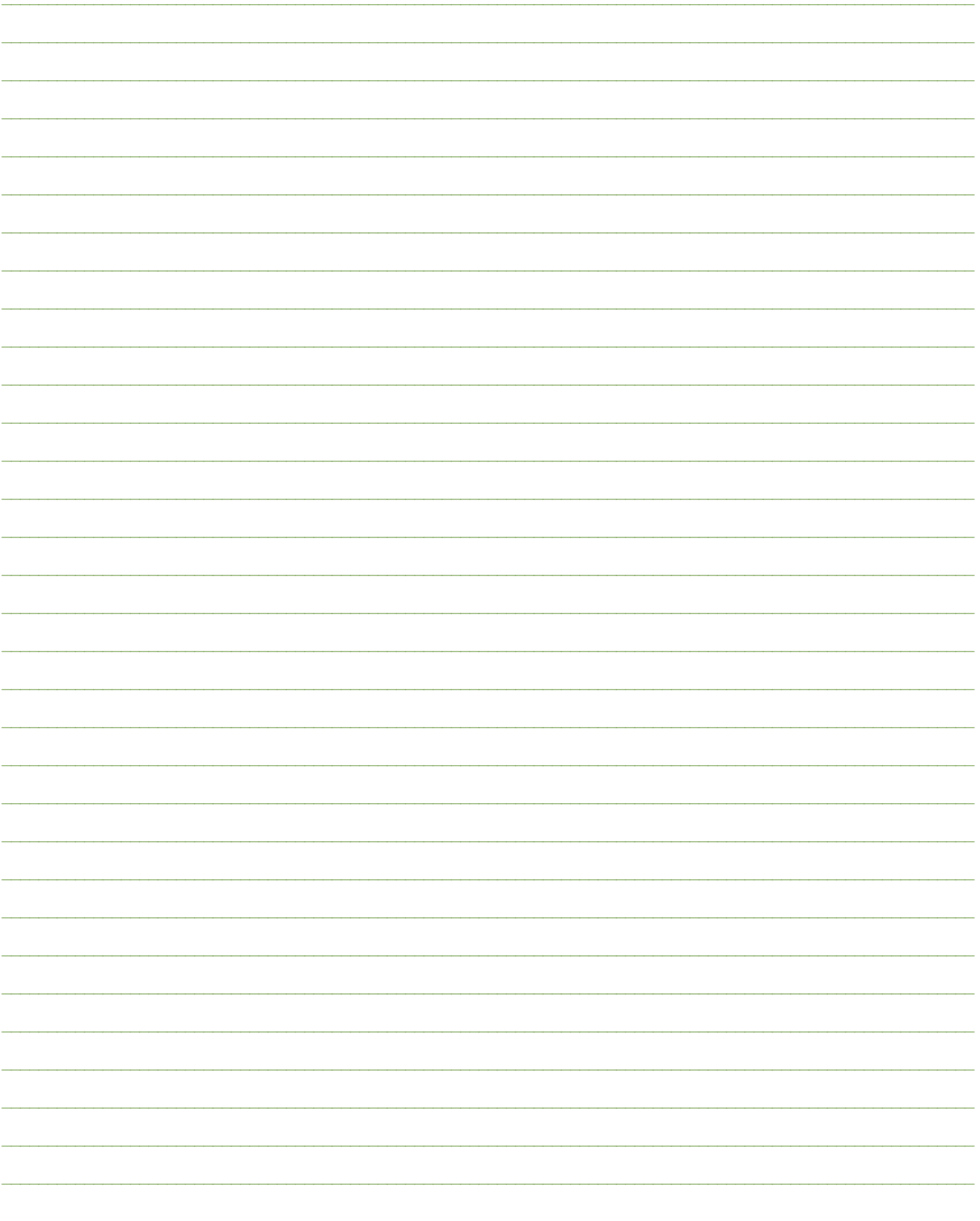
JONAH 2

¹ Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, ² saying, "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. ³ For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. ⁴ Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' ⁵ The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head ⁶ at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. ⁷ When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. ⁸ Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. ⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!" ¹⁰ And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

JONAH 3:10–4:11

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?" ⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." ⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." ¹⁰ And the Lord said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"



FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.
2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?
3. What did this text show you about God's people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. Rewrite Jonah's prayer from Jonah 2 in your own words. What resonates with you about this prayer?
2. Why do you think Jonah responded to the Lord's forgiveness of Nineveh with anger?

"The book of Jonah yields many insights about God's love for societies and people beyond the community of believers; about his opposition to toxic nationalism and disdain for other races; and about how to be "in mission" in the world despite the subtle and unavoidable power of idolatry in our own lives and hearts. Grasping these insights can make us bridge-builders, peacemakers, and agents of reconciliation in the world." –Tim Keller

3. Reflect on the quotation by Tim Keller above. How does the book of Jonah inspire you to be on God's mission for compassion and reconciliation in the world?

4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Jonah the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY ---

While Jonah can easily be relegated to the world of children's Sunday school and storybooks, it is, in fact, a profoundly deep theological treatise. Jonah prophesies God's compassionate love not just for the people of Israel but for the Gentiles and all who will call on the name of Jesus. Jonah resisted God's initial call to travel to Nineveh and prophesy, instead attempting to flee to Tarshish. Jonah's encounter with pagan sailors leads to their repentance, and Jonah prays a Psalm-laden prayer of thanks while in the belly of the fish. The second part of Jonah mirrors the first: Jonah travels to Nineveh, encounters the pagan Ninevites who repent and are saved from the Lord's promised destruction, then Jonah prays an angry prayer because of his anger that the Lord saved the evil Ninevites. The Lord then rebukes Jonah, asking him, "Do you do well to be angry?" This question sparks in us the question, too—when God chooses to extend his mercy, compassion, and saving grace to all people who repent and believe, how do we respond?

Jesus referred to Jonah and the Ninevites in Matthew and Luke, saying in Luke 11:32, "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." Jesus is the greater Jonah, spending three days and nights in the tomb before he rose and defeated death forever. Matthew 12:40 says, "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

The true and greater Jonah, Jesus, extended the saving mercy of God to all who repent and believe. Ninevite or Israelite, Gentile or Jew, all who call upon the name of Christ are saved.

WEEK SIX

MICAH: GOD'S MERCIFUL FORGIVENESS

Date: ca. 725 B.C.

Original Audience

Micah, similar to that of an attorney, brings a “lawsuit” against the people of God in both Samaria and Jerusalem (northern and southern kingdoms) as both Assyria and Babylon stand will soon act as instruments of the Lord’s divine sentence.

Purpose and Occasion

Micah brings an indictment against the rulers of both the northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms. Their sins of infidelity against the Lord included idolatry, the unlawful seizure of property and other corrupt civil practices, failures in spiritual and prophetic leadership, and a belief that personal sacrifice satisfies divine justice.

Major theme

The people of God are guilty of not upholding their terms of the covenant. Because God is holy, it requires obedience and righteousness—not merely ritual—from God’s people, yet they fail egregiously time and again. Sins against God demand judgment. However, forgiveness is grounded in God’s faithfulness to his promises; as the Lord has delivered his people in the past, so he will do in the future.

Read the book of Micah, chapters 1–7

FOCUS PASSAGES

MICAH 1:2–7

² Hear, you peoples, all of you; pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it, and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. ³ For behold, the Lord is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. ⁴ And the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. ⁵ All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? ⁶ Therefore I will make Samaria a heap in the open country, a place for planting vineyards, and I will pour down her stones into the valley and uncover her foundations. ⁷ All her carved images shall be beaten to pieces, all her wages shall be burned with fire, and all her idols I will lay waste, for from the fee of a prostitute she gathered them, and to the fee of a prostitute they shall return.

MICAH 2:1–3

¹ Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. ² They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. ³ Therefore thus says the Lord: behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks, and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster.

MICAH 3:9–11

⁹ Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, ¹⁰ who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. ¹¹ Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the Lord and say, “Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.”

MICAH 5:2–5

² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he shall be their peace.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.
2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?
3. What did this text show you about God's people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. Micah is acting as the Lord's attorney bringing charges against the people of the Lord. In reading through Micah, summarize what those charges included. What are the specific sins the leaders of Judah and Israel committed?
2. As modern Christians, it might be easy to feel removed from the writings of Micah, especially as it pertains to judgment. As Christians, Jesus has taken our judgment, so how can we apply Micah's message of judgment and restoration to the modern Christian?
3. Corruption, injustice, wealth at the expense of the poor were among the sins of Israel's leaders. Do you see these sins occurring in today's church? Where do you see today's church fighting against these sins?

4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Micah the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Though Micah lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, he spoke messages on the Lord's behalf directed at both the northern and southern kingdoms. Because of their long history of violating their covenant with the Lord, Micah gave warning—as a legal indictment—that God would allow the Assyrian empire to capture the northern kingdom and, soon thereafter, the Babylonians to take the southern kingdom; both would bring destruction and devastation.

As is often the case with the words of the prophet, there are two sides—warnings of impending judgment on God's people immediately followed by words of restoration and hope. The book of Micah, broadly speaking, is arranged in three sections, each containing messages of both doom and hope (chapters 1–4a, 4b–5, 6–7). Micah brings accusations against Israel's leaders for their corruption and injustice (Chapters 1–4a) and accusations against Israel's prophets for accepting bribes from the wealthy at the expense of the poor (chapters 3–4). However, the hope with which Micah follows the accusations is both near-term and long-term in nature. Though the people of God will succumb to the attacks of the Assyrians and Babylonians, he would—in the near term—restore them and bring them back to their land (4:8–13). But he also promises a messianic king from the line of David, who would be born in Bethlehem and establish a new Jerusalem (5:1–14).

The book of Micah closes in a summarizing manner with both words of warning and hope (chapters 6–7); he speaks against the corrupt leaders who ultimately cause damage to both the people and the land, so Micah concludes with a succinct summary of what it is to remain in covenant with the Lord, "He has told 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).

This summary is the Lord's message to his people irrespective of the age in which they live. Israel and all of God's church are commended to reflect his character, know his forgiveness, and bless the nations through the Messiah's rule.

WEEK SEVEN

NAHUM: GOD'S CERTAIN JUDGMENT

Date: ca. 640 B.C. | **Original Audience:** Nahum

Purpose and Occasion

Nahum might be seen as a sequel to the book of Jonah—a sequel with a dramatically different outcome. While the book of Jonah ended in the Ninevites repenting, their repentance did not last even 100 years as they continued on in their bloodshed, of which, the northern kingdom of Israel was included. (Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria.) Nahum, therefore, was God's messenger to announce the fall of Nineveh along with the complete overthrow of Assyria.

Major theme

Even though the Lord used Assyria as an instrument of judgment against his people's unfaithfulness, they opened themselves to the Lord's judgment. Assyria began taking control of the northern kingdom, Israel, in 730 B.C. and completed their conquest in 722 B.C. Feeling pride for their conquests, Nahum warns Nineveh, the arrogant capital of the Assyrian Empire, that it would face destruction as judgment from the Lord.

Read the book of Nahum, chapters 1–3

FOCUS PASSAGES

NAHUM 1:1–15

¹ An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh. ² The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. ³ The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. ⁴ He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers. ⁵ The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it. ⁶ Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. ⁷ The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. ⁸ But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness. ⁹ What do you plot against the Lord? He will make a complete end; trouble will not rise up a second time. ¹⁰ For they are like entangled thorns, like drunkards as they drink; they are consumed like stubble fully dried. ¹¹ From you came one who plotted evil against the Lord, a worthless counselor. ¹² Thus says the Lord, "Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. ¹³ And now I will break his yoke from off you and will burst your bonds apart." ¹⁴ The Lord has given commandment about you: "No more shall your name be perpetuated; from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the metal image. I will make your grave, for you are vile." ¹⁵ Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfill your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off.

NAHUM 2:10–13

¹⁰ Desolate! Desolation and ruin! Hearts melt and knees tremble; anguish is in all loins; all faces grow pale! ¹¹ Where is the lions' den, the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion and lioness went, where his cubs were, with none to disturb? ¹² The lion tore enough for his cubs and strangled prey for his lionesses; he filled his caves with prey and his dens with torn flesh. ¹³ Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard.

NAHUM 3:18–19

¹⁸ Your shepherds are asleep, O king of Assyria; your nobles slumber. Your people are scattered on the mountains with none to gather them. ¹⁹ There is no easing your hurt; your wound is grievous. All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.
2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?
3. What did this text show you about God's people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. The Lord's anger is completely different than our anger. In the same manner, how is the Lord's jealousy (v. 1:1) different from our jealousy?
2. Go through the book of Nahum and locate those passages which are hopeful. How many can you find? What does this tell you about the overall tone of the book? Does this encourage you or discourage you, and why?
3. What are some practical takeaways for the modern Church in the book of Nahum? How can we apply this book's message to our everyday lives?

4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Nahum the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Nahum's central message is a passionate one, which essentially states, "The Lord will bring punishment upon Assyria because of sinful and grotesque violence. Nahum's tone is strong; with no uncertainty, the Lord says to Assyria—and all the violent nations—"The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies" (Nahum 1:2).

We'll often paint God as only gentle and merciful, and he is that! But he is also a God of justice. In Nahum, it's as if we see the Lord looking down upon humanity, seeing their wickedness and, in effect, saying, "I won't tolerate you behaving this way. I made you, and you have no life, no right of existence without me, no future unless you are in harmony with me. Whatever is wrong in the world has got to be put right—and I'll see that it is."

The book of Nahum provides a powerful reminder that God cares about his world and *will* judge sin. One of God's attributes is his just anger—quite different from our anger. God is holy; no part of him isn't wholly enveloped in holiness. So, even his anger is righteous and pure. As the Lord reminds us through the prophet Nahum, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power," which is good news for humanity. But he completes his thought by saying, "and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty" (v. 1:3). While the book of Nahum is gloomy, the prophet also reminds people of all ages, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him" (v. 1:7).

WEEK EIGHT

HABAKKUK: GOD'S PERFECT JUSTICE

Date: ca. 630 B.C.

Original Audience: Habakkuk prophesied toward the end of Assyrian dominance and the rise of the Babylonian empire.

Purpose and Occasion

Uniquely in the prophetic books, Habakkuk is a conversation between Habakkuk and the Lord. Habakkuk prays, and the Lord answers him. Habakkuk wondered how God could use the more wicked Babylonians to punish the wicked people of God in Judah; God answered him with the famous verse, "The righteous shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

Major theme

God's justice is perfect, no matter how we perceive his actions or motivations. As the people of God, we trust God to sovereignly act in the ways true to his perfect character.

Read the book of Habakkuk, chapters 1–3

FOCUS PASSAGES

HABAKKUK 1:1–17

¹ The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. ² O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? ³ Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ⁴ So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

⁵ "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. ⁶ For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own. ⁷ They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. ⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour. ⁹ They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand. ¹⁰ At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. ¹¹ Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!"

¹² Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. ¹³ You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

¹⁴ You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. ¹⁵ He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad. ¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich. ¹⁷ Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

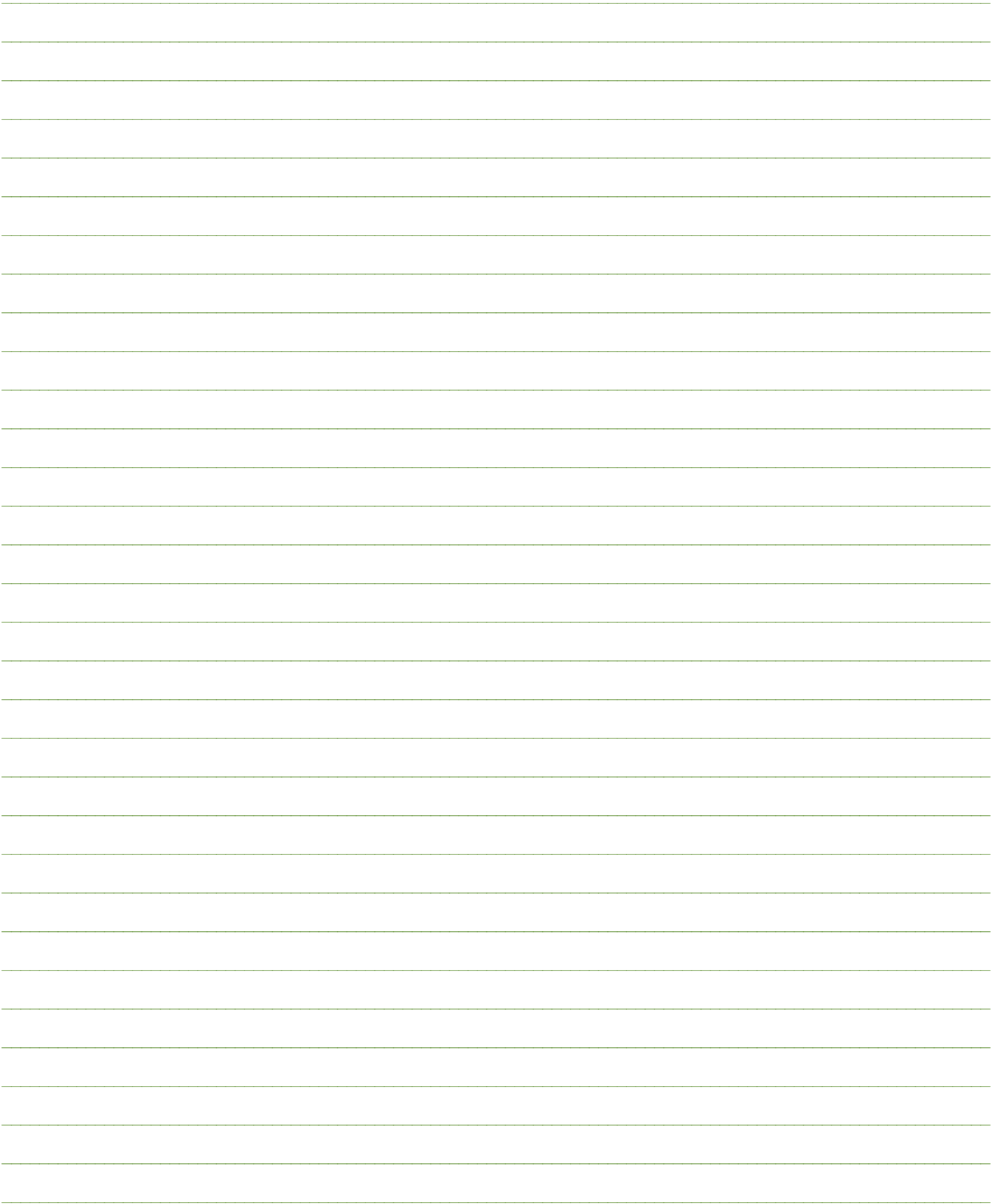
HABAKKUK 2:1–5

¹ I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

² And the Lord answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. ³ For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. ⁴ "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith. ⁵ "Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples."

HABAKKUK 3:17–19

¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.



FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.

2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?

3. What did this text show you about God's people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. How do the words and questions of Habakkuk encourage you? Do you find them uncomfortable or comforting? Think about the posture you often take before the Lord and jot down some descriptive words.

2. Habakkuk sits in the tension between justice and mercy. How does the Lord's reply in 2:2–4 help you think about this tension: God's need for justice, and his gift of mercy?

3. The author of Hebrews quotes Habakkuk in a chapter about the assurance of our faith in Jesus when we face judgment. We will “all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Read Hebrews 10:30–39. How does the author of Hebrews draw on the lessons of Habakkuk when describing assurance?

4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Nahum the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Uniquely, Habakkuk prophesies by speaking to God. Habakkuk gives us permission and a reminder that dialogue with God, especially about big issues like wrath and judgment, is invited. Habakkuk asks us to confront the tension between the judgment we deserve and the mercy we are given. Habakkuk asks hard questions of God: is he really good, trustworthy, and will he restore us the way he has promised? Or is he wrathful, bent on judging the wicked, even when the wicked are his chosen ones? Habakkuk draws the same conclusion for both questions: yes.

In Hebrews, the unknown author references Habakkuk during his chapter 10 discourse on the assurance of our faith. “The Lord will judge his people,” he writes. But just a few verses later, he cites Habakkuk: “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith.” The judgment of the Lord does fall, but not upon the ones God has chosen to be his. God sent Christ, the sinless One, to stand in our place. So, we answer Habakkuk’s questions with the full knowledge of God’s promises that came true in Christ. Yes, God will judge the wicked (and we are the wicked). But the judgment is pronounced on the One in whom we have faith, Jesus, whose righteousness is imputed to us by that faith.

WEEK NINE

ZEPHANIAH: GOD THE AUTHOR OF REDEMPTION

Date: ca. 625 B.C.

Original Audience: The people of Judah during the reign of King Josiah who was attempting to reform Judah in line with God's law.

Purpose and Occasion

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah of Judah, one of the good kings. Josiah became king at age eight, and when the book of the Law was rediscovered during his reign, he implemented reforms in line with God's law. Zephaniah prophesied to the people that if they did not repent and turn back to God, they would experience judgment in the day of the Lord.

Major theme

Major themes in Zephaniah include acknowledging the sovereignty of God over all people and creation and reminding the people that a day of judgment would come, but God will redeem the remnant who follow him.

Read the book of Zephaniah, chapters 1–3

FOCUS PASSAGES

ZEPHANIAH 1:1–18

¹ The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

² "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. ³ "I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. ⁴ "I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests, ⁵ those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom, ⁶ those who have turned back from following the Lord, who do not seek the Lord or inquire of him."

⁷ Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is near; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests.

⁸ And on the day of the Lord's sacrifice—"I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire. ⁹ On that day I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold, and those who fill their master's house with violence and fraud. ¹⁰ "On that day," declares the Lord, "a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter, a loud crash from the hills. ¹¹ Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar! For all the traders are no more; all who weigh out silver are cut off.

¹² At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.' ¹³ Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them." ¹⁴ The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶ a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. ¹⁷ I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. ¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

ZEPHANIAH 2:4–15

⁴ For Gaza shall be deserted, and Ashkelon shall become a desolation; Ashdod's people shall be driven out at noon, and Ekron shall be uprooted. ⁵ Woe to you inhabitants of the seacoast, you nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left. ⁶ And you, O seacoast, shall be pastures, with meadows for shepherds and folds for flocks. ⁷ The seacoast shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah, on which they shall graze, and in the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the Lord their God will be mindful of them and restore their fortunes. ⁸ "I have heard the taunts of Moab and the revilings of the Ammonites, how they have taunted my people and made boasts against their territory. ⁹ Therefore, as I live," declares the Lord of hosts, the God of

Israel, "Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste forever. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them."¹⁰ This shall be their lot in return for their pride, because they taunted and boasted against the people of the Lord of hosts.¹¹ The Lord will be awesome against them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth, and to him shall bow down, each in its place, all the lands of the nations.¹² You also, O Cushites, shall be slain by my sword.¹³ And he will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, and he will make Nineveh a desolation, a dry waste like the desert.¹⁴ Herds shall lie down in her midst, all kinds of beasts; even the owl and the hedgehog shall lodge in her capitals; a voice shall hoot in the window; devastation will be on the threshold; for her cedar work will be laid bare.

¹⁵ This is the exultant city that lived securely, that said in her heart, "I am, and there is no one else." What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beasts! Everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist.

ZEPHANIAH 3:9-20

⁹ "For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord.¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering.¹¹ "On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.¹² But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord,¹³ those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid."

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!¹⁵ The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil.¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak.

¹⁷ The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.¹⁸ I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.¹⁹ Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.²⁰ At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes," says the Lord.

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. Zephaniah speaks of the tension of living in a broken world with hope of total redemption. What are some ways you feel that tension in your life?

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord. (Zephaniah 2:3)

2. Reflect on the verse above. How does this verse encapsulate the gospel? How does it challenge you to think about the way you live out your faith?
3. Focus specifically on Zephaniah 3:14–20. Make notes of how these verses describe God’s character. How do they show you a picture of God’s plan for redemption?
4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Zephaniah the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Zephaniah prophesied to Judah, the southern kingdom that had broken off from Israel but still belonged to God. Major themes in Zephaniah include acknowledging the sovereignty of God over all people and creation and reminding the people that a day of judgment would come. But this “day of the Lord,” a phrase used throughout the prophets, is described in Zephaniah as a curse for those who strayed from God and a blessing for those committed to him. Zephaniah’s tension of judgment and hope helps us while we live in the same tension: we feel the world’s brokenness, the cost of our sin, and of corporate and institutional sin. And yet, we have hope that because God has chosen us, we will be restored.

Throughout the minor prophets, and in Zephaniah particularly, we see a God who rules with justice and restores with mercy. This duality is key to our understanding of God’s perfect character and wisdom, and it sets the stage for the redemption plan that unfolds through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As Zephaniah ends, we see what scholar David Baker writes: “The blessings are sure and the promises can and will be fulfilled because it is Yahweh himself, the covenant-keeping God, who delivers them.”

God demands justice, but in his great mercy, he knows that his people can never keep their part of the covenant. So he provides what they need: a Savior. The Canons of Dort, a foundational document of the Reformed tradition written in 1618-19, summarizes this beautiful truth:

“Since, however, we ourselves cannot give this satisfaction or deliver ourselves from God’s anger, God in his boundless mercy has given us as a guarantee his only begotten Son, who was made to be sin and a curse for us, in our place, on the cross, in order that he might give satisfaction for us.”

WEEK TEN

HAGGAI: GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE

Date: 520 B.C. | **Original Audience:** Jewish people who had returned to Jerusalem in Judah after the exile

Purpose and Occasion

The prophet Haggai encouraged the people of Judah to finish rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. King Darius's ascent to be king of Persia had led to peace in the area, and the Jewish people were ready to finish rebuilding the temple that had begun during King Cyrus's reign.

Major theme

Haggai encouraged the Jewish people to remember and honor God's covenant with them, that he would dwell with them by rebuilding the temple.

Read the book of Haggai, chapters 1–2

FOCUS PASSAGES

HAGGAI 1:1–15

¹ In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. ² "Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord." ³ Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

⁷ "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁸ Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord. ⁹ You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors."

¹² Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord. ¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, "I am with you, declares the Lord." ¹⁴ And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

HAGGAI 2:1–23

¹ In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet: ² "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, ³ 'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? ⁴ Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the Lord. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, ⁵ according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. ⁶ For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. ⁷ And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. ⁹ The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.'"

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.

2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?

3. What did this text show you about God’s people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. Read Haggai 1:3–6. What admonishment is the Lord giving his people? Compare the descriptions of their house with the Lord’s house (the temple).

2. Ask yourself the question the Lord asked the people: Consider your ways. Do you feel like you never have enough? How does the Lord provide for that emptiness in a way eating, drinking, clothing, and money do not?

3. Read the following passages about the temple throughout Scripture. What do you notice about the importance of the temple? What does it communicate about God?
 - a. 2 Samuel 7:1–13

 - b. 1 Kings 6:11–12

 - c. 1 Kings 8:9–11

 - d. Ezra 3:8–13

 - e. Ephesians 2:19–22

 - f. Revelation 21:22–36

4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Zephaniah the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Haggai writes soon after the Jewish people return. He is a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, writing about rebuilding the temple, which was destroyed during the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem. The people started to rebuild the temple, but they hit a series of setbacks, including attacks from their neighbors. Haggai's message from the Lord for the people was that they needed to rebuild the temple. He warned that they were caring more for their own homes and wealth than they were for the house of the Lord, the temple. Haggai 1:3–4 says, "Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, 'Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?'"

The contrast here is key to understanding the importance of Haggai's prophecy: it's not just that they weren't rebuilding the temple, but that they had rebuilt their own houses in search of their own safety, security, and wealth. By prioritizing their own houses over the house of the Lord, the people were living for their own glory, not God's.

When they began to work, the Lord encouraged their efforts. He reminds them that he is always there, always their covenant God, always at their side. Throughout Scripture, the temple is used as a covenant symbol that God desires and plans to dwell with his people forever. Ephesians 2 uses the church as an analog for the new temple, built with Christ as the cornerstone, wherein God will dwell. And in Revelation 21, John's eschatological vision reveals a city with no temple, because the temple is God himself, dwelling with his people forever.

WEEK ELEVEN

ZECHARIAH: GOD'S FUTURE PLANS

Date: Around 520 B.C.

Original Audience: The people of Judah who had returned to their homes after the exile but had yet to turn fully back to God.

Purpose and Occasion

Zechariah is one of the best examples of Old Testament apocalyptic literature. The prophet encourages God's people to renew their covenant commitment to the Lord, on the heels of Haggai's prophecy for them to rebuild the temple, God's dwelling place. Together, Haggai and Zechariah long for God's people to return wholeheartedly to the God whose steadfast love never failed them.

Major theme

Zechariah has two sections: eight visions (ch. 1–8) followed by extended Messianic and future prophecies for the full restoration of God's people.

Read the book of Zechariah, chapters 1–14

FOCUS PASSAGES

ZECHARIAH 1:1–17

¹ In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, ² "The Lord was very angry with your fathers. ³ Therefore say to them, Thus declares the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. ⁴ Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. ⁵ Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, 'As the Lord of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us.'"

⁷ On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, ⁸ "I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. ⁹ Then I said, 'What are these, my lord?' The angel who talked with me said to me, 'I will show you what they are.' ¹⁰ So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, 'These are they whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth.' ¹¹ And they answered the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said, 'We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.' ¹² Then the angel of the Lord said, 'O Lord of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?' ¹³ And the Lord answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. ¹⁴ So the angel who talked with me said to me, 'Cry out, Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. ¹⁵ And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster. ¹⁶ Therefore, thus says the Lord, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares the Lord of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. ¹⁷ Cry out again, Thus says the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.'"

ZECHARIAH 7:1–8:8

¹ In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislev. ² Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men to entreat the favor of the Lord, ³ saying to the priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets, "Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

⁴ Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me: ⁵ "Say to all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? ⁶ And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves? ⁷ Were not these the words that the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?'"

⁸ And the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, ⁹ “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, ¹⁰ do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” ¹¹ But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. ¹² They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts. ¹³ “As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear,” says the Lord of hosts, ¹⁴ “and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and the pleasant land was made desolate.”

¹ And the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, ² “Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. ³ Thus says the Lord: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. ⁴ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. ⁵ And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. ⁶ Thus says the Lord of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the Lord of hosts? ⁷ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, ⁸ and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”

ZECHARIAH 9:9 – 17

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. ¹³ For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior’s sword.

¹⁴ Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning; the Lord God will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. ¹⁵ The Lord of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones, and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar. ¹⁶ On that day the Lord their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. ¹⁷ For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

1. Zechariah, along with Haggai and Malachi, prophesy much later than the other Minor Prophets—after the return after the exile. Reread Zechariah 1:1–6. How does knowing more about the earlier minor prophets impact your reading of these verses? What patterns does the Lord not want his people to repeat?

2. Summarize Zechariah 7:1–8:8 in your own words. Make note of anything particularly relevant to your daily life and walk with the Lord. What can you take away from this ancient prophecy?

“Christ is the only person in all history whose character and experience answer to the description of the ideal king in this prophecy. He alone, among the sons of men, can be described as the true tsaddiq— the righteous One.”—David Baron

3. Reflecting on Zechariah 9 and the quotation above, who is the fulfillment of these prophecies? What characteristics of the coming king are described? Look up the following verses to help you answer.

a. Jeremiah 23:5

b. Isaiah 42:6–8

c. Matthew 21:1–11

4. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Zechariah the prophet?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Zechariah builds on the themes of Haggai, but his emphasis is not on the temple (God's dwelling place) but rather on what it means to be the covenant people of God. Zechariah is peppered with reminders of God's unfailing love. Zechariah is structured with eight visions, similar to other prophets, and then an extended discourse on the future kingdom of the Lord. In chapter 7, Zechariah addresses how the Jewish people ended up in exile and warns them against falling into the same patterns. But Zechariah takes a shift after chapter 8. James Boice writes, "Up to this point most of the events foretold by the prophets have concerned their immediate future, primarily the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel and the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah, with judgment against such additional kingdoms . . . From time to time there were prophecies of the coming of Christ . . . (Now) we are given the widest possible vision of the land before us."

The second half of Zechariah offers us prophecies that are cited frequently in the New Testament; the ESV Study Bible cites at least 67 such citations. This book previews Christ as the coming king and the perfect shepherd, the righteous one who will save his people. Tagged onto the initial chapters of Zechariah encouraging God's people to renew their commitment to him, this expansive understanding of God's future plans for his people presents a compelling argument to those of us reading it today to trust the Lord.

WEEK TWELVE

MALACHI: GOD'S UNMATCHED GLORY

Date: ca. 450 B.C.

Original Audience

God's people, about a hundred years after the end of the exile, who had again failed to live up to the covenant standards of God's people.

Purpose and Occasion

The people of Judah had rebuilt God's temple but failed to experience the blessings of God they had expected. So they lived a lackadaisical faith; the priests were corrupt, and they continued in sinful patterns, including mistreating the poor, divorcing, and not tithing.

Major theme

Malachi encourages the people to remember God's laws and also that they will eventually be judged on the "day of the Lord."

Read the book of Malachi, chapters 1–4

FOCUS PASSAGES

MALACHI 1:1–14

¹ The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.

² "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob ³ but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." ⁴ If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," the Lord of hosts says, "They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called 'the wicked country,' and 'the people with whom the Lord is angry forever.'" ⁵ Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel!"

⁶ "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?'

⁷ By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' By saying that the Lord's table may be despised. ⁸ When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts. ⁹ And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts.

¹⁰ Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. ¹¹ For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. ¹² But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. ¹³ But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord. ¹⁴ Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

MALACHI 2:10–16

¹⁰ Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? ¹¹ Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. ¹² May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!

¹³ And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. ¹⁴ But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

¹⁵ Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Ask the Lord to draw your heart and mind to the words he has for you in this text.

2. What did this text reveal to you about God and His character?

3. What did this text show you about God’s people and/or you?

OBSERVE AND REFLECT

1. Compare and contrast the messages of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. How are they similar? How are they different?

"Perhaps more than any other Old Testament book, Malachi describes that modern attitude of mind that considers man superior to God and that has the audacity to attempt to bring God down to earth and measure him by the yardstick of human morality." (James Boice)

2. Consider the Boice quotation above and your reading of Malachi. Do you agree or disagree? What ways do you see this type of attitude in Malachi and in modern society?

3. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Malachi the prophet?

4. What is one thing you have learned and will take away from this study?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Malachi wrote his prophecy as a series of questions and answers between the Lord and his people, punctuated with sharp wit and sarcasm. It is the last book in the Old Testament, a fitting end to the prophets who have condemned the Israelites and hoped for the Messiah.

Malachi echoes to us that the world is fractured by sin and that we reverberate with our own brokenness out of the initial fall. God's chosen people, the recipients of God's unmatched covenants and blessings, led by the Levite priests, have failed to live with goodness, justice, righteousness, and love. As go the Israelites, so go the rest of us: covenant children, who still toil in the fallow ground waiting for the final redemption of all things.

Malachi concludes with hope, hope with roots that stretch backward to Genesis and forward to Revelation. Chapter 4:2–3 says, "But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. 3 And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts."

We wait with hope for the Son of righteousness to return, inaugurating the perfect, forever kingdom of God where we will dwell with him always.

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