

MINOR PROPHETS

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MINOR PROPHETS

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1 LESSON

The Unfaithfulness of a Nation

BY BECKY UNRAU

Hosea

Key Verse The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.” Hosea 3:1



Israel's unfaithfulness to God results in judgment. When the nation feels that all hope is gone, they experience God's forgiveness and love.

Life Response

To realize the extent to which we demonstrate unfaithfulness to our loving God and to experience His forgiveness.

C Chuck Swindoll tells the story of a young man named Aaron who, desperately looking for a job, took a bus driving position in southside Chicago. Before long, a small gang of tough kids spotted the rookie driver, and began taking advantage of him. They refused to pay, ignoring his warnings. One day after the boys got on, Aaron spotted a policeman standing on the corner and pulled over. The officer demanded that the boys pay or get off. They paid, and the policeman got off. A few blocks later, the boys assaulted Aaron, leaving him unconsciousness.

Aaron decided to press charges and attended a hearing before the judge. As the boys sat across from him in the court-



room, he was overcome with compassion for them. When they entered a plea of “guilty”, Aaron stood to his feet and requested permission to speak. He asked the judge to total up all the days of punishment against the boys, and requested that he be permitted to go to jail in their place. The judge did not grant the request, but Aaron visited the boys in jail, leading most of them to a faith in Christ. Because Aaron had chosen to love people who didn’t deserve it, they were able to comprehend the love that God had for them.

1. What was it about Aaron’s ministry that had the biggest effect on the boys?
2. Why did Aaron’s actions have such an impact on the boys?
3. In what ways did the Israelites in the Old Testament rebel against God?
4. In what ways do we rebel against God and His teachings?



Hosea 1: 4-9

God’s Judgment

When Hosea married Gomer, they had three children. The name of each child was intended to convey a message to the Israelites.

The messages become more severe with each child. The first son was Jezreel, and the name projected the image of bloodshed. The message of the first son was directed to the royal household. His name was a reference to the massacre that took place in Jezreel when the elders and guardians of Ahab’s children slaughtered 70 princes in response to Jehu’s request.

The second child was named Lo-ruhamah, which meant “no longer loved”. That message was for the entire nation of Israel. Because of her unfaithfulness, she would no longer see the blessings which she experienced as a faithful nation.

The third child was named Lo-ammi, which means “not my people”. Because of their sins, the Israelites will no longer be

God's people. Because they had broken the covenant and He was no longer their God, neither were they His people.

5. Hosea and Gomer gave their children specific names. Each name had a significant message. What message was intended by each of those names? (1:2-11)
6. Hosea says that the Lord will "break Israel's bow". What message will the broken bow send to the Israelites?
7. In what way has God shown you that He is powerful and is able to do anything that He wants to do?



Hosea 8: 1-6

Trusting in Wrong Things

The Israelites were God's "chosen people" with whom He made a covenant. He promised that the Israelites would have many descendants, that God would provide them with land and that His people would be a blessing to others. The Israelites broke the covenant, failing to trust and serve God faithfully.

When the Israelites built the golden calf, they broke the second command that was given to them in the law. Not only did they worship the golden calf at Mt. Sinai, but Jeroboam built golden calves and placed them at Bethel and Dan (in northern Israel) for the people to worship. The Israelites traded faith in an almighty God for a visible, powerless piece of clay, wood or metal. Although God continued to show love and patience toward Israel, they looked for security and salvation in other places, forming treaties with surrounding nations.

8. List some of the ways that the Israelites offended God. (see vs. 10, 11)
9. What are some ways that God continued to demonstrate His faithfulness in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness?
10. What things divert you from being able to focus on God in your worship?



11. There are times in our lives when we don't feel God's presence. How has God shown you His presence and His love?



Hosea 14:1-9

Hope for the Future

It appeared that the end of northern Israel as a nation was near. It was a time when there was little hope. Although destined to destruction for her behaviour, God's love and compassion allowed Israel another chance.

In verses 2 and 3, Hosea gives the Israelites the words to pray as they seek forgiveness from God and relief from the Assyrian threat. God promises to respond with compassion and forgiveness. God continues to love the Israelites in spite of their unfaithfulness to him.

12. Was Hosea's prophecy of destruction inevitable for the Israelites? What needed to happen for it to be avoided?
13. What purpose does Hosea have by ending his book on a hopeful note?
14. On what can we base our hope in times of trouble?

Faith and Obedience

The Israelites were a nation that once believed and had faith in Yahweh. Hosea demonstrates how the Israelites became a nation that no longer trusted in God, how they placed their faith in idols, other nations and themselves instead.

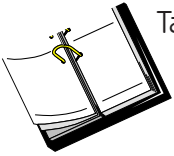
As Christians, there are times when it is easy to lose faith in God and the power that He can have in our lives. Through the hard times, we often feel like going our own ways.

15. What can we learn from the mistakes of the Israelites?
16. When you follow another vehicle in a blizzard, there are times when you can't see the road, and yet you keep pressing on

while watching the tail lights ahead of you. When were there times in your life that you simply had to trust God to get you through?

17. List some occasions in your life when it has been difficult to follow God's word.
18. Does faithfulness to God come easier or harder at certain times of the week?
Share a time when you have experienced God's faithfulness during a time of difficulty and discouragement.

Through this week...



Take note of God's compassion and forgiveness to you.

Consider your day to day faithfulness to God.



2 LESSON

A GOD of COMPASSION and BLESSING

BY MATTHEW FUNK

Joel

KEY VERSE “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 he relents from sending calamity.” Joel 2:13



God’s judgement on Judah resulted from their disobedience. The mercy and blessing He showed them was because of their repentance.

Life Response

That we exam our own lives for examples of God’s compassion and blessing, and realize the joy that comes from a right relationship with God.

A few years ago Christy went to Russia for summer missions. Her group, consisting of students from around the world, spent most of their time distributing tracts and doing street evangelism. Due to a weak Russian economy, the group had poor living conditions and a meager food supply. Consequently they had to be satisfied with eating simple meals, often consisting only of bread and butter. The bread was good, but with only butter it became quite bland after a while and they longed for the simple taste of jam.

One morning, after several in the group commented on their desire for jam, they decided to pray about it. Even though it

seemed like an insignificant thing to pray about, they decided to do it anyway. Not much more was thought about it, but throughout the day they received answers to their prayer. They received five different visitors that day, and each one of them brought a jar of jam for the group! Christy and her group witnessed a direct answer to prayer, and felt the mighty hand of God move in a seemingly small and insignificant situation.

1. How do you think the students felt as they prayed for the jam? What expectations may they have had?
2. How would you feel in that situation? What insignificant things have you prayed for?
3. List some examples in your life when God has answered your seemingly small and insignificant request.



Joel 1:2-20

Plague of Locusts

Joel chapter 1 speaks of a destructive locust plague in Judah, and the resulting cry to the Lord by the people. The prophet uses the locusts to symbolize a coming judgement on Judah. Verse 3 describes the locusts in four different waves. This could refer to different types of locusts, but more likely refers to the differing stages in the physical development of one locust species. In any event, the author intends the reader to see the vast devastation that resulted.

Joel chooses to address three different groups with his prophecy: the drinkers of wine, the priests and the farmers. He chooses these three groups to illustrate how the disaster would effect everyone. Obviously the drinkers of wine would be affected by the loss of wine producing crops, but why would the priests be affected? Because of the plague, the products needed for sacrifice (grain, wine and oil) were destroyed, leaving the priests incapable of offering sacrifices to God. This was a reminder of the separation of the people from God. To illustrate the depth of their mourning, Joel compares them to a virgin grieving for her husband who dies

before the honeymoon night. Farmers are the third group to be affected, losing their only form of livelihood.

In verse 6 Joel compares the locusts to lions, signifying the power of the attack. He says that the locusts stripped the bark off trees. As a result the branches appear white and the tree is left to die.

Not only were the people affected outwardly, but Joel mentions that all joy disappeared as a result of their disobedience. From this we are reminded that joy comes as a result of being in a right relationship with God.

4. In what ways are the locusts a fitting symbol of God's punishment on the people?
5. In verse 3, Joel tells the people to pass this story on to the next generation. Why do you think it was so important that the story be remembered?
6. Verses 12 and 16 both refer to Judah's loss of joy as a result of disobedience and rebellion. Is lack of joy evident in our culture? In what ways is it visible?



Joel 2:12-17

Return to God

This section explains God's requirements for relief from the disaster. Repentance is obviously the key, but the important point is that the people show a change of heart, and not merely make a show of symbols. If they do this, God will show His compassion and relent from sending the disaster.

Verses 15-17 represents a call to public repentance. Verse 16 makes reference to those mothers who are nursing. The custom was to exempt nursing mothers from cultural gatherings, but the important nature of this meeting overruled cultural customs. Reference is also made to the bridegroom. At that time both betrothed and newly married men were exempt from all events, including military duty, yet they were not exempt from this assembly. This shows the extreme need for repentance and the urgency of the situation.

In verse 17 the priests are told to weep “between the porch and the altar”. This was where the priests would go to meditate between the people and God. They were moved to plead Judah’s case before God.

7. Is public repentance a “thing of the past”? What use did it serve?
8. Although the specific reasons for punishment are not given, what do verses 12-14 suggest the people are guilty of?
9. What were some symbols which the people of Judah used to display their repentance? In what ways do we demonstrate repentance today?



Joel 2:18-32

Blessings

Verses 18-32 show the result of the people’s response to God’s plea to “return to the Lord your God” (verses 12-13). God’s love for his people was being shown through wrath, and when they repented, his love continued, but was now shown through compassion and blessing. Verse 20 informs us of the size of the locust plague by referring to its smell. Anyone who has walked along a beach during fish fly season can attest to Joel’s description of the stench left behind by the decaying locusts.

Verses 21-27 show a complete restoration in Judah. In the same way that everything had been affected by the locusts, everything will be affected by God’s provision. The land, animals and people will all flourish. This includes the restoration of supplies of grain, wine and oil, symbolizing a renewed covenant with God. There would be a return of the joy and peace the people had lost. This inner renewal was perhaps more important than the outer signs of repentance.

Verses 28-30 describe some of the future blessings of the Lord. These include the Holy Spirit coming upon everyone. In early days only the spiritual leaders received this gift; now it

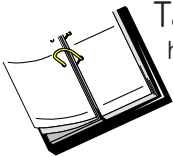


is obvious that everyone will receive it: men, women, young, old, slave and master.

10. In response to Judah's repentance, God, in compassion, removes the locusts and blesses the people bountifully. In what ways have you experienced God's blessing as a result of repentance. Name outward, tangible as well as inward examples.
11. God's love was being shown to the people all along (first through wrath, and later through compassion and blessing). When in your life have you experienced God's love through hard times? Through good times?

(We need to remember that the physical blessings from God are great, but the real blessing comes from being in His presence and sharing a covenant with Him. When we realize this, we will find it easier to be truly thankful for the many blessings He has given us.)
12. Sometimes it's not until God allows something to be taken from us that we realize His blessing. What are some things that God has given us which we can easily overlook as blessings?

Through this week...



Take time to be thankful for the many blessings you have, and remember to turn your heart toward God.

Renew your covenant with him through prayer. The result will be renewed joy and blessings beyond imagination.

3 LESSON

A Heart Condition

BY BECKY BUHLER

Amos

KEY VERSE "Seek the Lord and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it. You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground."

Amos 5:6-7



Israel assumed that if their outward expression of worship was right, then treatment of others did not matter, and God would still bless them.

Life Response

That we realize our heart attitude is revealed by our action and that truly loving God means loving our neighbours as well.

W

hen my family lived in Rio de Janeiro, I owned a ham radio. I kept it in the utility room on top of the freezer. When we travelled, I always unplugged the radio and disconnected the antenna.

Once, when we were leaving for a week-long trip, I remembered I hadn't unplugged the radio. I ran back into the house, pulled the plug and dashed out again.

But I pulled the wrong plug. I unplugged the freezer...for seven days, then, a freezer full of food sat in a sweltering apartment with the power off.

When we came home,...guess who got fingered as the one who had unplugged the freezer—and who would therefore be responsible for cleaning it? You got it. So I got to work.

What is the best way to clean out a rotten interior? I knew exactly what to do. I got a rag and a bucket of soapy water and began cleaning the outside of the appliance. I was sure the odour would disappear with a good shine, so I polished and buffed and wiped. When I was through, the freezer could have passed a Marine boot-camp inspection. It was sparkling. But when I opened the door, that freezer was revolting.

-Max Lucado

1. Why did Max only clean the outside of the freezer instead of actually solving the problem of the smell? What assumptions did he make?
2. What are some areas in our lives where we find it easier to “clean up” on the “outside” in order to avoid the effort of changing what is on the “inside”?



Amos 2:6-16

A Bad Case of Materialism

This passage contrasts God’s faithfulness and Israel’s unfaithful behaviour. While Yahweh remained faithful, the Israelites took advantage of those among them who were unable to defend themselves. God’s accusation against Israel must have taken them by surprise. Just recently, Israel had expanded its borders, and was now enjoying a period of prosperity. They saw this as God’s blessing on His holy people. The prophet Amos’ reminder of God’s goodness to Israel begs the question: “Why would Israel rebel against God instead of following him by showing the same kindness and mercy to their fellow man that He had shown to them?” As Israel enjoyed more and more successes, her dependence on God shrank, and spiritual decay increased.

3. What reasons does God list for punishing the Israelites? (vv. 6-8) Note: the phrase “for three sins, even for four” is a way of saying that this list is not intended to be complete.
4. Why was it considered a sin for people to sleep on an article of clothing taken in pledge (Exodus 22:26, 27)?

5. Why did the prophet include the acts of God in 2:9,10?



Amos 5:1-17

A Funeral For Israel

In this passage, Amos sings a funeral song for Israel! In doing this he hopes to awaken the nation to its true status: it is dead spiritually, with physical destruction to follow if they do not heed the call to repentance found in vv. 14-15. Israel was enjoying a period of peace and prosperity. The Israelite army was strong, as was the political situation as a whole. Jeroboam II, Israel's king, had brought prosperity to the nation. There were no major threats from the surrounding nations. Feeling that everything was going well and with no evident impending doom, the news that they would be destroyed did not sound very plausible.

6. Even though Bethel and Gilgal were traditional places of worship, God told the Israelites not to go there. What are some possible reasons for this command?
7. In v.8-9 Amos speaks of God's awesome power to destroy as well as to create. What possible effects would this have had on his listeners?
8. What are the Israelites commanded to do in order to live? What would obedience to this command have involved for the people?



Amos 5:20-27

The Heart of the Matter

In this passage God speaks of His hatred toward the acts of "worship" that the Israelites performed. The reason for this is that they are empty of meaning, acts done only to ensure that their state of prosperity will continue. As in the worship of the false gods, the Israelites thought that worship

was a magic formula to invoke God's blessing upon their lives. They had obviously forgotten I Samuel 16:7 which clearly states that God has the power to see person's hidden motives. Amos refers the Israelites back to the time in the wilderness when God blessed Israel despite the fact that they did not bring offerings. In so doing, God reminds them, through Amos, that the forms and rituals of worship are not a sure method of securing His blessing on their lives. Israel's failure to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) is shown to be a direct result of their failure to "love God the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5).

9. In what ways did Israel fail to meet God's requirements regarding worship? What would be the consequences for this failure?
10. Did the people sin by not bringing offerings to God in the wilderness? Why or why not? What was the sin that the people were now committing as described in v. 26?
11. In what ways is our worship today empty of meaning? Why?

Life Application

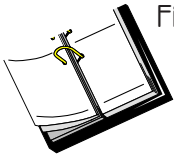
The Israelites thought that they had God's blessing because the land was experiencing prosperity, when in fact He was very displeased with their exploitation of the poor.

As Christians in North America, we can fall into the same trap of thinking all is right inwardly because we are, in general, a prosperous people. While easy to fall into, it is often difficult to be delivered from it. We must learn to use our resources, not to oppress the poor as the Israelites did, but to help those who are needy, just as God helps and provides, both spiritually and physically, for us in our need. However, our ministry to those in need should not be done out of a sense of duty or an attempt to impress God or others but from an overflow of love in our own hearts for people and for God.

12. What are some areas in which we find it easier to show love to our neighbour? In what areas do we struggle with this?
13. Can you think of any blessings you have received as a result of living a life of worship?

14. Think about the people with whom you interact every day (those you work with, see daily on the bus, etc.). What are some ways they are oppressed both spiritually and by society? What can you personally do to manifest Christ to them, to minister to them as an outward expression of the love you have for God?

Through this week...



Find new ways to show love to your “neighbours”.

ASK God to help you with the more difficult ones.

4

LESSON

The Pride Of A Nation

BY SHELDON DUECK

Obadiah

Key Verse "The Day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own heads. Obadiah 15



Although Judah had taken advantage of Edom in the past, Edom was accountable for refusing to help her.

Life Response

That we recognize areas where we allow past differences to keep us from loving others today.



On the evening of April 14, 1912 11:40 p.m. a tragedy occurred. The highly touted maiden voyage of the Titanic came to an abrupt end. Striking an iceberg in the frigid Atlantic waters caused the luxury liner to sink to the ocean floor.

The Titanic had been billed as the safest and most luxurious ocean-liner ever built. It was an amazingly large boat, 269 meters in length. Most of the people of that time boasted that it was unsinkable because the hull was divided into 16 watertight compartments. Even if two of those compartments would flood, the ship could stay afloat. On that fateful day, six of the sixteen compartments flooded with water. Only seven hundred passengers survived to tell their story. Fifteen

hundred people drowned in the disaster. The captain of the Titanic went down with the ship, still believing he could save his vessel.

1. Place yourself in the people's shoes before boarding. How would you have felt about getting on that ship?
2. What would have been your immediate response when told that the ship was sinking? Why?
3. What new technology/inventions do we boast about today which fill us with pride and confidence in what we can do? What assumptions do we have?
4. How do we feel when that technology/invention breaks down?



Obadiah 1-9

The Destruction of Edom

In the book of Obadiah, the prophet speaks about the impending destruction of Edom. A state located just southeast of the Dead Sea, Edom had natural protection making it easily defensible. The Dead Sea provided a strong defence for the state. Desert protected the eastern and southern borders and Judah was to the west.

Although the date of writing is unsure, some people believe that since Judah fell to the Babylonian Empire around 586 BC and Edom had been terrorising the survivors of the war, God sent Obadiah to prophecy to the Edomites about this time. Obadiah prophesies the destruction that will happen to them when the day of the Lord comes.

Edom's cities were located high up in their mountainous strongholds. The cliff which enemies would have to scale rose up 1000 feet. Since this was so difficult, Edom could watch the only entrance into their city with little else to worry about.

Edom, secure, high on their mountains and rocky strongholds, believed that no country would be able to uproot the

nation. They were very proud of their country's wealth and their many evil deeds.

5. What causes the arrogance of the Edomite people?
6. In what ways does Obadiah describe the severity of God's punishment?



Obadiah 10-14

The Judgement of Edom

According to Genesis 25:30 the people of Edom were the descendants of Esau. This opens up a rivalry from ages past where Jacob's line of descendants are sorely hated by Esau's descendants.

The rivalry between Esau and Jacob stems from the time when Jacob blackmailed Esau for the birthright. This was why Judah (Jacob's descendants) was hated by Edom (Esau's descendants). This hatred resurfaces when the Edomites rejoice over the misfortune of Judah as seen in this book.

This passage talks about a time when Judah is being attacked. The Edomites saw this as a cause for celebration. "As you have done, so will it be done to you" Obadiah warns them in verse 15. Although Christ would quote a form of this in Matthew 7:12, Obadiah prophesies that this will be the treatment which Edom will receive.

7. In verse 10 Edom is accused of violence against Jacob. What violent act are they accused of in verses 11-12? How is this different from verses 13-14?
8. Why did Esau's descendants hate Jacob's descendants? Check Genesis 25:30-33, 27:36.
9. In what way can Edom's punishment be seen as fair?



Judah's Hope

Obadiah concludes his message to Edom with a prophecy about how Edom will be destroyed. It seems that the conquered will become the conquerors (vs 18). While the people of Edom will face judgement, Judah will experience deliverance. It speaks about how God will punish the one who does evil.

While many may argue that evil is never judged, God shows in this book that this is not true. He told Edom, a very wicked nation, that they would be destroyed because of all the evil they had done. Edom, though they had escaped immediate consequences of their evil deeds, in the end received God's judgement.

The book of Obadiah ends with a positive message. It anticipates the coming of the Lord's kingdom by those who believe in him. However, Edom is an evil nation and this territory will eventually be taken over by the Lord's people.

We often think that as Christians we are exempt from the messages that such books bring. However, we fail to realise that we can be as much to blame as the Edomites. Have you ever done something to a friend and been too proud to admit that you were wrong? That is much the same as what the Edomites were facing. They were not aware of the severe punishment they would experience in the near future.

10. What does Obadiah mean in verses 17-18 when he speaks about Mount Zion as a deliverance and the house of Jacob as a fire?
11. In what ways is our attitude of self-confidence like that of Edom? How is it portrayed?
12. In what ways do we demonstrate an unwillingness to forgive other individuals or groups?

LESSON 5

Jonah vs God

BY IKE UNGER

Jonah

Key Verse "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened." Jonah 3:10



God has a great love for all people. He desires that all would find salvation.

Life Response

That we understand God's compassion on our own lives and desire that others experience that same compassion.

The more he thought about it, the less sense it made. He could remember what he was told to do, but how did he end up in this situation. There sat Chris, just a few feet away from his father, a big man. Through Chris' eyes, his father looked like a giant. The only thing running through Chris' mind was, "Why didn't I do what he told me to do."

It all started the day before. Chris was told by his father that he could go to his friend's house for a short while and that he was to be home by 11 p.m. It sounded so simple as he thought about it now. Yesterday, however, it had been an impossible thing to do. When he got to his friends' house, they told him that they were going out that night and would have "lots of fun". Chris knew what this meant and also knew that his parents had told him many times not to get involved .

Now, here he was. The police had just brought him home, and told his father that Chris was being charged for using an

illegal substance. It was the first time that Chris had ever let loose like this. He knew that drugs were harmful, and that it was wrong to use them, but that hadn't been enough that last night.

Chris was not prepared for his father's response. His father looked Chris in the eye and said "I forgive you". He went on to explain that he hoped Chris had learned his lesson.

1. What thoughts might have been going through Chris' father's mind as he considered his response?
2. How might Chris' father's response affect his relationship with Chris?
3. How would reflecting on his own teenage years have helped Chris' father in choosing a response?



Jonah 1:1-17

JONAH FLEES GOD

When God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah flees instead to Tarshish. He would rather see the Ninevites destroyed than receive God's mercy. Jonah took off in the opposite direction of Nineveh and boarded a ship at Joppa, setting sail for Tarshish.

Why was Jonah so set on seeing these people destroyed? The people of Israel saw Nineveh as a threat and also as an enemy. Nineveh, at this time, was a great city. So instead of loving his enemies, Jonah wished them to be destroyed. Jonah tries to run from God, but, as the story illustrates, it is not that easy.

Nineveh was known for its size. Jonah 3:3 mentions that it took three days to walk through the entire city. The circumference of the city was about sixty miles. It contained a population of well over 1 million. A city that size would likely have a rather large army.

Jonah runs in the opposite direction. God sends a great storm to stop Jonah from making his journey, and forces him to take responsibility for what was happening in his life.



4. How much choice does Jonah have as to whether he will go to Nineveh?
5. What was God trying to teach Jonah?
6. What can we learn about God in this chapter?
7. Discuss the sailors' response to the storm.



Jonah 2:1-10

JONAH'S CONFESSION

Now it's time for Jonah to think about what is happening. One minute he was fast asleep, the next he was questioned, then thrown overboard at his own command, and now he is inside a fish. By this time Jonah starts to feel defeated. Suddenly, going to Nineveh didn't seem like such a bad idea. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. During this time he recommits himself to doing what God had initially told him to do. When God commands the fish to vomit Jonah up, he is again instructed to go to Nineveh.

This chapter is a reminder that even though we disobey God, He still shows mercy and compassion when we call out to Him. Jonah is confident of this when he prays to God from the belly of the fish. However, did Jonah really have a change of heart? He still saw himself as better than the pagans (2:8-9), and his response to Nineveh's repentance doesn't appear very righteous (4:1-3). Jonah is angry when God doesn't destroy Nineveh. It appears that he was hoping that the people would not relent, and God would destroy the city. While God's compassion on him in the belly of the fish seemed fair, he couldn't stand the thought of God showing mercy to wicked Nineveh.

8. Why does Jonah cry out to the Lord? In what manner does he pray?
9. What promise does Jonah make to God while in the fish?
10. What do we learn about God through Jonah's prayer?



Jonah 3:3-5; 3:10-4:11

JONAH'S REMORSE

Jonah went to Nineveh and preached to the people, telling them what God had commanded him to say. Just as Jonah feared, the people repented and turned from their sin. As a result God did not destroy them. It is interesting to see the sudden change in the hearts of those who lived in Nineveh; even the king put on sackcloth and decreed that all should bow down before God and pray for deliverance. God had already been at work in the hearts of the people long before Jonah prophesied.

In chapter four we see Jonah express his anger at God's compassion on the people of Nineveh. Although God had saved Jonah when he disobeyed, Jonah did not seem to think that the people of Nineveh deserved the same mercy. Jonah is so depressed and furious that he wants God to take his life.

11. Who was shown greater mercy, Jonah or the city of Nineveh?
12. Why did Jonah want to die?
13. What was Jonah's role in bringing salvation to Nineveh?

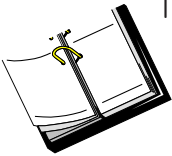
Here is a prophet who has just been given the honour of saving many people, and what does he do? He curses being alive. Jonah still wanted the people of Nineveh destroyed, and is angry at God for showing those people mercy.

Considering this, why should God show Jonah any mercy? Jonah very quickly forgot the sin he committed and the mercy he was shown by God and wanted Him to show Nineveh no mercy. He refused to acknowledge that he was a sinner just as they were.

14. What can we learn from Jonah's response to God's compassion in his own life and in the lives of others?
15. Compare Jonah with Matthew 18:21-35.

16. What kind of people, or groups of people, do we feel don't "deserve" to be evangelized?
17. How do we run from God today, and how does God respond to it?

Through this week...



Think about the people with whom you have contact.

Are these people saved, or do you have biases or fears that keep you from telling them about the gospel? It is easy to keep Christ to ourselves and not share him with those with whom we have contact. Do you have a deep love for those who are not saved? Letting God work in our lives sometimes means making ourselves vulnerable, and giving up our own plans in order to do what he wants.

Rejoice with those who receive forgiveness. It is easy for us to want what is "good" for us, and not make many sacrifices for other people. Would we rejoice if told that a person who had been our "foe" had come to know the Lord as their Saviour? Which direction is "Tarshish" for you?

Share Christ freely. The New Testament (Roman 3:23) tells us that all have sinned and therefore we all need forgiveness. Is there a person in your life who needs to know about Jesus Christ and receive his compassion? What can you do about it?

6

LESSON

A Gracious God

BY CORRIE THIESSEN

Micah

Key Verse "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8



God is going to judge the people because of the perversion of worship practices and the injustice displayed toward the poor. The hope for the future is based on the uniqueness of God.

Life Response

That by realizing the relationship between right actions and a right relationship with God, we will be motivated to act out of pure motives.

Plato stated : "...it is by justice that we can authentically measure a man's value or his nullity... the absence of justice is the absence of what makes him man." These words are illustrated in John Griffin's book [Black Like Me](#), in which a young white man changes his skin colour in order to experience the life of an African American in the depths of Mississippi. His experience included the following unjust treatment: not being allowed to leave a bus at a rest stop while whites filed past him, being hated simply for the colour of his skin and being asked by a white man to leave a park that was desegregated.

The distress caused to the African American by the white American is summed up in these words: "...we've reached a poor state when people are afraid that doing the decent and



right thing is going to help the communist conspiracy.’ But as African Americans we have the responsibility to love, ‘God tells us straight – we’ve got to love them, no ifs, ands, and buts about it’.”

1. Discuss Plato’s claim that we can measure a man’s value by justice, and “the absence of justice is the absence of what makes him man.”
2. How would you have reacted in the situations Griffin encountered?
3. List some examples where you have observed someone acting justly.



Micah 2:1-5; 3:1-7

INJUSTICE TOWARD OTHERS

Micah’s oracles of doom focus on two major themes: injustice (or the oppression of the poor) and religious perversion. Micah has been referred to as the “small town prophet”. In 1:1-16, he names several places that will be affected by the judgment brought on by the corruption of Samaria and Jerusalem. He protests vehemently against the exploitation and oppression of the underprivileged by the rich upper class.

In chapter 3, the leadership of Judah, whose duty was to promote justice and defend the covenant, are described as those who “eat my people’s flesh” (v.3). As a result, God will not answer their cry (v.4).

Micah implies that disobedience brings about a separation from God. Micah compares his search for godly people in Judah with looking for summer fruit in fall (7:1). The godly, as the fruit, are nowhere to be found. Chapter 7 also alludes to the disintegration of the family as a result of corruption.

4. What reasons are given in these verses for the coming disaster?
5. Micah addresses the actions of the leaders of Samaria and Jerusalem in ch.3. What accusations does he make against them?

6. In what ways do the actions of leaders affect family relationships today?



Micah 2:6-11; 3:5-11; 6:16, 7:1-20

RELIGIOUS PERVERSION

The second theme in Micah's oracles of doom is religious perversion or empty ritualism. He denounces the people for their resistance to the prophetic word, especially when it is a message of doom (2:6-11). He then singles out prophets who deliver empty, false messages (3:5-7,11). Micah separates himself from the diviners who are paid to prophecy (3:11), whose oracles depend on the amount of money they receive.

It is interesting that though the prophets spoke falsely, they were relying on the expected presence of God in the very temple they defamed. In response (3:12) God says he will level the temple of Jerusalem.

Micah 6:16 compares Israel to Omri and Ahab, two wicked kings whose actions led to widespread Baal worship, leading to northern Israel's demise.

7. Even when the prophets spoke falsely, they intended to be received by the LORD in His temple. Is this evident among us today? In what ways do we "prophesy" falsely, by words or actions?
8. Omri and Ahab are known for being responsible for the religious decay in Israel through their evil worship practices. What positive worship practices, demonstrated by people you know, have led you into a fuller relationship with God?
9. God's message to us is not simply to inform us, but to call us to a life of worship and obedience which celebrates Him. How does Micah 6:8 lead us to this point?



Micah 4:1-13; 7:8-20

HOPE

Micah writes of hope for the future when the covenant ideal will be fully realized in contrast to the present situation of religious and social degradation.

Chapter 4 provides a picture of hope for the return from the coming exile; a time when peace, prosperity, security, and unerring devotion to God are prevalent. Verse 4 speaks directly to the security of Micah's own countrymen, whose land has been taken by the wealthy. The fig tree and the vine in verse 4 are symbols of the peace, security, and contentment that have disappeared.

The lame and the exiles will be given a prominent place in the new era. They will be the people of God, a remnant, a strong nation. They will rule as lions in a herd of sheep, in triumph over the nations. Justice will return to Judah, and order will be restored.

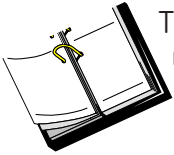
While Judah does have opportunity to return to their land after the exile, they never see this picture of restoration completely fulfilled. When Christ comes, peace does come (although in a different form than they were expecting). Justice also returns. The weak, young, lame, and social outcasts also receive equal treatment as Jesus relates to them.

The hope of the future is not found in the repentance of the people but in the intervention of the coming king. When Christ came, God acted by shaming the enemy, executing judgment, and shepherding His people. It is not Israel's character that creates hope for the future, but God's character.

10. The fig tree and the vine were symbolic to the people of Micah's time for peace, security, and contentment. What symbols represent this today?
11. It is clear that God punished the people because of their sin and rebellion (1:3-5; 3:12; 2:3; 6:13). However, the hope of the future comes through God's actions and not as a result of an action by the people. How would you explain this?

12. If this redeeming action of Christ is not a result of our actions, what are we to do in response to the requirements of God in Micah 6:8?

Through this week...



Think of some ways in which you can act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.

Write them down and check up on yourself at the end of the week.

7

LESSON

“Trust in Him!”

BY DONAVAN FRIESEN

Nahum

Key Verse “The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness. Nahum 1:7-8



God, through his sovereignty, loves and protects his people.

Life Response

That we learn to put complete trust in God. To believe that God protects those who trust in Him.

The passengers on the train were uneasy as they sped along through the dark, stormy night. The lightning was flashing, black clouds were rolling and the train was travelling fast. The fear and tension among the passengers was tangible.

One little fellow, however, sitting all by himself, seemed utterly unaware of the storm or the speed of the train. He was amusing himself with a few toys.

One of the passengers spoke to him. Sonny, I see you are alone on the train. Aren't you afraid to travel alone on such a stormy night?

The lad looked up with a smile and answered, “No ma’am, I ain’t afraid. My daddy’s the engineer”.

1. What was it that kept the young boy feeling safe, even though everyone else was afraid?

2. How was the confidence of the boy visible to others on the train?
3. The engineer of the train had built up a trust with his young son. How have you seen such trust expressed toward other people and toward God?



Nahum 1:2-8

God's Sovereignty

God's power is demonstrated through some of His great manifestations. In verse four we see a description of God's creation being reversed; the seas and the rivers run dry. Bashan, Carmel and Lebanon all wither. These three places were widely known for their fertility, fine trees, and large vineyards. They were well watered, immune to drought or blight. Nahum is showing that Yahweh is sovereign over all creation and capable of exercising his authority in it (Amos 1:2). Everything that is in the world, mountains, hills, seas, rivers, trembles at the sight of God. God has power over all. God shows anger against His enemies, and they will experience darkness and flood. In Nahum the "enemy" is Nineveh. Nineveh was once light, but now has turned to darkness. Nineveh will be destroyed, plunged into complete darkness.

4. Why do you think Nahum begins his book by portraying God as "mighty, angry and powerful"? (1:2-3)
5. Nahum 1:4 describes the seas, rivers, mountains, hills and the earth that are subject to the power of God. What other things are subject to the power of God?



Nahum 1:7-15

Friend of Foe?

In this section, Nineveh and Judah are compared. Judah, enjoying a time of spiritual reform under King Josiah, is de-

scribed as the place for which the Lord cares (v.7). Nineveh, known for her wickedness and brutal treatment of conquered enemies, is the city on which the Lord visits His wrath and judgment (v.8). In this passage, Nahum portrays God as compassionate as well as one who will bring judgment. He is a God of wrath and judgment, but He is also a loving and holy God. Although no one can stand against Him, He protects and cares for those who seek Him for refuge.

6. Why is it important for Nahum to portray both the compassionate and wrathful sides of God's character?
7. What has Nineveh done that makes the Lord so angry? (v.8)
8. List some examples of times in your life when you did not trust God completely, and yet He still proved His faithfulness to you?



Nahum 2:1-10

Look to God

Nineveh was prophesied to earlier by Jonah. They responded by repenting in dust and ashes. Their repentance did not last long. Shortly thereafter, Nineveh continued her "down hill" slide. In 2:1 we hear sarcasm in Nahum's voice. He is telling Nineveh to "guard their city", to "watch the road", to "brace themselves", and to "marshal all of their strength". Nahum taunts Nineveh, knowing full well that these things will not help Nineveh to defend itself against God. If God wants to destroy Nineveh, He will. There is nothing that Nineveh can do for protection.

In verse two there is complete reversal. The Lord will restore Jacob's line, like the splendour of Israel. At this time, they are not yet restored. No doubt, the people often heard about the "good old days" (when David was king, and Israel was a healthy united nation). Nahum tells Judah that this is what will happen to them. The fall of Assyria will bring relief from the heavy taxation which had been levied by the rulers.

9. Why is Judah shown God's grace? What is the result of God's grace? (2:1-2)
10. Why is Nineveh not given any hope? Is it too late for Nineveh to repent? (Vs. 2:8; 3:5-7)

A family was awakened by their smoke detector in the middle of the night to discover that their house was on fire. The father ran into the upstairs bedroom of his children and carried his eighteen-month-old baby in his arms while dragging his four-year-old by the hand.

They were halfway down the stairs when the little boy remembered that he had left his teddy bear in the bedroom, so he broke free from his father's hand and ran back to the bedroom to retrieve it. In the flurry and confusion, the father didn't notice that his son wasn't with him until he got outside. By now the little boy was trapped by the flames and smoke in his second-story bedroom. Smoke swirled around him and he coughed and cried out from the upstairs window, "Daddy, Daddy! Help Me!"

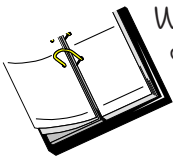
His father yelled from below, "Jump out of the window, Andy, I'll catch you."

In the darkness and smoke, the little boy yelled back, "But Daddy, I can't see you!"

Daddy shouted back, "That's okay, son. I can see you—jump."

11. How can we learn to trust our Heavenly Father the way Andy needed to trust his Dad?

Through this week...



Write down ways you can put your trust in God more completely.

Check-up on yourself at the end of the week.

LESSON

A Prophet Questions God

BY STACY BARKMAN

Habakkuk

Key Verse “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.” Habakkuk 3:17-18



Habakkuk seeks answers from God regarding the evil that was happening around him, seemingly unchecked.

Life Response

That we seek God and are reassured of His presence even when life seems unfair.

Jeff and Linda graduated from Bible College, eager to practice what they had learned. Married just a year earlier, they left college, wondering what they would do next. In late July, a missionary reported in their church about an opportunity with Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) in Burkina Faso. It was something that would utilize both Jeff and Linda's strengths, and so they decided to ask a few more questions. Inviting the missionary over for supper that week, they asked many questions. Their biggest concern was the health of Linda's aging parents. With only four weeks before the mission needed them on the field, things had to proceed quickly. They applied to the mission and received their acceptance within a week. Their financial and church support

confirmed, they booked their airline tickets and applied for passports. Within a month of first hearing about the opportunity, Jeff and Linda set foot on Burkina Faso soil, convinced that only God's leading could have brought about all the conditions so quickly.

Only two months after their arrival, they received the shocking news that Linda's father had a stroke. It didn't seem fair. Why did it have to happen this year? Why did God guide us here for this? Why...Why? As they searched for answers, Jim's father wrote them a letter, reminding them that "The same God who gave you peace about moving to Burkina Faso also knew that your Dad would get sick – and still He chose to give you peace." That letter helped reassure Jim and Linda of God's presence at all times, whether or not it appeared that way on the surface.

1. What would have been your initial reaction if you had received such news?
2. What is your first reaction when it doesn't appear that life is "fair"?
3. Share a situation in your life in which it was difficult to comprehend that God was in control?



Habakkuk 1: 1-11

Habakkuk Questions God

Habakkuk lived in Judah towards the end of the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC), and during the reign of King Jehoiakim (609-598 BC). During Habakkuk's preaching, Babylon was becoming the dominant world power, overtaking the Assyrians. They had cruelly treated and destroyed the nations around them.

Jehoiakim was a cruel and corrupt king. During his reign, Judah was making alliances with other nations and there was much social injustice in the country. Habakkuk cried out for justice to be served.



4. What is the main question that Habakkuk is asking in these verses?
5. What is God's response to Habakkuk's question?
6. In what were the Babylonians trusting?
7. What situations cause you to ask God the question in v.3: "Why do you tolerate wrong?"



Habakkuk 1: 12-13, 2: 2-20

Habakkuk Questions God Again

Having received an answer to his first question, Habakkuk asks God a second question. Not understanding the methods God uses, Habakkuk asks how God could use a nation more wicked than Judah to punish them.

In spite of this, Habakkuk's confidence in God is not shaken. He is confident that God will not let the Babylonians completely destroy Judah. Habakkuk begins and ends this section with a confident declaration of the sovereignty of God. Confident that God is holy and pure, Habakkuk recognizes that He cannot stand evil. Because of His nature, God will deliver justice. In chapter 2:3 God says that He will act, reminding Habakkuk to be patient because it will happen at "the appointed time".

8. What is Habakkuk's second question as outlined in ch. 1:12-13?
9. How does God answer?
10. Look at the five "woes" in 2:6,9,12,15,19. What types of evil were being addressed and what consequence is related to each?



Habakkuk 3:1-7, 16-19

Habakkuk's Response to God

In the third and final chapter, Habakkuk concludes his debate with God. In the first two verses Habakkuk stands in awe of God, asking Him to bring a revival to Judah. He begs God to renew His great deeds as He did in the past. Habakkuk recalls events like the Exodus, the plagues, military victories, the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea and similar events. He ends his prayer with a confession of complete trust and faith in God. He trusts that, although Babylon will probably leave Judah bare and desolate, God will ultimately deliver His people and restore them to Himself. Habakkuk believes that hope and joy will one day be a characteristic of Israelite life. After receiving answers to his questions, Habakkuk declares his trust in God and acknowledges that God's ways are best.

11. After asking God to give an explanation for what He does, what is Habakkuk's response?
12. How does Habakkuk's response demonstrate that He understands God's answers?
13. What were some reasons why Habakkuk could still trust God so completely?

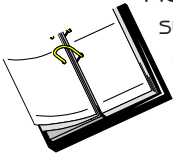
Life Application

As Christians, we don't always understand why God does the things He does, nor why He allows the things He allows. We must remind ourselves of the times in our lives when God has delivered us and proven faithful and trustworthy.

14. Share some struggles that have caused you to question God. Did you feel as though you received an answer?
15. What was your response to God's answer (or lack thereof)?
16. When God's answers don't seem evident, or we don't understand, how should we respond?

Habakkuk sets a good example of how we are to respond to God when he does things that we don't understand. He sought after God and put his whole trust in Him. When we don't understand God's ways, it helps to remind ourselves of His faithfulness throughout history. In times of struggle we need to seek God and be comforted by His presence. He has promised that He will always be with us: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

Through this week...



Rejoice in God's goodness even though, on the surface, God doesn't seem to be involved in all of your circumstances.

Read Psalms in which David expresses trust in God even though everything looks dark.

9 LESSON

Judgment and Hope in the Day of the LORD

BY DAVE REIMER

Zephaniah

Key Verse "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder." Zephaniah 3:9



God is a God of justice, punishing the wicked and rewarding the faithful, yet always for the purpose of purifying a people for Himself.

Life Response

Understanding the purpose of God with His people, we can have hope within our struggles and rejoice in the coming of the day of the LORD.

Frank was very excited about the afternoon. He had been invited into the manager's office at work. He was looking forward to the meeting, anticipating what kind of promotion and raise he might be getting. He was sure it would be substantial. He had worked so hard, learned so fast, and contributed so much to the company. He was positive that his boss had noticed how much better a worker he was than all the others with whom he worked.

Frank faced the surprise of his life, when he walked into the manager's office and was informed that he was fired. He would no longer be employed by the company. He had failed to meet the company's expectations and had been a hindrance to employee relationships.

1. How do you think Frank felt when he heard the news?
2. What factors contributed to the surprise element in the story?
3. Who sets the standards and ultimately judges what is right and wrong in a company? Who is ultimately “in charge” in all of life?



Zephaniah 1:1-3

Introduction

Zephaniah was a prophet of royal descent, a great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah. He prophesied during the reign of Josiah. Josiah was a good king, reigning in the shadow of his wicked grandfather, Manasseh. Josiah brought about some good reforms in Judah, turning the nation back to God. However, this was only temporary. Josiah's sons, who reigned after him, plunged the nation back into idolatry. One of Josiah's sons, Zedekiah, was reigning when Judah went into exile only 23 years after the death of Josiah.

The first declarations of the LORD are a sweeping condemnation on the whole earth. This is reminiscent of the days before the flood.

4. Who is about to face the judgment of God?
5. Who is the direct focus of the judgment (cf. Gen. 6:5-8)? Why don't the wicked suffer alone?
6. How do you think God responds when He looks down on our world today?



Zephaniah 1:4-2:3

Judgment against Judah

Judah was a nation oppressed by enemies on every side. They longed for the day when God would once again estab-

lish His kingdom in the capital city, Jerusalem. They longed for the day of the Lord. They believed that when God would come, it would be to fight against the others. They still sacrificed in the temple as the Lord had commanded. Like the employee in the introduction, they actually believed that they were in a good relationship with God.

Zephaniah declares that while they are offering sacrifices to God, they are making those same sacrifices to other gods (1:5). They don't actually believe in the wisdom, power, or love of God (1:12). They are not living by faith in Him. Therefore, when the Lord does come to fight against His enemies, it will actually be Judah he is fighting against. He will fight against them, not for them. It will be a day of darkness, not light. God is not showing favouritism to Judah. They too will be judged according to their sin. As a matter of fact they will get theirs first because they, of all people, should have known better. This is the message of Zephaniah and a surprise to the people of Judah.

7. Judah was expecting the "day of the LORD" to be their day of deliverance. Notice the many references to "the day", "that day", and "the day of the LORD". What will happen in Judah on that day?
8. Point out the sins that the people of Judah committed (1:4-2:3).
9. Will the day of the LORD for us be darkness or light? How many of our religious observances are actually statements of faith in our God? Are there some that may actually be an offence to Him?
10. Notice the call to repentance in 2:1-3. Is there actually hope? For whom?



Zephaniah 2:4-15

Judgment against the Nations

Judgment will also come to the surrounding nations who are enemies of God. Zephaniah points the finger at Philistia



(west), Moab and Ammon (east), Cush (Egypt – south), and Assyria (north) by referring to some of their chief cities and geographical areas. Judgment on the foreign nations, the enemies of Judah, is a part of God's blessing to Judah. Justice is being done. God is looking out for His people.

11. Point out some sins committed by these foreign nations. Also point out the punishments they will face.
12. What are some benefits God's people reap from the destruction of evil.
13. How does this passage provide hope for the oppressed today? What does it say to the oppressor? Is justice a thing to be desired or feared? Are you looking forward to the day of the LORD?



Zephaniah 3:1-20

Restoration for the Remnant

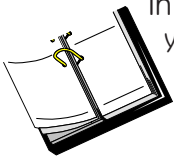
After a scathing prophecy of judgment against Judah and the nations, God reminds His people that He is not forsaking the covenant He has made with his people; His love, concern, and care have not been abandoned. Before He tells them this He reminds Judah of her sin, noting that she is deserving only of punishment, not mercy (3:1-8; cf. Rom. 3:9-18). There is no favoritism with God. The whole world will be consumed.

The punishment of God is never an uncontrolled outburst of anger and frustration. God is not man. The judgment of God has purpose. It is not just to punish evil. Neither is it simply for the benefit of the oppressed. Rather the judgment of God has a distinct purpose. He wants to purify a people unto Himself. This holy, set apart people will need to be a new and renewed people, described here as a remnant. Notice too, that this is not an afterthought. Already in 2:1-3, Zephaniah was calling for repentance.

14. The people of Judah are responsible because they have a covenant agreement with the LORD. Which people are singled out and how are they described (3:1-8)?

15. Who are the people that make up the remnant of Israel? How are they described?
16. Within your particular society, does God see you as a part of His remnant? Do you look forward to the day of the LORD as a day of light or do you dread it as a day of darkness? How does the book of Zephaniah give you comfort or fear?

Through this week...



In all of your activities, think of how the Lord perceives your actions.

Thank God that every judgment upon your life is meant to purify you, to conform you to the image of God's Son.

10 LESSON

Priorities, Priorities!

BY COREY HERLEVSEN

Haggai

Key Verse "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty." Haggai 2:6,7



Through the prophet Haggai, the Lord calls the people to develop a worldview which reflects proper priorities. Specifically, they are to begin working on the House of the Lord to restore its former glory. When this is done, He will grant peace and blessing to a defiled people.

Life Response

That we examine the weakness in our worldview and the resulting skewed priorities. That we prepare ourselves to hear God's call to obedience and by obeying enter into His promised blessing and a glorious future.

Several years ago, after a fairly moving Sunday morning worship service, I was taking part in that Sunday morning ritual of standing around the foyer chatting with as many people as I could (coffee cup in hand of course). One of the church members, an executive in one of the city's large accounting firms, made an offhand casual remark which remains with me and troubles me still. He said: "Well, that was nice but I guess now we better get ready to go back to the real world". It seemed so innocent a remark on

the surface but upon reflection, it reveals a crooked worldview. It suggested that what we were doing at church was not “the real world”, it was just a pleasant “Calgon take me away” diversion from the empire building of the mighty firm downtown. A crooked worldview results in crooked priorities, resulting in a crooked life. Even if all looks well on the surface, we end up living lives that are centred more in ourselves than in God. We become disobedient first in our hearts and minds and then, inevitably, in our actions and the way we live our lives.

1. Respond to the statement “a crooked worldview (or way of looking at life) results in crooked priorities, resulting in a crooked life.” Do you agree? Can you think of any examples from your own life story that you would like to share?
2. Why do we get together on Sunday mornings for these events we refer to as ‘worship services’? Do we view what happens here as central and essential or is it just one more compartment in our busy lives?



Haggai 1:1-15

Sermon one—Crooked Priorities

The book of Haggai is composed of three of the prophet’s sermons, each of which is marked by the date on which it was first preached. The sermons present a particular problem, which is the result of the people’s skewed worldview, then present a response.

In this first message, preached on the first day of the sixth month of Darius’ second year (1:1), the problem is obvious. The people are living in fine houses while the Temple of the Lord remains a ruin. The people in Haggai’s day have returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, and have lived there for at least fifteen years. Apparently, they are living under adverse financial circumstances (1:5-6) and are using this as an excuse to put off repairs to the Temple of the Lord. It seems reasonable, and in fact is reasonable, if you look at the situation through a skewed worldview. If the needs and

the comfort of the people constitute the “real world” and the worship of the Lord is just a pleasant diversion from this, then their argument makes perfect sense. Their houses will be completed and decorated first and then the Temple will get whatever energy and resources happen to be left over.

But the reality of the situation is that their worldview is crooked and so their priorities are also crooked. In verses 8-9 Haggai adjusts their vision by pointing out that the adverse financial conditions, far from being an acceptable excuse for ignoring the Temple, are the result of ignoring the Temple. If they continue living these crooked lives they will continue to suffer drought and loss.

The proper response is to reconsider what the “real world” is by putting the completion of the Temple ahead of their self-interest. Then the Lord will be given His due honour and He will again reveal His glory in covenant love and compassion.

The response of the people to Haggai’s sermon is both immediate and appropriate. They obey the voice of the Lord which comes through His prophet and they show the Lord proper respect and reverence (1:12). Their worldview is corrected and, accordingly, so are their priorities. “They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty their God” (1:15).

3. Many of us have gone through trying times in our lives where we have either said or thought something like this: “After we get our houses built/our business established/our bills paid off, we will tithe or give to the church”. How does Haggai’s first sermon speak to this situation?
4. Are there areas of our lives, other than the financial, in which our priorities are robbing God of His glory? What would a proper response to Haggai’s sermon look like in those areas?
5. In Haggai, there is a direct relationship between the adverse conditions of the people (vs. 5-6) and the priorities of the people (vs. 9-10). Is there such a direct relationship between the adverse conditions in our society and the priorities of our society? If so, is there a guarantee that restructuring our priorities will result in blessings?



Sermon two—A Crooked Measure

The second message comes to the people on the twenty-first day of the seventh month. This message is a needed counterbalance to the previous one because the people fall into a familiar trap. They have swung from one extreme to the other. Where they had been ignoring the Temple to work on their own things, they are now obsessed with the Temple, discontented with their work for God because it seems so ordinary and pathetic. They began thinking that if they couldn't build it right, maybe they shouldn't build it at all. Addressing the source of the discontent, Haggai asks the key question of verse 3. (For the necessary background of this question see Ezra 3:10-13).

If the priorities of the people are now correct, the way they go about living them out are still crooked. The standard by which their obedience must be measured is not what it accomplishes, but rather their faithfulness in doing what they should.

Haggai addresses this problem by linking the commands of God with His promises, giving the people a new way to measure their response. Haggai 2:5 makes two things clear. First, the present command to build the Temple does not stand in isolation. It is rooted in God's past actions and promises. The idea of a temple came in Exodus 6:7 when Israel received the covenant promise. The people might have felt that the covenant was no longer relevant; Solomon's glorious Temple had been destroyed, they had been sent into exile, and the new Temple couldn't be compared to the one Solomon built.

By repeating the covenant at this point, Haggai assures the people that God's promises remain. Not only that, the obedience of the people is preparing a work of God which will bring greater glory than any they have ever seen.

Second, 2:5 makes it clear that the Spirit of God is the source of both purity and power (cf Exodus 33:14-15). It is His presence which will ultimately make the efforts of the people effective.

6. What was it that discouraged the people as they rebuilt the temple? (2:3; Ezra 3:10-13)
7. Do you ever feel that your efforts (as individuals or as a church) to serve God are 'ordinary and pathetic'? Is this because we are using a crooked measure to determine their effectiveness? If so, what measures are we tempted to use and what do these reveal about our worldview?



Haggai 2:10-19

Sermon three—Crooked Spirituality

There is a danger in Haggai's first two messages which focused on the rebuilding of the temple. When the worship of the people becomes too focused on a particular place, true spirituality gets lost and ritualism takes its place. People keep returning to the "Lord's house" strictly out of habit, without actually worshipping the Lord Himself. This seems to be the problem Haggai talks about in this sermon.

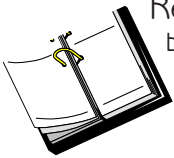
The third sermon begins with an observation about what the Law says about becoming holy. An object or person does become defiled by coming into contact with something that is defiled (see Lev. 11:28). However, an object or person does not become holy just by touching something that is holy (see Jer. 11:15). The people listening to Haggai had a crooked understanding of spirituality. They wrongly assumed that contact with the Temple would make them holy. They also assumed, wrongly, that their sin would not make them unholy. At this point in Israel's history (after the exile and just before all of the Israelites return to the land), an important spiritual principle is reaffirmed. Evil is contagious and the people of God need to relearn what it means to be separate and holy. Relying only on externals such as the Temple cannot do this.

While the Bible doesn't give the response of the people to this message, it seems likely that they repented and changed their understanding of what it means to be holy. Haggai 2:15-19 makes it clear that their conditions are about to change. Whereas in the past God had punished them, He was now going to bless them (v.19b). The change makes sense

if the people obeyed the repeated command to “give careful thought” to their priorities and their behaviour (1:5, 1:7, 2:15, 2:18).

8. Carefully compare Haggai’s third sermon with Jeremiah’s Temple sermon (Jer 7) and with Jesus’ Temple sermon (Mark 11, which has Jeremiah in the background). How do the root issues compare?
9. Are we guilty of ‘crooked spirituality’ when we rely on external things such as baptism, family connections, church programs, tithes, titles, degrees etc.? What would Haggai consider to be a proper response to his message?

Through this week...



Reflect on your own worldview and the priorities and behaviour which result. What would your life look like if God was in the centre in fact not just in theory?

11

LESSON

The LORD God Almighty

BY GLEN KOOP

Zechariah

Key Verse "Not by might not by power, but by my spirit says the LORD."
Zechariah 4:6b



God, in His love, is ever trying to win all people back to Himself.

Life Response

That we are challenged to live a lifestyle that will attract people to ask, desire and accept God as LORD and Saviour, capturing the message found in 8:23c "...let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you."

The majority remained in affluent Babylon under the foreign king of Persia, King Cyrus. But a small contingent of the Judean people decided to accept the offer to return to the homeland of their fathers. They came to Jerusalem and began the rebuilding project. They were going to rebuild the Temple, then the walls of Jerusalem. This was to be done under the eyes of men like the priest, Ezra, the wine taster for king Artaxerxes Nehemiah, the High priest, Joshua, the governor, Zerubbabel and the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah.

To lay the foundations and walls for the city and the Temple was a backbreaking task. To be constantly on the lookout for hostile neighbours who were trying to stop or stall the project made it most discouraging. But worse than that was the fact that the new structure was nowhere near as magnificent

as the one king Solomon had built. It is to these people that the prophet Zechariah ministers.

A parallel to this story would be that of the coming of the Mennonites to Canada in 1874. The cold harsh winters, diseases, and the mosquitoes made them think that Manitoba was an undesirable place to live.¹ The first settlers of La Crete, Alberta, and their offspring still talk about the minus 50 degree winters, winters that seemed to start too soon and last too long.

1. Who were the leaders that came back to Judah?
2. Who or what was it that motivated them to return to a place that had been ransacked, burned, overgrown, and cursed by their neighbours?
3. What are the similarities between Judah of old and other contemporary people of God who have moved from one country to another? (Is God nudging them to move? Who is going? What are the reasons for going?)



Zechariah 1:1-6

Introduction

According to Ezra 4, the rebuilding project was halted by the neighbours. But according to Zechariah 1:1-6, God was giving the Judeans a message to repent (v.3). A number of the visions may help us understand God's call to repentance (5:1-4, 5-11; 7:8-10).

4. What is Judah to repent from? (Ezra 10; Nehemiah 13:15ff.)
5. Why were the people a bit confused about the message from God, "Repent!"?



Zechariah 1:7-6:6

Zechariah's Visions

"Vision" is generally distinguished from an ordinary dream. A vision is usually associated with a prophet. It is a word from the Lord, a divine revelation. It seems to mean more than mere physical sight. It suggests the idea of seeing through, being able to discern and understand. It is a word used more than any other for the act of an authentic prophet receiving an oracle from God. ²



Zechariah 1:7-17

The First Vision

Although many details of the first vision are given, only a few seem important enough to explain. The horses and their colour are not fully explained, but more is revealed in the eighth vision (6:1-8). They are the means by which the Lord gathers the news from all four directions of the compass. In the eighth, they are sent to deliver a message to the whole world.

6. Discuss the message that God is giving the prophet to relay to the remnant returning to rebuild Jerusalem in this vision.



Zechariah 1:18-21

The Second Vision

The number four has special significance in the ancient world. Symbolic of the four points of the compass (North, South, East and West), it seems to suggest totality. ³

"Horns" symbolize power, pride, and victory. "Craftsmen" are workmen with hammers, like blacksmiths.

The horns came to destroy Israel and the craftsmen destroy the horns. Nations are rising up against nations. This is not unusual in that day nor of our day.

7. What is the message for Israel in this vision: hope, joy, judgment, salvation, etc.?



Zechariah 2:1-13

The Third Vision

A human being with a carpenter's measuring tape wants to take the measurements of the city of Jerusalem. Measuring suggests limits, boundaries and specific size, in this case set by a human being.

8. Contrast man's measuring with God's. (vss. 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13; Psalm 127)



Zechariah 3:1-10; 4:1-14; 6:9-15

The Fourth & Fifth Vision

The leader Joshua is mentioned in chapter 3 and Zerubbabel in chapter 4. God has selected two leaders of Judah, the olive trees, the servants through whom the olive oil will flow to the lamps. The lamps are the temple and the Jewish community that are to witness for God. God oversees the whole operation.⁴

9. Compare this scene with that of Job 1:6ff. & 2:1ff. (Note what God does for this sinful man who has been chosen to be a religious leader in Judah.)



Zechariah 5:1-4

The Sixth Vision

The flying scroll in this vision looks like a banner which all can see. It has writing on both sides. This is God's powerful word, the word that creates and transforms lives! (Gen. 1&2; John 1:12; 2 Cor. 5:17-21)



10. What is the purpose of this banner from God?



Zechariah 5:5-11

The Seventh Vision

It appears that the prophet does not recognize a common “measuring basket”. He does not recognize evil in everyday things.

11. Note what God does with evil at this moment in history (9-11).



Zechariah 6:1-8

The Eighth Vision

This is the vision of the four different coloured horses driving in four different directions. The spirits of God are ready. At God’s call and command they deliver His message throughout the world. The Spirit of God conquers in the North. God is sovereign.



Zechariah 7:1-14

God calls Israel to attract the world to Himself

The Bethelites spent much of their time fasting. This had become part of their tradition. Now in their troublesome situation they inquire of the religious men whether they should return to the practice of fasting. To their question the Lord God Almighty responds with a question of His own: When you fasted for the past seventy years, did you do it for God or yourselves? “And when you eat and drink, isn’t it for your own enjoyment?”⁵

12. Is God opposed to fasting?

13. Is God opposed to eating?

14. What does God desire of us that is more important than eating or fasting? (7:8-10)



Zechariah 8:1-23

15. What is the message that God Almighty gives to Zechariah?

16. How do the promises of God apply to the remnant that returned to rebuild Jerusalem? (8:18-23)

¹ Seeking to be Faithful by Harvey Plett, p.76.

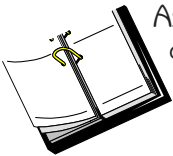
² Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, p. 823.

³ The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 3, p.565. The Concise Oxford Dictionary, p. 169.

⁴ Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi by Joyce Baldwin, p. 124.

⁵ The Contemporary English Version, p. 1116.

Through this week...



Ask yourself how you see God at work in your life. How do you measure the presence of God? How powerful is God's word?

Are you attracting others to Jesus by your joy, love, peace, truth, and forgiveness?

12

LESSON

Where is the Honour Due Me?

BY JOHN NEUFELD

Malachi 1-2

Key Verse "A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due me? If I am a master where is the respect due me? says the Lord Almighty." Malachi 1:6a



In their relationship with God, the people of Judah were showing contempt instead of honour.

Life Response

That we discover how to live each day in a way that will bring honour to God.

I often think back to my teenage years of baseball. I clearly remember a game where I became very displeased with the umpire. Early the next day we were back on the playing field ready to play another game. I was relieved that we had a different umpire this time. Some of my friends came to watch the game and as they were standing around the dugout I gave them a full report on how bad the umpire had been the previous day. My report registered loud and clear, without a hint of an encouraging or positive tone. As I was concluding my critical analysis, I was shocked to hear a voice ask "was I really that bad?" There stood the umpire! You can imagine that this would never be recorded as one of my more glorious teenage moments. Still trying to

“save face” in front of my friends, I explained to the umpire (in a much nicer way) the basis of my opinion for the calls he had made.

1. Think about how you have found yourself talking negatively about someone, not knowing that the person was listening. Share some of your stories.
2. How did you feel when you found out that the person you had talked about heard everything you said?
3. Discuss some of the ways in which we treat God in a similar way?



Malachi 1:6-10

Honouring or Despising God's Name

This section records a dispute between God and the priests. The priests were to lead worship and honour God, but their actions were despicable to God. Malachi was written some 100 years after the return from exile. The prosperity that they expected to return to them never came, and the people felt that God had let them down. They no longer took the law of God seriously. Malachi's words were intended to reprimand the people and the leaders of the community for the lack of sincerity in their worship and in their lives. The people of Israel doubted God's love and justice. Formal worship became meaningless, and the people tried offering blemished animals to God. Malachi said it would be better if the doors of the temple were locked than to continue to offer flawed sacrifices and profane God's name in this manner.

4. Why were the priests arguing with Malachi, asking how they had shown contempt for God's name?
5. What point was Malachi trying to make when he asked them to try to offer the polluted offerings to the governor?
6. What is the present-day parallel of “offerings to the governor”? Why is it more natural to give our offering to the governor rather than to God?





Malachi 2:1-9

No Worship is better than Bad Worship

This judgment is addressed directly to the priests. The priests, who were responsible for the conduct of worship, were the worst offenders. Their contempt for God in worship made it impossible for them to please Him in other areas. Why should they look for any better response from God when they continued to offer flawed sacrifices. Either they would learn to honour God or else they would face His curse. The curse meant a direct judgement from God. The entrails of the animal (offal v.3) was unclean and taken outside of the camp to be burned. The picture of God spreading the offal onto the faces of the priests is shocking, and shows the extent of His disgust and their disgrace.

Malachi contrasted the current ungodly priests with the Levites who were faithful to God. Levi is presented as a model for the priests. Malachi gives a remarkable picture of the ideal and true priest in the eyes of God. In contrast, the priests in Malachi's day showed partiality and thus God caused them to be despised.

6. Why did Malachi contrast the current priests with the Levites?
7. Why did God cause the priests to be despised and humiliated before all the people?
8. In what ways did the priests show partiality in matters of the law?

Life Application

True Worship Brings Honour

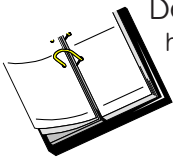
Malachi's message contrasts the faithfulness of God with the unfaithfulness of His people. Malachi called the people to repent and to humble themselves before God. He challenged the people to take God seriously in every aspect of life and to

bring honour to God by being obedient to His law. Malachi tells the people that God still loves them and is longing to bless them. However, they need to worship God in a way that is pleasing to Him and to live obediently, bringing honour to God.

As Christians, we can relate in many ways to the people of Malachi's time. With all the ungodly and shameful things we see happening all around us, do we sometimes doubt God's justice? When we face hardships instead of prosperity, do we tend to doubt God's love for us? Israel doubted God and they thought it was not profitable to serve Him. As a result, they ended up disgracing God and His law and became selfish and self-righteous.

9. What can we learn from Malachi's message to the priests?
10. For whose sake is it important to honour God (His or ours)?
11. In what areas have you doubted God's love and justice?
12. In what ways have your doubts in God been evident in your life?
13. What benefits of following God do we experience while we're still on this earth?
14. How can we honour God and remain faithful to Him through good times and hard times? Share some different ideas of how you worship and honour God.

Through this week...



Determine what changes you need to make so you will honour God more fully in your life.

13

LESSON

Is God Unfair?

BY COLIN LOEWEN

Malachi 3-4

Key Verse "I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed."

Malachi 3:6



Bible Truth

Israel thought that God had changed and that He was being unfair.

Life Response

That we discover that even though God seems unfair at times, He does not change and will always remain faithful.

They were four brothers. As they grew up, their parents taught them about Jesus and the Bible. Two of them accepted the Lord as their Saviour. They became involved in the church and taught their children about Jesus Christ. Much of their time, energy and resources was given to the church. They both purchased a business and for a while had financial success. However, times changed and both brothers were forced to declare bankruptcy, suffering much emotional strain in the process.

The other two brothers, who had thrown religion out the window had married non-Christian wives and also became involved in business. Their businesses did well, in fact so well that they could afford big homes, new cars and expensive winter vacations. They became millionaires while their Christian brothers met financial disaster.

1. What seems unfair about this story? Why?
2. Share experiences where you thought things in life were unfair?
3. In the short term, which of the brothers would you rather be? Which would you want to be in the long term?



Malachi 3:6-12

Attitudes

Malachi speaks of the need for a change in attitude. First, Malachi speaks of a proper attitude toward property. God had promised to give Israel great prosperity if they would obey Him (Deut. 28:11). Israel disobeyed and when they compared the prosperity of heathen nations to their own, they were disappointed. They turned to sin, religious indifference and skepticism. Israel remembered God's promise of prosperity, so they asked God how they could receive His blessing again. God told them to stop robbing Him (Mal. 3:8). He accused them of considering their possessions as their own rather than a sacred trust from God. Israel had become a greedy nation. They had stopped giving the tenth they were commanded to give (Deut. 14:22-29). The sacrifices that they did give were blemished.

Second, Malachi speaks of a proper attitude toward God. The attitudes of Israel toward their possessions affected their relationship with God. The temple practices had been corrupted and their attitudes portrayed a deep-seated lack of belief. They had stopped giving and therefore they also stopped receiving. God promised protection, a good reputation and blessings as results of faithful giving. God challenged Israel to restore proper giving and see whether God would return with such generosity that they would not have room for it.

Third, Malachi speaks of a proper attitude toward others. A nation that does not give to God is a nation without faith, and this affects its social life. When Israel stopped giving to God they did not receive His abundant blessings and their society

suffered. The joy of giving freely to God and to needy fellow citizens unifies a nation. Israel lost that joy. The result was a religious indifference which divided their nation.

4. In what ways did Israel rob God?
5. In what ways did the people of Israel experience God's punishment for their greed?
6. What results would come if Israel would change her ways?
7. What blessings come to those who give today? What is lost when we fail to honour God with our giving?



Malachi 3:13-18

Is God unfair?

God's second accusation against Israel is that they have said "harsh things about [Him]" (Mal. 3:13). They have spoken against God their protector! Their hearts drifted away from Him. No one considered the requirements of God to be worthwhile or important. Arrogant and evil people seemed to prosper without any response from God. Why not join them?

Israel had become skeptical of God's promises and turned to disobedience. Abandoning their faith caused the distinction between good and evil to blur. God responded to their question with a promise. God knew those who were righteous and those who were not.

On the "day of the Lord", when God returns to judge everyone, He will spare the righteous people whose names are written in the "scroll of remembrance" (Mal. 3:16; Rev. 21:27). When God will judge those who are arrogant and evil, Israel will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked—between those who serve God and those who do not.

7. Why was Israel hesitant to obey God's commands?
8. What is God's promise in response to their complaint?

9. When will Israel see the difference between the righteous and the wicked?

Life Application

Israel's heart had drifted from God. They stopped obeying His commandments. They saw the neighbouring nations prosper even though they were arrogant and were not serving God. Why did God not punish those people? The Israelites did not understand why they should obey God when the other nations were living immoral lives and seemingly getting away with it.

As Christians we often look around us and see unrighteous people prosper while we struggle. Like Israel, we ask God what the purpose is in living for Him. It is easy to lose sight of God when others curse His face and yet live a much more prosperous life than we do.

We may not understand why we do not have things as good as others on earth, but God has promised that a time is coming when these 'earthly' things will not matter. The only thing that will matter then is whether we "feared the Lord and honoured His name"!

10. What situations cause you to ask the question in verse 14, "What did we gain by carrying out His requirements and going about like owners before the Lord Almighty?"
11. How do you respond when others around you are living in greater prosperity or health? Does that mean God is unfair? Why or why not?
12. Did you become indifferent toward God when you thought He was being unfair? Why or why not?
13. How has the Lord blessed you when you did serve Him? Describe some experiences.

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