

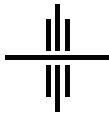
The Minor Prophets



Cities Church

Bible Study Guide

Michael Thiel



Cities Church

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Overview

Week 1 – Sep 28	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Hosea 1-3 / Deut 9	Hosea 1-3	Romans 5:10
Day 2	Hosea 3-5	Hosea 3-5	1 Cor. 6:19-20
Day 3	Hosea 6-14	Hosea 6-14	1 Peter 1:13-25
Week 2 – Oct 5	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Joel 1	Joel 1	Matthew 5:17-20
Day 2	Joel 2	Joel 2	Luke 5:32
Day 3	Joel 3 / Acts 2	Joel 3	Hebrews 12:5-11
Week 3 – Oct 12	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Amos 1-3	Amos 1-3	Romans 1:18-23
Day 2	Amos 4-6 / Psalm 46	Amos 4-6	Matthew 23:1-12
Day 3	Amos 7-9 / Acts 15	Amos 7-9	2 Timothy 4:3-5
Week 4 – Oct 19	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Obadiah	Obadiah Part 1	1 John 2:15-17
Day 2	Obadiah	Obadiah Part 2	Mark 7:14-23
Day 3	Obadiah	Obadiah Part 3	Romans 8:31-32
Week 5 – Oct 26	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Jonah	Jonah 1	John 5:22-24
Day 2	Jonah 2-3	Jonah 2-3	Matthew 12:38-41
Day 3	Jonah 4	Jonah 4	Romans 11:6
Week 6 – Nov 2	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Micah 1-3 / Exodus 19	Micah 1-3	John 3:19
Day 2	Micah 4-5 / Exodus 20	Micah 4-5	1 John 2:18-25
Day 3	Micah 6-7 / Exodus 33:1-34:17	Micah 6-7	John 3:14-15

Week 7 – Nov 9	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Nahum 1-3	Nahum 1	Psalm 46
Day 2	Nahum 1-2	Nahum 2	Acts 10:36, 42-43
Day 3	Nahum 3	Nahum 3	Colossians 2:13-15
Week 8 – Nov 16	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Habakkuk 1	Habakkuk 1	Galatians 3:7-10
Day 2	Habakkuk 2	Habakkuk 2	Romans 3:24-26
Day 3	Habakkuk 3	Habakkuk 3	1 Peter 4:16-19
Week 9 – Nov 23	Reading	Reading	Task
Day 1	Zephaniah 1	Zephaniah 1	Matthew 6:33
Day 2	Zephaniah 2	Zephaniah 2	1 Peter 1:13
Day 3	Zephaniah 3 / Isaiah 62	Zephaniah 3	Luke 15:8-10
Week 10 – Nov 30	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Haggai / Nehemiah 1-3	Haggai	John 2:18-22
Day 2	Haggai / Nehemiah 4-7	Haggai	Matthew 12:5-8
Day 3	Haggai / Nehemiah 8-13	Haggai	Revelation 21:22-27
Week 11 – Dec 7	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Zechariah 1-5	Zechariah 1-5	John 1:14-18
Day 2	Zechariah 6-9	Zechariah 6-9	Matthew 21:6-11
Day 3	Zechariah 10-14	Zechariah 10-14	John 19:31-37
Week 12 – Dec 14	Reading	Questions	Reflection
Day 1	Malachi 1 / Psalm 25	Malachi 1	Romans 6:23
Day 2	Malachi 2 / Psalm 27	Malachi 2	Matthew 13:14-15
Day 3	Malachi 3-4 / Psalm 46	Malachi 3-4	Matthew 3:1-12

Preface

Michael Thiel

Dear Cities Church,

This is the fourth and final Bible study of 2015. We made it through Acts and now we take on a challenge, the Minor Prophets. This Bible study guide follows the sermon schedule as we take on each Minor Prophet one at a time, in order as they are in the Bible. Additionally we are thrilled to include Jason DeRouchie's lectures notes on the Minor Prophets as an introduction each week. Jason is an Old Testament professor at Bethlehem College & Seminary and was happy to team up with us for this new Bible Study.

The function of this workbook in the life of Cities Church addresses several items:

1. Sermon Series

The workbook is laid out to accompany the sermon series. The length of the workbook follows a very simple quarterly schedule, which turns out to be three months at a time. So, when this workbook was written we did our best to plan out the sermon passages as well.

2. Structure

This workbook has 12 weeks, which lines up with the fourth quarter, October through December. Each week is broken down in a nominal three day layout. I say nominal because you can choose however you want to use this workbook. You could take parts of the weekly content and divide it up so that you have something to work on each day of the week.

There are three parts per day. We were really shooting for that magical number of three. The three parts cater to different ways of taking in Bible. First, there is a section of the Bible to read. Second, there is a section of Scripture to look at that accompanies the sermon series. We've written questions for this section and also included relevant quotes. Third, we suggest a verse or two to reflect on. You can choose the way you want to reflect and meditate on the verses. I have included an appendix that lays out one way to do the inductive Bible study method. Either way, I encourage you write out your thoughts and insights.

Each week we've added two open pages: one for sermon notes and one to write out prayer requests.

Lastly, each week we've included an article or story from a member of our church. This content is either relevant for the study, or for the general edification of Cities Church. The stories are also a neat way to have a real life story from our community in the context of the stories we're studying in the Bible.

3. Consistency

One of our aims with this workbook is to help provide a means for consistency in your Bible intake without it being solely passive consumption. This workbook is generic enough that you will have to put in work to mine the Bible for diamonds on your own. And we wouldn't want it any other way. We can't wait to hear what people find and how God moves their hearts as they dig in the Scriptures. This workbook can be viewed as a suggested place to dig on a consistent basis that still requires your own shovel to break the ground

4. Options

Lastly, we do not consider this workbook to be mandatory or exclusive. We offer it in an open handed manner to simply be a tool to help. We're here to serve, help, and guide. And if this workbook isn't helpful for you, then don't do it. Our suggestion to you is that you talk about your plans within your Life Group for how you aim to take in Bible this fall season. If it's not using this workbook, then talk about what you plan to do instead.

May God bless your Bible study this fall and build us up to walk in newness of life.

Much love,
Pastor Michael
September 2015

**Hello,
Minor
Prophets**

Jonathan Parnell

The registrar's office was preparing to release the list of next semester's courses.

I remember anticipating that list with my friends, eagerly awaiting that posted document, fantasizing about the new classes to be offered. This was a big event in the life of a small Bible college. We didn't have a football team, you know, but we all needed our mandatory credits in the New and Old Testaments.

Once the list was finally revealed, and we huddled together to check it out, we soon noticed one class missing from the usual menu. It was that elective on the Minor Prophets. There was a new class instead, simply called "Hosea–Malachi."

Come to find out, a class titled "Minor Prophets" was a hard-sell up against the likes of the Gospel of John, or more obviously, "Major Prophets." In an effort to boost class registration, the registrar's office changed the name of the class to be less confusing. That elective previously listed as "Minor Prophets" was, to be exact, an elective on twelve prophetic books found toward the end of the Old Testaments. It's the section with the funny names. It's Hosea–Malachi.

And it's now the fall sermon series at Cities Church.

Men or Message?

These twelve books, each smaller than Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, have long been called the Minor Prophets, or more canonically, "The Book of the Twelve." The obscurity that surrounded them at a Bible college was probably a decent indication of their obscurity in the church at large. Let's face it: they're not easy. Sometimes they're redundant; other times they are opaque; and most of the time they can feel completely irrelevant to our world. Just what are we supposed to do with these books?

I'm glad you asked.

Over the years, the church has seen varied approaches in how to interpret them. They are, in one sense, one book; but in another sense, they are twelve different books that feature the ministries of twelve different men who spoke God's word to Israel. With the advent of modern thinking, and a heavy emphasis on historical criticism over the

last two centuries, this latter approach as become more popular in recent decades.

Many interpreters, even if accidentally, isolate the prophets from one another and spend too much time reconstructing the historical context of the prophet himself. This often means that modern interpreters reorganize the order of the Minor Prophets based upon their individual historicity. They tend to treat Hosea, for example, not as a book with a message but as a biblical character who carried a message that just so happens to be captured in a book. The focus subtly shifts from the message itself to the man who first spoke it.

But that is the wrong way to read it.

The God-Inspired Books

Hosea, indeed, was a real man who was commissioned by God as a prophet to Israel — and his story is a fascinating one — but the book that we find in our Bible isn't the mere boxscore of his prophetic performance. Well-meaning efforts to get behind the text of Scripture in order to really understand the character of Hosea eventually get caught up in an undercurrent that pulls you farther and farther away from the God-inspired message itself. Our aim is not to pretend to be ancient Israelite standing in the crowded streets of Jerusalem, listening to Hosea deliver his original message, but rather, we are to be the people of God today who have received Hosea's message in a book — this book that we have before us. This book known as Hosea is the word of God, and it is one of twelve books that form a collective witness, inspired and preserved by God, for the people of God in every age.

The Minor Prophets are twelve individual messages that form one composite message, and they are organized mainly around content, not historicity (only four of the books explicitly mention the time period). If we are going to read them seriously, and in the way they have been handed down to us in the biblical canon, we must read them each as books within a book, mainly striving to discern their message in light of God's redemptive storyline. As one theologian puts it, "We are made to stand before the Twelve and see the word go forth, address genera-

tions, enclose the prophets in a history larger than themselves, and then reach out and locate us in its grand sweep — in judgment and mercy — before that same holy God.”

That is how we should read the Minor Prophets, and that is how your pastors are hoping to preach them.

Remembering the Bible

This approach, I believe, appropriately honors the Minor Prophets were what they truly are as God’s word. We want our study of every biblical book, especially the stranger ones like the Minor Prophets, to be rooted in a fertile understanding of what the Bible is.

The Bible is God’s revelation to us, testifying to his preeminent, definitive revelation: Jesus Christ. Though the Minor Prophets are different from, say, Romans, they are united by their common nature (God speaking), and their common goal (God revealed). Hosea–Malachi, like the Gospel of John and every New Testament book, is about Jesus. To be sure, the Minor Prophets are more deeply embedded in the thick history of Israel, and sometimes that can be tough to understand, but their canonical goal is the same. These prophets have good news, and their message is vital for our lives in this world.

In the following months, and in the next pages of this study guide, we hope this bears out again and again. This series will not feel like the footnotes of your newest study Bible; there will be some interpretive questions we won’t be able to cover; you might even wish you learned more about the historical context of Amos. But you will, God willing, hear an old word for a new day. You will hear the message of these prophets, what they are saying about Jesus, and why it matters now.

¹ Christopher Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*, 245.

Flow of Thought in the Twelve

Jason DeRouchie

Section #1: Sin

1. Hosea

Israel, Yahweh has a case against you: You have played the harlot and been like an unfaithful wife, departing from faithfulness, steadfast love, and knowledge. Please return to Yahweh, your husband!

2. Joel

For the Day of Yahweh is at hand, and repentance is your only hope! I will be a refuge to my people, but a roaring, devouring lion against all who fail to heed my voice!

3. Amos

How secure you feel, yet how insecure you actually are! I have disciplined you, yet you have not learned from the discipline. You anticipate my coming, but for you this Day will be darkness, not light. Prepare to meet your God, for the fulfillment of my kingdom promises is only for those who truly repent!

4. Obadiah

Know this: Pride and hatred have no place in my coming kingdom; this is why your brother Edom will be destroyed.

5. Jonah

Yet be warned, for your own pride and hatred of others resembles that of Edom and stands in direct contrast to the mercy Yahweh gives to whomever he wills. Don't be like Jonah; be like Yahweh and extend compassion rather than gloating in others' destruction, lest God's judgment fall on you!

6. Micah

Yahweh, from his courtroom, has found you and the nations guilty! Yet your final judgment Day has not come, and in his mercy, he will still forgive your sins, if you but return. Soon God, through his Word and Messiah, will be exalted over all things. Will you be a part of the judgment or the redemption?

Section #2: Punishment

7. Nahum

Know this for certain: Yahweh is a stronghold only for those who accept his terms of peace, but he will justly judge all his unrepentant enemies.

8. Habakkuk

Yahweh is just, and in his time he will indeed punish all wrongdoers and preserve all who walk by faith, looking to him for help, guidance, and satisfaction.

9. Zephaniah

Please be part of the remnant that draws near to God, so that the coming Day may be one of rejoicing! Yet for all who fail to heed God's voice, the Day of Yahweh the warrior will be sure destruction!

Section #3: Restoration

10. Haggai

Drawing near to God necessitates that you take seriously the need for his presence in your midst that he might bring forth the fulfillment of all he has promised, blessing for you and for the nations who surrender to him.

11. Zechariah

You need God's presence among you, for his kingdom restoration will be brought not by human effort but by the power of his Spirit working through his slain and yet victorious priest-king.

12. Malachi

This restoration is for you, if you will but fear and honor God in all areas of your life, awaiting the day when curse will give rise to full restoration blessing!

Week 1

Hosea

The God
Who
Keeps
Covenant
Love

Jason DeRouchie

YHWH's Unfaithful Bride

1. *Portrait 1: The Old Covenant and the Hope of the New*

a. Hosea's Family and Israel's Unfaithfulness and Restoration (1:1–2:1)

- i. Hosea's setting: a wife, children, and land of prostitution (1:2)
 - Hos. 1:2. Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking Yahweh.”
- ii. Hosea's 3 children (1:2–9):
 - 1) *Jezreel*, “God scatters” (1:4; 2:22)—The Lord will scatter Israel.
 - 2) *No Mercy* (1:6; 2:23)—God will not show compassion on Israel leading to forgiveness.
 - 3) *Not My People* (1:9; 2:23)—The covenant relationship has been broken—lit., “I am not I AM to you” (see Exod. 3:14; Ps. 50:21; cf. 6:7; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; Ezek. 36:28).
- iii. Reversal (1:10–2:1, 22–23)
 - 1) In fulfillment of his Abrahamic promises, God will multiply Israel (1:10), “scattering” her in the sense of sowing new seeds of life among Judah and Israel as a unified people (1:11; cf. 2:22)
 - 2) Not My People changed to “Children of the Living God” and “My People” (1:10; 2:1; cf. 2:23)
 - 3) No Mercy to “Mercy” (2:1; cf. 2:23)

b. Yahweh's Divorce and Israel's Restoration (2:2–23)

- i. The form of 2:2–23: A divorce-court proceeding
 - 1) Prophetic oracle type:
 - a) Indictment: 2:2, 5, 8
 - b) Warning/Judgment: 2:3–4, 6–7, 9–13
 - c) Instruction: 2:2
 - d) Aftermath/Salvation: 2:14–15
 - 2) Legal context: “Plead” = “to make or participate in a lawsuit against” (2:2; cf. 4:1; 12:2)
 - a) OT Background:
 - Jer. 3:8. She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a *decree of divorce*. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore.
 - Isa. 50:1. Thus says Yahweh: “Where is your mother’s *certificate of divorce*, with which I sent her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.”
 - b) Covenant lawsuit form:
 - i) Summons to court (2:2)
 - ii) Mention of parties (2:2)
 - Defendant: Israel the adulterous nation
 - Plaintiff: Yahweh the wronged husband
 - iii) Charge and Evidence (2:2, 4–5, 8, 13b)
 - iv) Identification of prosecutor/judge

- Yahweh is the attorney, judge, jury, and police officer
 - v) The children of Israel are the witnesses
 - vi) Declaration of sentence (2:3, 6–7, 9–13a, 14–23)
- ii. The nature of Israel's fornication:
- 1) Material prosperity has led spiritual adultery:
 - a) Failure to recognize Yahweh as her provider (2:2, 5, 8, 12)
 - b) Syncretistic idolatry in mixing paganism with Yahweh worship (2:11, 13; 4:13–14; 11:1; 13:1–2)
 - c) Poor religious leadership, which fails to know God and his law (4:4–9; 5:1; 6:9)
 - d) Unrestrained selfish oppression of others (4:2)
 - 2) They have forgotten Yahweh (2:13; 8:14; 13:6 with 14:8; cf. Deut. 8:18–20)
- iii. Yahweh's judgment response:
- 1) "Lest ...": Complete lack and starvation (2:3)
 - 2) "Therefore": Entrapment, lack of guidance, and abandonment (2:6–7)
 - 3) "Therefore": Lack of provision, public shame, helplessness, misery, waste (2:10–13)
 - 4) "Therefore": Covenant renewal!
 - a) Renewed courtship and hope (2:14–15)
 - b) Restoration of marriage, including:
 - i) A complete rejection of past sin (2:16–17)
 - ii) A new creation covenant (2:18)
 - iii) Global peace and security (2:18)
 - iv) Eternality of relationship (2:19)
 - v) True knowledge of God, as righteous, just, covenantally loyal, merciful, and faithful (2:19–20)
 - vi) Renewal of covenant triangle: God-people-land (2:21–23)

Hos 11:8–9. How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zebaiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

2. Portrait 2: Redemption through Exile and the Davidic Hope (3:1–5)

- a. Israel's sinful state in exile (3:1).
 - i. *Gomer, the unfaithful wife and slave*: Gomer no longer has any claim as Hosea's wife ("a woman") but has been sold into slavery in some way.
 - ii. *Israel, the slave of sin*: The parallel is of Israel, likely outside the land in exile, separated from God, slaves of foreign gods, and bound and broken ("they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes," 3:1).
- b. The initial restoration as a picture of husbandly mercy (3:2–4):
 - i. *Hosea's merciful redemption of Gomer*: Hosea is called to "love" (not simply "take," 3:1) this wife, buying her back out of slavery and requiring of her a time of sexual segregation (from both her fornication and her husband), leading to her purification, rededication, and renewal (3:2–3).
 - ii. *Yahweh's loving discipline of Israel*: The parallel to this is Israel's initial restoration to the land about half a millennium before Christ (3:4); here "the children of Israel shall dwell many days without":
 - 1) King or prince, who led them into unfaithfulness (1:4; 8:4)
 - 2) Sacrifice, which they offered to the Baals (2:13; 11:1; 13:1–2)

- 3) Pillar, ephod, and household gods, all used in pagan worship (10:2; cf. Judg. 17:5; 18:14; 2 Kgs. 23:24; Zech. 10:2).
- c. New covenant restoration (3:5):
- i. *Gomer's response*: Not mentioned.
 - ii. *Israel's restoration*: In the “latter days,” this time of alienation will give rise to a heart change back to Yahweh their God and David their king, resulting in renewed fear to Yahweh and his goodness.
- d. Synthesis: Represented Hos 3:1–5 is the same two-stage restoration already highlighted by Isaiah: physical return from Babylon under Cyrus (Isa 44:24–48:22) and spiritual deliverance from bondage to sin under the messianic Servant (49:1–53:12). Daniel will reinforce the same reality by stressing how the initial “70 years” of Jeremiah (Dan 9:2; cf. Jer 25:12; Ezra 1:1) would only initiate stage 1; stage 2 would take “70 weeks of years” (Dan 9:24).

YHWH's Case Against Israel

1. Yahweh's Indictment (4:1; 12:2; cf. 2:2):
 - a. Israel has forgotten Yahweh (2:13; 8:14; 13:6; 14:8; cf. Deut. 8:18–20)
 - Hos. 2:13. And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and *forgot me*, declares Yahweh.
 - Hos. 8:14. For Israel has *forgotten his Maker* and built palaces, and Judah has multiplied fortified cities; so I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour her strongholds.
 - Hos. 13:6; 14:8. But when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they *forgot me*. 14:8O 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.
 - Deut. 8:18–20. You shall remember Yahweh your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19And if you *forget Yahweh your God* and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. 20Like the nations that Yahweh makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of Yahweh your God.
 - b. No knowledge of God, loyalty to God, or truth in the land (4:2)
 - i. No *knowledge* of God in the land (4:4–6:3): They have forgotten God's law and need to repent (4:6; cf. 4:14; 5:4 with 5:14–6:3)
 - ii. No *steadfast love/covenant loyalty* in the land (6:4–11:11): Their loyalty is quickly fleeting, and will only grow when rooted in righteousness (6:4; 10:12; cf. 11:8–11)
 - iii. No *faithfulness/truth* in the land (11:12–14:8): Through hypocrisy and ingratitude they have forgotten Yahweh and need to remember he alone is the savior (11:12–12:1; 13:5–7; cf. 14:4–8)
2. Yahweh's Judgment: Ultimately, Assyria will be used as the rod of God's punishment (10:6–7; 11:5–7)
3. The Cries of a Loving Husband:
 - Hos. 13:4, 9. But I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but

me, and besides me there is no savior.... 9He destroys you, O Israel, for you are against me, against your helper.

- Hos. 11:9. I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.
- Hos. 14:8. 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.

Postscript (14:9)

The lasting relevance of Hosea's message:

Hos. 14:9. Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of Yahweh are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

Day 1

Read the introduction to Hosea in a Study Bible and read Hosea 1-3. Describe the theme of Hosea. Read Deuteronomy 9. What does this chapter teach us about Israel's relationship with God?

Questions: Hosea 1-3

1. 1:2-3. What does God want Hosea to do and why? Describe the emotions and the feelings that Hosea would probably be feeling.

2. 1:3-9. What are the names of the three children and why? What do you think is going through Hosea's mind as these children are being named these names?

- Even in the midst of Israel's idolatry and God's judgment, what sign of hope do we see in Hosea 1?

3. Would you treat the people of God in 2:1-13 like God does in 2:14-23?

- Read Hosea 2:8. How does God describe Israel's faithlessness? In your own words, describe the outrage of Israel's sin. (see Hosea 11:3)

4. Hosea 3. What does Hosea do that gives us a picture of God's grace and who gives this idea to Hosea to do this? How does chapter three make you feel?

Read

Hosea 1:3, Romans 5:10, Ephesians 2:12-13

“Apparently, Hosea’s wife had been unfaithful to him. Perhaps she had even sold herself into some kind of temple prostitution. Whatever the exact situation was, God told Hosea to go and buy her back and to continue to love her. Hosea never talks about himself again in his prophecies. We have just read everything [meaning Hosea 1-3] the Bible tells us about him. What, then, is the significance of the man Hosea and his wife? Throughout this book, Hosea and Gomer – real characters in history – stand for God and Israel. In much of the prophetic portions of the book, God and Israel are directly personified as husband and wife, as in chapter 2. Then, at other times, all the images are dropped, and God talks directly to Israel about himself and about them, as revealingly as in any other book in the Bible.” –Mark Dever.

“Hosea’s pursuing, redeeming, and sanctifying love for Gomer provides us with a vivid and moving picture of Christ’s love for us, his bride.” –Nancy Guthrie.

Day 2

Read Hosea 3-5. Note an example of Israel's sin, God's judgment for that sin, and God's salvation for the people. What did Israel do that prompted God's anger?

Questions: Hosea 3-5

"Idolatry was the Israelites' biggest problem. In fact, you could say the whole book is about their idolatry." –Mark Dever.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–22. According to Paul, how are we to learn from Israel's idolatry?

2. What is symbolic about chapter 3? What is Hosea putting on display for the reader?

3. Hosea 4:1. What does Hosea mean by "controversy"? How does this verse help us understand the coming chapters?

a. Hosea 4:6. Describe the failures of the leadership.

b. What is the main accusation that God brings against Israel in chapter 4? (It is repeated in 5:4)

4. What is another repeated accusation against Israel? And what is their greatest need? (see 4:6; cf. 4:14; 5:4 with 5:14–6:3)

Read

Hosea 3:2, John 8:34, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Day 3

Read Hosea 6-14. On what basis does Hosea exhort us to “press on to know the LORD”?

Questions: Hosea 9-14

1. Hosea 6:1-3. What are Hosea’s words of instruction? Describe God’s love even when he seems to be angry and ready to punish or afflict pain.
 - a. Luke 24:45-47. How does Jesus fulfill Hosea 6:1-3?

2. Hosea 6:6. What does God desire (Matthew 9:10-13)?
 - a. Hosea 7:4. How do you stir the fires of your faith so that it doesn’t grow cold and you end up turning away from God?

 - b. Hosea 7:13. Define “redeem”. Describe God’s love in this context.

3. In your own words, describe the heart of God we find in Hosea 11:8–9?

4. What is the significance of Hosea 14:9? How does this concluding verse impact the way we read the rest of the Minor Prophets? Acts 23:11. What is God’s plan?

Read

1 Peter 1:13-25

Two questions to consider in your devotion: What is the imperishable seed Peter mentions? What is its relation to us?

Call Me
Husband,
Not Baal

John Piper

The book of Hosea describes Hosea's marriage to Gomer and its prophetic meaning for Israel. Chapters 4–14 give excerpts from Hosea's preaching of grace and judgment leading up to the fall of Israel in 722 BC. Chapters 1–3 are so powerful and personal that I want to walk through them with you and make some brief comments and applications as we go. If you grasp the point of chapters 1–3, you have grasped the point of the book. I believe the point for us at Bethlehem at the end of 1982 is: Love God warmly as your husband, don't just serve him as your Lord.

Hosea's Unique Prophecy

Let's begin with 1:1, "The word of the Lord came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jereboam the son of Joash, king of Israel." This means that Hosea was prophesying in the thirty years or so leading up to Assyria's destruction of Israel in 722 BC. The whole book seems to be addressed to the northern kingdom of Israel, not the southern kingdom of Judah. So Hosea is a contemporary of Amos, and they were addressing the same corrupt and idolatrous northern kingdom during the last decades of its existence.

But Hosea is utterly unique in one respect. God made him live the tragedy of Israel's unfaithfulness by marrying a harlot. What follows is shocking because the idolatry of Israel is shocking. Verses 2, 3: "When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord.' So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son." Some Christians who would never dream of marrying a pimp or a prostitute will fall in love with a well-bred unbeliever. But in God's eyes, everyone who forsakes the Lord is a whore. There are no religious singles in God's eyes. Everyone is either faithfully married to God or is a prostitute. God made you (not just Israel) for himself. If you get your kicks from somewhere else, you commit great harlotry against God. That was Israel's condition. And so God took Hosea

and said, as it were, "Before I give you a word of judgment and grace, I am going to make you know what it's like to be married to an unfaithful wife. Go, marry a harlot!" Hosea obeys and has a son. His marriage is an acted-out parable of God's relation to Israel.

Judgment and Hope

Verses 4, 5: "And the Lord said to him, 'Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and 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. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.'" Gomer is going to bear three children, and each one is going to symbolize the judgment of God which harlotry always begets. The first is named Jezreel to remind the people of the fury of Jehu (a former king of Israel) when he killed Joram and Amaziah and Jezebel and 70 sons of Ahab in the city of Jezreel. Even though Jehu was carrying out the penal purposes of God, he was reckless and impetuous and high-handed in his dealings. When God says in verse 5 that he will therefore break the bow of Israel, he means that this is still Israel's spirit. She is unfaithful and begets violence and treachery. The first son stands for this sin of Israel.

Verses 6–9: "She [Gomer] conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, 'Call her name Not pitied, for I will no more have pity on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will deliver them by the Lord their God; I will not deliver them by bow, nor by sword nor by war, nor by horses, nor by horsemen.' When she had weaned Not pitied, she conceived and bore a son, and the Lord said, 'Call his name Not my people, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.'" Hosea doesn't tell us whether these last two were his children or not. When your wife is a harlot, you never know. But, like Jezreel, their names show what harlotry, or forsaking the Lord, begets: God's pity will come to an end, and he will cast off Israel as his people. There is a point of no return in the faithlessness of a wife and the faithlessness of a people.

But 1:10–2:1 show that these judgments are not the last word. Judgment may be

coming (as indeed it came in 722 BC when the Assyrians deported Israel), but somewhere down the line God would have back his people, his wife of harlotry.

Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Sons of the living God.” And the people of Israel and the people of Judah 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. Say to your brother, “My people,” and to your sister, “She has obtained pity.”

God may replace pity with wrath for a season. He may disinherit some generations of Israel. But he will not give up Israel forever. He will, at some future time, overcome the alienation of “Not pitied” and “Not my people,” and great will be the day of Jezreel.

So (to sum up chapter 1) Hosea married a harlot to symbolize and act out God’s relation to faithless Israel. She had three children whose names symbolize God’s judgment which unfaithfulness begets. Yet the promise is given that some day the judgment will be reversed.

Harlotry with the Baals

In 2:2 Hosea speaks again of his wife, Gomer. But there are also words of God to his faithless wife, Israel: “Plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—that she put away her harlotry from her face and her adultery from between her breasts, lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born.” Hosea is now back where he started in 1:2. He is not thinking of Israel as the violent child Jezreel or as bastards born of harlotry (as he did in 1:6–8). He is thinking now of Israel again as a wife of harlotry. And in 2:2–13 Hosea and God speak as one about the faithlessness of their wives and the judgment coming upon them.

Three verses sum up this unit: first, verse 5, “Their mother has played the harlot; she that conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool

and my flax, my oil and my drink.’” Then in verse 8 God says, “She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold which she used for Baal.” Then verse 13, “I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals, when she burned incense to them and decked herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, says the Lord.” In those three verses we see the tragedy of Israel: 1) God wants to be her husband, but she is a harlot loving other gods; 2) all she has she gets from her true husband, but thinks she is getting it from the Baals; 3) God will punish this harlotry. For when he is treated as less than a husband, he shows that he is vastly more than a husband.

Pursuing an Unfaithful Wife

Hosea 2:14–23 is one of the most tender and most beautiful love songs in the Bible. It is sung by God to his unfaithful wife, Israel. But before we look at it, skip over to chapter 3. Here we see Hosea and Gomer for the last time. She has run off and lives now with a paramour, a “significant other.” So Hosea is free, right? Now he can get a divorce. She has ended the marriage once and for all. She has another man. Hosea is free. Right? Wrong! God would not give up on Israel, and he aims for Hosea to symbolize his undying love to his wife of harlotry. Verse 1: “The Lord said to me, ‘Go again and love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress; even as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.’ So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.” When you think a moment on what God asked Hosea to do here, you get a glimpse into what God’s love for us in our wretchedness is like.

She had been faithless all along, and finally she had gone off with another man. Hosea could have had her stoned by law, just like we stand condemned by law. But God commands him to love her. “Go again, love her.” And not just to go and get her and love her, but to even be willing to pay this “significant other” for her. If that was not almost an emotional impossibility, Hosea could not afford it. If he could have, he probably would

have paid cash. But he couldn't. So he paid half in cash and half in barley. And the total amounted to what Exodus 21:32 says a female slave costs. Gomer had evidently sunk to the lowest possible level. And God says to Hosea, "Get her back, whatever it costs, get her back."

The reason God could expect that of Hosea is that he aims to do just that with his wayward Israel, and he had shown this to Hosea in 2:14–23. Recall from other messages the principle that guides me in my interpretation of passages like this. It looks beyond the Assyrian captivity to a literal fulfillment for ethnic Israel some day. But the fulfillment will also include us who are children of Abraham by faith (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7, 29). When Christians read Hosea 2:14–23, they should say, "Those are promises for me; that is God's will for me." This principle is confirmed here by the fact that Paul, in Romans 9:24, and Peter, in 1 Peter 2:10, apply Hosea 2:23 to the church. So this is a word of God for us today.

God's Love Song

I see in Hosea 2:14–23 at least three things God does for us, his rebellious wife, to win us back; and I see one overriding thing that he wants from us. The first thing he does is woo us tenderly. Verse 14: "Behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her." We are all guilty of harlotry. We have loved other lovers more than God. We have gotten our kicks elsewhere. He has been at times an annoying deity. We, like Gomer, were enslaved to a paramour, the world, pleasure, ambition. But God has not cast us off. He promises to take us into the wilderness. He wants to be alone with us. Why? So that he can speak tenderly to us. Literally, the Hebrew says, so that he can speak "to her heart." And when he speaks, he will allure you. He will entice you and woo you. He will say what a lover says to his lady when they walk away from the party into the garden. God wants to talk that way with you. Go with him into the wilderness and listen with your heart. Do not think you are too ugly or too rotten. He knows that his wife is a harlot. That's the meaning of mercy: God is wooing a wife of harlotry.

The second thing God does is promise her hope and safety. Verse 15: "And there I will give her vineyards and make the valley of Achor a door of hope." The valley of Achor is where Israel was first unfaithful to the Lord in the promised land. Just after Israel entered the land, Achan kept the forbidden booty and caused the defeat at Ai. But now God promises that if his harlot will come home, Achor will no longer be a "valley of trouble" (Joshua 7:26), but a door of hope. She will come home to rich vineyards. Verse 18 spells out her hope in more detail: "I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground, and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety." If only his estranged wife will come home, she will find a paradise with her husband: he will make a pact even with the animals, lest they do harm; and he will remove all violence and conflict. These are no doubt the words God speaks into the heart of his wife in the lonely place. "It will be so good, so good! Put away your harlotry and come home."

The third thing God does is renew his wife's betrothal and consummate the marriage again in purity. Verses 19, 20: "And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, in steadfast love and mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord." Three times: I will betroth you; I will betroth you; I will betroth you. "We will go back to the days of our engagement. We will start over. Harlots can start over! We will lay a fresh foundation: righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness. Things will not only be good in the paradise around us. Things will also be right between us. These have always been my ways; but now they will be mutual." Yes, even a wife of harlotry can experience a new relationship of righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, and faithfulness with her divine husband.

But the most daring statement of all is the last one in verse 20: "And you shall know the Lord." To see what this means, recall the peculiar use of the word "know" in the Bible. For example, Genesis 4:1, "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." And Matthew 1:25, "Joseph knew her [Mary]

not until she had borne a son.” In the context of a broken marriage being renewed with the fresh vows of betrothal, must not the words, “and you shall know the Lord” (v. 20), mean, you shall enjoy an intimacy like that of the purest sexual intercourse. When the wife of harlotry returns to her husband, he will withhold nothing. He will not keep her at a distance. The fellowship and communion and profoundest union he will give to his prodigal wife when she comes home broken and empty.

This is the gospel story in the Old Testament. This is the meaning of Christmas interpreted seven centuries before Christ. God comes to woo us tenderly to himself; he promises us fullest hope and safety; he starts over with any who will come, and offers us the most intimate and pleasure-filled relationship possible.

And what must we do to qualify? What does he want from us? Verse 16: “In that day, says the Lord, you will call me, ‘My husband,’ and no longer will you call me, ‘My Baal.’” I think the word Baal here has a double meaning. As the next verse shows, it means one of the false gods of Israel’s idolatry. So verse 16 means: “You will no longer include me as one of many gods, or many lovers; you will talk to me as your only true God and husband.”

But there is another sense of the word Baal. Fifteen times in the Old Testament it simply means “husband,” but husband in the sense of owner and lord. The Baals were Israel’s hard masters as well as her lovers. In 7:14, for example, the people gashed themselves to try to get benefits from the Baals (just like the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18:28). When Israel chose a Baal for her “significant other,” she chose a cruel and merciless lord. So the other (and I think primary) meaning of Hosea 2:16 is: “Relate to me as a loving husband, not as a harsh master or owner. In that day, says the Lord, you will call me ‘My husband,’ and you will no longer call me ‘My Baal.’”

The good news at the end of 1982 is that God wants you to love him warmly as your husband, not just serve him dutifully as your Lord. When you think of your failures in 1982—how little you have read his Word, how burdensome prayer has felt, how many other things of this world have given you

more kicks than God—God wants you to remember that his desire to have you back is not based on a naïve estimation of your character. The point of Hosea is that God exalts his mercy by not giving up on his wife of harlotry. The good news of Hosea—and of the parable of the prodigal son, and of Christmas—is that God knows we have sold ourselves for a song in 1982, yet he is wooing us into the chambers of his love.

But, please take special notice of this, especially you who tend to keep God at arm’s distance from your emotions. According to Hosea 2:16, God does not want you to return to him and say, “Yes, Sir,” and set about your duties. He wants you to come into the wilderness, to listen to him speak tenderly, and to respond to him, “My husband.” God wants your heart, not just your hands, because if he has your heart, he has everything.

Sermon Notes

October 4, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 2

Joel

**The God
Who
Rejects
Apathy**

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Content*: Agricultural devastation sets the stage for a summons to repentance, to which God responds with a promises of mercy and an outpouring of his Spirit, with a day of judgment on the nations
2. *Author*: Joel (“Yahweh is God”), who is otherwise unknown
3. *Date of prophetic activity*: mid-sixth or mid-ninth centuries
4. *Emphasis*: The impending day of Yahweh—a day of salvation and judgment

Literary Overview

1. Superscription (1:1)
2. Call for Lamentation and Repentance (1:2–2:17)
 - a. 1st Appeal: Curses should yield repentance (1:2–20)
 - b. 2nd Appeal: The Day of Yahweh is coming (2:1–17)
3. Promise of Salvation and Restoration (2:18–3:21)
 - a. 1st Announcement: Restoration of Deity-Nation-Land Relationship (2:18– 32)
 - b. 2nd Announcement: Defeat of Israel’s Enemies (3:1–21)

Call for Lamentation & Repentance (1:2–2:17)

1. Agricultural devastation caused by locusts (1:4) and fire (1:19–20); drought (1:20). How should Judah understand the destruction? Answer: As curses of the covenant
 - (#6c) Agricultural disaster / unproductivity caused by crop pests (Deut. 28:38–39, 42), (#10) fire (Deut. 28:24; 32:22), and (#6b) drought (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:22–24)
2. What do these destructive forces anticipate? Answer: They are foretastes of the impending Day of Yahweh:
 - Joel 1:15. Alas for the day! For the day of Yahweh is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.
 - Joel 2:11. Yahweh utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of Yahweh is great and very awesome; who can endure it? Cf. Isa 33:14–15; Nah 1:6; Mal 3:2; Rev 6:17.
3. Transition:
 - a. In light of the fact that “the day of Yahweh is great and very awesome,” the question is raised in 2:11, “Who can endure it?”
 - Joel 2:11. Yahweh utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of Yahweh is great and very awesome; who can endure it?
 - Isa. 33:14–15. The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: “Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?” 15He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking on evil.
 - Nah 1:6. 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.

- Mal 3:2. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap.
 - Rev. 6:15–17. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"
- b. The verses that follow suggest that some can if they "return" to Yahweh and find "refuge" in him, thus proving to be his "people."
- Joel 2:12–14. "Yet even now," declares Yahweh, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to Yahweh your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for Yahweh your God?
 - Joel 3:16. Yahweh roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earthquake. But Yahweh is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel. (Cf. Gen. 49:9 with Rev. 5:5—the lion of the tribe of Judah.)
 - Zeph 2:3. Seek Yahweh, 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 Yahweh.

Promise of Salvation and Restoration (2:18–3:21)

1. The promise that those who return will experience restoration blessings:
 - a. (#1) Renewal of Yahweh's favor / loyalty / presence (Joel 2:18, 27–29; cf. Lev 26:42, 45; Deut 4:29, 31; 30:3, 9)
 - b. (#5) Agricultural bounty (Joel 2:19, 22, 24; cf. Lev 26:42; Deut 30:9)
 - c. (#9) Power over enemies (Joel 2:20; cf. Deut 30:7)
 - d. (#3) Restoration of true worship and ability to be faithful (Joel 2:26, 28; cf. Deut 4:30; 30:6, 8)
 - e. (#2) Renewal of the covenant (Joel 2:26–27; cf. Lev 26:42, 44–45; Deut 4:31)

2. Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:17–21.
 - a. Peter believed the prophecy of Joel 2 was being fulfilled at Pentecost. His addition of "in the last days" (*en tais eschatais heoemerais*) in Acts 2:17 suggests that he was convinced the end times had already begun in his day.
 - b. Elsewhere the apostle wrote that Jesus Christ "was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest *in the last times (ep'eschatou toen chronooen)* for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Pet. 1:20–21). This suggests that Peter saw the last days (pl) beginning with Christ's resurrection.
 - c. Nevertheless, he still affirmed that the climactic last day (sg) was still to come: "According to [the Father's] great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed *in the last time (en kairooe eschatooe)*" (1:3–5).

Excursus: The “Last Days” in Scripture

1. The “Last Days” in the OT:

- a. Tribulation for Israel
 - i. Judgment leading to captivity, oppression, and persecution (Deut. 4:30–31; 31:29; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; Ezek 38:14–17; Dan. 10:14 with 11:27–12:10; cf. 8:17, 19 with 24)
 - ii. False teaching, deception, apostasy (Dan. 10:14 with 11:27–12:10; cf. 8:17, 19 with 25)
- b. Return to Yahweh
 - i. They seek Yahweh (Hos. 3:4–5; cf. Deut. 4:30–31)
 - ii. They are delivered and enemies are judged (Ezek. 38:16, 18, 21–22; Dan. 10:14 with 11:40–45; 12:2)
- c. The Messiah Conquers Israel’s Enemies (“the nations”) (Gen. 49:1, 8–9; Num. 24:14–19; Isa. 2:2–4; Mic. 4:1–3; Dan. 2:28–45; 10:14–12:10)
- d. God Establishes a New Kingdom and Rules Over It Via a Judean-Davidic King (Gen 49:1, 10; Isa. 2:2–4; Mic. 4:1–3; Dan. 2:28–45; Hos. 3:4–5)
- e. The Saints of Israel are Raised from the Dead (Dan. 12:2)
- f. God Establishes a New Covenant with Israel (Jer. 31:31–34; 30:24)
- g. Many Gentiles (former enemies) Experience Deliverance as Well (Jer. 47:48; 49:39; Isa. 19:19–25)

2. The “Last Days” in the NT (*en tais eschatais heoemerais* unless otherwise noted)

- a. Holy Spirit is poured out in the last days, bringing judgment on Israel and restoration to the remnant (Acts 2:16–20)
- b. God’s speaks through Jesus in these last days (Heb. 1:2–3), Christ having appeared at “the end of the ages [*epi synteleia tooen aiooenooen*] to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26; cf. Dan. 12:13) and having raised from the dead for the sake of the Church “*in the last times [ep’ eschatou tooen chronoen]*” (1 Pet. 1:20; cf. 1:5).
- c. Many anti-Christ’s revealed in the “last hour [*eschateoe hooera*]” (1 John 2:18), a phrase only used in the LXX of Daniel where the Hebrew reads “latter days” (Dan. 4:17, 19, 26; 5:5; 8:17, 19; 9:21; 11:6, 35, 40, 45; 12:1, 13).
- d. False teachers in the last days (Jude 18–19; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1 with 1 Tim. 6:1–5, 20)
- e. The “end of the ages [*ta teleoe tooen aiooenooen*]” has come on believers (1 Cor. 10:11; cf. Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10)
- f. Still other texts that suggest we are still anticipating the ultimate, consummate end—John 5:24–25; 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48; 1 Pet 1:5.

3. Conclusions:

- a. Today we are still anticipating the consummation, but Christ’s resurrection truly inaugurated the last days.
- b. NT theology is, therefore, “end times (inaugurated)” theology.

The Bridge to Amos

- Joel 3:16. Yahweh roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earthquake. But Yahweh is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.
- Amos 1:2. Yahweh roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers.

Day 1

Read the introduction to Joel in a Study Bible and read Joel 1. Describe the theme of Hosea.

Questions: Joel 1

“[T]he text connects the locust plague in history with the eschatological day of the Lord (1:15-18; 2:2-11). Joel links the real world of human phenomena (1:1-14) with the expectation of the eschatological day of the Lord (2:1-11). The superhuman strength of the locusts dramatically heightens the catastrophe. The images of darkness (2:2), fire (1:19-20; 2:3), and earthquake (2:10) suggest a theophany. God himself is behind the image of the locusts, as he comes to bring devastation on the land and to judge his people (2:10). His coming is near (2:1), cosmic (2:10), and awe inspiring (2:11). The experience of the locust plague in history is a mirror image of the coming day of the Lord in the future (eschatology).” –Willem Vangemeren

1. Make a list of signs of God’s judgment from Joel 1.
2. Read Deuteronomy 28 and compare the list from Question 1 to the curses in Deuteronomy. Make a list of curses / judgments that appear in both passages. Include Joel 2 in your comparison.
3. In light of God’s judgment, what should Joel’s audience do? What does Joel call them to do?
4. Describe “repentance”. What does it mean and what does it look like?

“According to the book of Joel, there is much we need to be saved from, for there is much that we have done wrong. According to the Bible, God made the world. Therefore, he is the world’s rightful judge.” –Mark Dever

“Joel preached the sovereignty, holiness, and compassion of God. The holy God would not ignore sin among his own elect people. The prophet saw in the outbreak of a locust plague the hand of God chastening and driving Israel to repentance. This locust outbreak was a warning that if Israel was not repentant, a yet more devastating army would come against the nation.” –Tremper Longman

Read

Deuteronomy 28. Study Matthew 5:17-20

Day 2

Read Joel 2. Note the use of the term “heart”.

Questions: Joel 2

1. Joel 1:15 introduced “the day of the Lord.” Joel’s words about the day of the Lord continue in chapter 2. What are the features of the day of the Lord? Is it something that God’s people should look forward to?
2. Thus far, Joel has focused extensively on the coming judgment on the day of the Lord. What note of hope does he introduce beginning in 2:12? How should the people respond to the news of God’s coming judgment?
3. Joel 2:18-27 describe God’s response to the people’s repentance. What will God do if his people return to him? (Consider comparing this passage to the first part of Deuteronomy 28 and Deuteronomy 30).
4. What do you see in Acts 2:37-39 that helps you better understand the book of Joel?

“Given our predicament as convicted sinners, Joel points toward hope by answering a second question: What is salvation? We learn in this little book that God is not only committed to justice, he is committed to mercy. He will not only judge his people, he will save them.” –Mark Dever

“The book of Joel suggests three major intertextual connections with the NT. First, the day of the Lord imagery is prevalent in the Gospels and the book of Revelation. Second, the coming of the eschatological Spirit, including calling on the name of the Lord and being called by the Lord, shapes the book of Acts and the apostolic mission of Paul. Third, John adopts the image of the fountain flowing from God’s throne to describe the new creation.” –Willem Vangemeren

Read

Deuteronomy 30. Study Luke 5:32.

Day 3

Read Joel 3. Read Acts 2. Describe the concept, the context, and what is all going on when someone pays you back for something.

Questions: Joel 3.

1. Compare the end of Joel 2 to Acts 2. What event fulfills the oracle in Joel 2?
2. According to Joel 3, what else will happen in the days when these oracles are fulfilled? Make a list. How might we understand what this fulfillment looks like?
3. Compare Joel 3:18 with Revelation 22:1-5.
4. Describe your reaction to the end of the book. Does it end on a note of hope? Explain.

“After everything Judah had endured – the invasions of locust armies, human armies, or both – God would still preserve and bless them. The effects of the recent devastation would be completely and permanently reversed. The land that was parched would drip with wine, flow with milk, and run with water. More than that, these dramatic symbols would point to the inner spiritual reality of the people’s reconciled relationship with God: ‘Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon’. Joel 3:21”. –Mark Dever

Read

Acts 2. Study Hebrews 12:5-11.

The
Locust
Horde and
the Day of
the Lord

John Piper

The book of Joel falls naturally into two parts. In 1:1–2:27 we read about a terrible locust plague that came over Israel as a judgment from God and how the people repented and God restored their fortunes. Then in 2:28 to the end of the book we read about how God at some future time is going to pour out his Spirit far and wide to bless his people and how he is going to gather for judgment the nations which have rejected him and his people. Or to put it another way, the first half of the book describes how God fought against his own people to make them honor him alone. And the second half of the book describes how he will fight against the nations who refuse to honor him alone.

What I would like to do this morning is guide you through the whole book in a summary way, then go back and focus on the main messages of the two halves as they apply to us today.

The Terrible Locust Plague

Let's begin with Joel 1:1. "The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel." We know almost nothing about this prophet. And that does not matter too much in the end, because his intention is to be a mouthpiece for God, not himself. In verses 2 and 3 he says that his message should be passed on from generation to generation. Then in verse 4 he describes the catastrophe of the locust plague: "What the cutting locust has 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." The results of this locust plague were utterly devastating. Verse 5: all the wine is cut off from the drunkard's mouth. Verse 7: the fig trees have splintered. Verse 9: there is not even enough grain for the cereal offerings in the temple. So in verse 13 Joel calls for Israel to cry to the Lord, because he sees in this catastrophe the judgment of God leading up to the great and terrible day of the Lord.

Gird 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 cereal offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of the Lord your God. Sanctify 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 to the Lord. Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near and as destruction from the Almighty comes. (vv. 13–15)

Foreshadows of the Day of the Lord

Chapter 2 begins with another warning that the terrible day of judgment called "the day of the Lord" is coming and that this locust horde is the dawn of this day of the Lord. "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness." Then in verses 3–11 Joel describes the locust horde again as a raging army with horses and chariots and warriors. Verse 3: "The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but after them, a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them." Verse 9, "They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls; they climb up into houses, they enter through windows like a thief." And in verse 11 they are said to be the army of the Lord. "The Lord utters his voice before his army, for his host is exceedingly great; he that executes his word is powerful." Then for a third time the locust horde is described as the advance troops of the day of the Lord: "for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?"

God's Purpose in Fighting His People

So far, then, we learn that God is fighting his people for some reason. We're not told why. Which probably means that Joel intended for us to learn more about God here than about ourselves. God has sent his army of locusts against Israel and threatened that the end is near. He is fighting against his people. But is only destruction in his mind? No. Verses 12–14 tell us more about this warrior God:

"Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; 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 repents of evil. Who knows whether he will not turn and repent, and

leave a blessing behind him, a cereal offering and a drink offering for the Lord our God?

Even though God has threatened destruction of his own people (since he can raise up from stones children to Abraham! Matthew 3:9), yet he holds out the opportunity of repentance and salvation at the eleventh hour. If they will repent, he will repent. If they will rend their hearts, he will cease to rend their land.

So in verses 15–17 Joel calls for fasting, and the priests pray for God not to make his heritage a byword among the nations. They humbled themselves and appealed to God’s jealousy for his chosen people; and he responded in verse 18: “Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.” He turned away from judgment; the climactic day of the Lord which had been threatening withdrew into the more distant future; and verses 19–27 describe the stunning restoration which God promises to the land.

Verses 25–27 show what God was really after in fighting with his people.

I will restore to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the Lord, am your God, and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

The ultimate aim of God in sending the locust horde against his people is to secure their undivided allegiance: “You shall know that I, Yahweh, am your God, and there is no one else.” Evidently, the cause of the locust plague had been the people’s half-hearted allegiance. Some of their affections had gone after things other than God. He was not their all-consuming love. So he fought against his own people. For few things are more dishonoring to God and dangerous for us than love to God which is only half-hearted.

The Coming Day of Judgment and Blessing

That is the first half of Joel’s book. He had said that the day of the Lord was near (in 1:15; 2:1, 11). But then God repented, and the final judgment did not fall. What becomes of it? Evidently it was “near” not in the sense that it had to happen soon, but in the sense that it was on the brink of happening; conditions were ripe for it; the massed troops were just across the border; the trumpet was on the lips, when the commander raised his hand and made peace with his rebellious people. But now what of this promised day?

In the second half of the book, Joel lifts his eyes to the future and, inspired by the Spirit, predicts the events that will precede the day of the Lord. Verse 28: “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.” Sometime in the future Joel sees a time of overflowing spiritual blessing beyond the prosperity which God provided after the locust plague. But this benefit applies only to those who “call on the name of the Lord” (according to verse 32), because the day of the Lord approaches again with darkness and destruction. Verses 30–32:

And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered.

So Joel sees two things coming as the day of the Lord approaches: one is a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:28, 29), and the other is a terrible time of divine judgment. He had fought against his own people in the past to lead them to salvation. He will fight against the nations in the future who reject his salvation and his people.

This final world-end judgment is described in chapter 3. First, verses 1 and 2, “Behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and

I will enter into judgment with them there.” The word Jehoshaphat means “Jehovah judges.” Joel sees a great day coming when God will vindicate his name by judging all who have spurned him. Verse 12 describes the scene as a great judgment: “Let the nations bestir themselves and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about.” Verse 14 describes multitudes in the valley: “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.” This does not mean people come there to make a decision; they come to experience God’s decision. God is the Decider in the valley of decision. The valley of decision is the same as the valley of Jehoshaphat, and “decision” (or verdict) is virtually the same as “judgment.”

So Joel sees a future with two sides: salvation and blessing for those who call on the name of the Lord, but judgment and destruction for the people who go their own way. The contrast is laid out finally in verses 16–21: “The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.” At the end of the age, when the day of the Lord comes, God will meet us either as a roaring lion to devour or as a quiet refuge of delight.

And now, just as the first half of the book ended in 2:27 with the purpose of God: “You shall know that . . . I am the Lord your God, and there is none else,” so the second half of the book draws near its close in 3:17 with the same purpose expressed: “So you shall know (in view of all that’s happened) that I am the Lord your God.” The purpose of God in the historical locust horde and the purpose of God in the final day of the Lord are the same: to make known that he alone is God and is to be loved and worshiped and served above all things.

God’s Purpose in History

That’s an overview of Joel’s message from the Lord. Now what is God’s word to us in these two halves of Joel’s prophecy? There are four things I think we should take to heart. First, let us never lose sight of God’s

purpose in history—from grasshopper swarms, to world-wide judgment, to the dissolving of sun and moon—his purpose is to be God in the eyes of all the world. “You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the Lord, am your God, and there is none else”(2:27, 3:17). If we are God’s people, everything we do must have this as its aim.

The American church is weary with having man and his relationships and feelings and self-concepts at the center of our attention for so long. We are bored with the very un-amazing results of standing in front of the mirrors of psychology and anthropology and sociology. And it is time that, at least in the church, we hold our eye to the telescope of theology. Untold numbers of puny personal problems would be swallowed up if we could learn to stand atop the Mt. Palomar of divine revelation and gaze at the God whose purpose is to be God alone, and before whose unutterable majesty every knee will bow whether in heaven or on the earth or under the earth. My prayer as we study the prophets this fall is that we might see God the way they see God, and that the word will spread, “They have a big God at Bethlehem.” The first lesson of the prophet Joel for our man-centered 20th century is this: From devouring grasshoppers to vanishing galaxies God has a purpose, and he will achieve it—to be God alone in the eyes of all the world.

God’s Good Intention in Opposing His People

Second, if our hearts wander from this God, he will fight against us to bring us to repentance. I have seen it in my own life: if I begin to become proud and self-confident and prayer starts to feel unnecessary, God clogs my way. He brings me down. Things will go sour at home. Tensions arise at work. Sleep is not sweet. Depression builds. Everywhere I turn, there is no joy. He boxes me in and clogs my way. He fights against me in my pride. For he is a jealous God and will have our heart’s trust 100%. When he says in 2:12, “Return to me with all your heart,” it is clear, isn’t it, what he is fighting for: all our heart, not a piece on Sunday and a piece at mealtime and a piece at bedtime. If you are his, he will fight you until you give him all your heart all the time.

Hosea describes the people of Israel going after other gods like a bride leaving her husband. And God says in Hosea 2:6, 7:

Therefore, I will hedge up her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them. Then she shall say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me than now."

God will fight against us and clog the joy of our lives until we return with our whole heart to him. For his purpose is to be God alone in the midst of his people.

Rend Hearts not Garments

Third, therefore, as Joel pleads, rend your hearts and not your garments, awake (1:5), lament (1:8), be ashamed and wail (1:11), declare a fast, and cry to the Lord (1:14) for mercy. Turn from the sin you cherish and for which you feel guilty every day. Return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (2:13). Don't be bitter at God because he clogs your way and frustrates your day. Every divine stroke is the discipline of a loving Father and a blow against our pride, our self-reliance, and our love for the world. Turn and kiss the rod of God, and the Lord will become to you a gentle shepherd.

The Fulfillment of Joel's Prophecy

Fourth, and finally, let us pray and seek God earnestly for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit promised in 2:28, 29. It is true that at Pentecost Peter said that the coming of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples was a fulfillment of Joel 2:28, 29: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). But that was just the beginning of the blessing. We have only tasted the power of the age to come, we have only received the down payment of the Spirit. The prophecy is far from complete. How many of our old men dream dreams of God? How many of our young men see visions of God? Where are the sons and daughters who hear the word of

God and bring us prophecies for our guidance? Has the hope of Moses in Numbers 11:29 really been fulfilled: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon all."

We know it has not yet been fulfilled, not only because the church is so far from ideal but also because the people of Israel persist in unbelief. They have been broken off because of their unbelief, and we Gentiles have been grafted in to the rich root of the covenant and made seed of Abraham and heirs of the promise (Galatians 3:14, 29; Romans 11:17ff.). But Scripture promises that one day Israel will be converted, accept Jesus as the Messiah; and then the prophecy of the Spirit will have its final fulfillment. So let us pray earnestly and call upon God to pour out his Spirit for a great awakening at Bethlehem, and for the conversion of Israel that we may be united in one holy people of God. Then when the day of the Lord comes and all the nations are gathered for judgment in verdict valley, the Lord will be our refuge, and we will confess with unspeakable joy that he alone is God in our midst, and there is none else.

Sermon Notes

October 11, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 3

Amos

The God
Who
Roars
Against
Sin

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Content*: In a period of rare economic prosperity and political strength for Israel, Yahweh announces her doom (cf. 4:12) because she has failed to keep the covenant.
2. *Date of prophetic activity*: ca. 760 B.C. for an apparently brief period (at the peak of the reigns of Jeroboam II in Samaria [793–753] and Azariah/Uzziah in Jerusalem [792–740])
3. *Author*: Amos (“one who is supported”), a shepherd/farmer from Tekoah, south of Bethlehem in Judah. Because he was a prophet to the *northern kingdom*, Amos served as a foreign missionary, being forced to overcome cultural, religious, and dialectic barriers.
 - a. There are two OT characters bearing the name Amos. One is the leader of King Jehoshaphat’s army = Amasiah (2 Chr. 17:16). The other, who is more well known = Amos, is the eighth century prophet from Judah to the northern kingdom Israel (760 B.C.). The latter’s audience was wealthy and at ease, bound up in materialism and exploiting the poor. Their hearts were far from God, but they thought they were close to him. They exalted themselves over their neighbors, believing their wealth was a sign of God’s favor. How wrong they were. Amos came and warned them of coming destruction if they didn’t repent and surrender to God.
 - b. Amos’ name is related to the verb meaning “to carry or bear (a load).” However, rather than pointing to his burdensome message (i.e., it was not easy for Amos to confront others on the seriousness of their sin), the echo of the passive participle in the form of his name suggests a meaning of “*one who is carried or upheld (by Yahweh)*!” The same form was used by Amos’ contemporary Isaiah, only as a passive participle and not a proper name (Isa. 46:3–4): “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, *who have been borne* by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.” Just as God promised Israel, so he would be Amos’ support, and the prophet’s name would be an ever-present reminder of this fact! Such a name was quite a gift to a prophet who was called by God as a foreign missionary to proclaim God’s Word to a hostile people!
 - c. Not only this, the name Amos is related to the name Amasiah, which actually means “Yahweh has carried (protectively).” The “iah” at the end of “Amasiah” is a shortened form of the name “Yahweh,” which has been added to the verbal root meaning “to carry, bear, uphold, support.” The point of these names is *not* to stress the weightiness of the prophet’s message but to emphasize that he would be upheld by God throughout his life.

Theme and Outline

1. Theme: 4:12 – “Prepare to meet your God!”
2. Outline:
 - a. Superscription (1:1)
 - b. The Indictment of Israel (1:2–2:16)
 - c. The Case against Israel (3:1–6:14)
 - d. The Sentence against Israel (7:1–9:10)
 - e. Epilogue: Ultimate Prospect for Israel (9:11–15)

The Indictment of Israel (1:2–2:16)

1. Amos' rhetoric is pointed and crafty. He notes seven nations surrounding the northern kingdom upon whom Yahweh would bring judgment. He begins at the outskirts (Aram, Philistia, Phoenicia) but then addresses distant cousins (Edom, Ammon, Moab) and then, in the climactic slot seven, the brother (Judah).
2. Unexpectedly, the northern kingdom of Israel is added at the end—the superfluous eighth nation to be judged (cf. David as the eighth, unexpected son in 1 Sam. 16:10–12).
3. God holds the first seven nations accountable in accordance with what they have been given, with Judah alone being judged according to breaking the law. Strikingly, the northern kingdom of Israel is treated more like the foreign nations that never received God's law and did even greater abominations.
 - Rom. 2:12–13, 26–27; 3:19–20. 2:12For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.... 26So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his circumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.... 3:19Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The Case against Israel (3:1–6:14)

1. Backdrop:
 - a. Jeroboam II's reign was the height of the northern kingdom's economic prosperity (2 Kgs. 14:23–15:7), a feature that created great problems in Israel.
 - b. God sent a poor prophet from the south (Judah) to address the spiritual problems of the rich among the north (Israel).
2. The prophet identified Israel as proud, with false securities about their future.
 - Amos 5:18. Woe to you who desire the day of Yahweh! Why would you have the day of Yahweh? It is darkness, and not light,
 - Amos 6:1. Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes!
 - Amos 6:8. The Lord Yahweh has sworn by himself, declares Yahweh, the God of hosts: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it."
3. The nature of Israel's arrogance was seen in:
 - a. Rampant injustice, oppression of the poor and needy, female rule.
 - Amos 4:1. Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, "Bring, that we may drink!" (Cf. Isa. 3:12.)
 - Amos 5:10–12. They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth. 11Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. 12For

- 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.
- Amos 6:12. You have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.
 - Amos 8:2–8.
- b. Lack of stewardship of God’s gifts and failure to attend to the brokenness of society.
- Amos 6:4–7. Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, 5who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, 6who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! 7Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away. (Cf. Ezek. 9:4.)
4. God’s response to Israel’s arrogance:
- a. He abhors their injustice and its resulting false worship, calls for justice and good, and promises life over death if they repent and return to what is right.
- Amos 5:14–15. Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so Yahweh, the God of hosts, will be with you, and as you have said. 15Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that Yahweh, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.
 - Amos 5:21–24. I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. 22Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. 23Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. 24But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.
- b. God brings curses, the revealed goal of which is corrective, not punitive. As in Leviticus 26:18, 21, 23, 27, Amos 4 clearly shows that covenant curses are designed as blessings in disguise for those who will learn from them. God’s disclosed intent in bringing curse was to call Israel back to relationship.
- i. God brought (#7) starvation / famine “yet you did not return to me” (4:6).
 - ii. God brought (#6) agricultural disaster and non-productivity seen in drought and crop-pests “yet you did not return to me” (4:7–8, 9).
 - iii. God brought (#8) illness, pestilence, and contamination along with (#3) war and its ravages “yet you did not return to me” (4:10).
 - iv. God brought (#10) destruction by fire “yet you did not return to me” (4:11).
- c. The Lord vows to judge Israel severely, crushing through desolation their pride of wealth, forcing them into slavery, and leaving only small remnants of their previous existence. Specifically with respect to curse types, Yahweh declared that they should “prepare to meet your God” (4:12), manifest in (#9) desolation of cities (3:14–15), (#13) exile and captivity (4:2–3), and (#1) anger and rejection from Yahweh (5:18–20).
- Amos 4:12. Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!
 - Amos 3:12. As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed.
 - Amos 3:14–15. On the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. 15I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end.
 - Amos 4:1–3. Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands,

“Bring, that we may drink!”²The Lord Yahweh has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.³And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead; and you shall be cast out into Harmon.

- Amos 5:18–20, 24. Woe to you who desire the day of Yahweh! Why would you have the day of Yahweh? It is darkness, and not light, as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the way, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of Yahweh darkness, and not light, and gloom with not brightness in it? ... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The Sentence against Israel (7:1–9:10):

It is intriguing the way the last major section of the book addresses God’s sentence on Israel.

1. Like a wall that is not plumb, Israel has not lined up with God’s standards, and God promises that all that crooked will be destroyed (7:8–9).
2. Israel’s prioritization of wealth over God and care of others will be reversed into mourning.
 - Amos 8:2–8. “The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them.³The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,” declares the Lord Yahweh. “So many dead bodies!” “They are thrown everywhere!” “Silence!”⁴Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end,⁵saying, “When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances,⁶that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?”⁷Yahweh has sworn by the pride of Jacob: “Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.⁸Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who dwells in it.”
3. Strikingly, the climactic devastation is declared to be a famine of God’s Word— an inability to hear from Yahweh.
 - Amos 8:11–12. “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord Yahweh, “when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Yahweh.¹²They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of Yahweh, but they shall not find it.”
4. Yahweh promises to follow Israel with judgment: “I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good” (Amos 9:4). Nevertheless, although “the eyes of the Lord Yahweh are upon the sinful kingdom” and although he will “destroy it from the surface of the ground,” he also asserts, “I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob” (9:8; cf. 3:2).

The Great Reversal (9:11–15)

1. The book’s last five verses balance out the picture of God as a roaring, devouring lion (cf. 1:2; 3:8; Gen. 49:9 with Rev. 5:5) and serve as a bridge into the book of Obadiah.
2. We learn first that God will restore his people:
 - a. Here the eternal promises of the Davidic dynasty are recalled (9:11) and with that a stress on the covenantal inclusion of a remnant from “all the nations who are called by my name” (9:12).
 - b. The only representative nation mentioned is “Edom,” which happens to be the target audience of Obadiah, the next book in the Twelve.

3. We then learn that God will restore his land:
- The productivity will be so great that reapers will not complete their harvesting before it is time again to plow or sow (9:13).
 - God’s people Israel (and those from the nations aligned with Yahweh) will again inhabit the land, enjoy its productivity, and never again be uprooted (9:14–15).
4. In Acts 15, the Jerusalem elder James cites the LXX of Amos 9 in support of God’s new work among the Gentiles (Acts 15:16–18): “After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18known of old.”

Target Nation	Sin Stated	Sin Summarized
Damascus/Aram (1:3–5)	“because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron” (v. 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abuse of enemies / failure to love neighbor
Gaza/Philistia (1:6–8)	“because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom” (v. 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abuse of enemies / failure to love neighbor
Tyre/Phoenecia (1:9–10)	“because they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood” (v. 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abuse of enemies / failure to love neighbor Unfaithfulness
Edom (1:11–12)	“because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever” (v. 11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abuse of enemies / failure to love neighbor Lack of mercy
Sons of Ammon (1:13–15)	“because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border” (v. 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abuse of enemies / failure to love neighbor Pride or covetousness
Moab (2:1–3)	“because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom” (v. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abuse of enemies / failure to love neighbor
Judah (2:4–5)	“because they have rejected the law of Yahweh, and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their walked” (v. 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disobedience to God’s law Belief in lies
Israel (2:6–16)	“because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals ... a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; 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” (vv. 6–8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abuse of their own—the righteous and needy / failure to love neighbor Sexual sins Low view of God’s holiness <i>*more like the nations + greater abominations</i>

Day 1

Read the intro to Amos in a Study Bible and read Amos 1-3. Describe the theme of Amos.

Questions: Amos 1-3

1. Read Genesis 12:1–9. What does God promise to do to those who curse Abraham?
2. God issues judgment on the enemies of his people and then on Israel and Judah as well? What is the significance of lumping Israel and Judah together in the judgment on nations like Moab and Tyre?
3. What is meant to make us feel the outrage of Israel's apostasy in chapter 2? What does God say about Israel?
4. Should Israel and Judah be surprised that God is going to judge them? Why should they expect his punishment or not?

“Understanding the book of Amos requires knowing who its main character is, and it isn't Amos. It's the Lord God (1:2). Amos may be the prophet, but he is only the prophet. The primary actor here is the Lord himself. And consider how the Lord presents himself in this preface to the book: as one who roars! This judge has more than a mere passing interest in human affairs. He roars about them.” –Mark Dever

Read

Romans 1:18-23

Day 2

Read Amos 4-6. Read Psalm 46.

Questions: Amos 4-6

1. What is the new indictment on Israel in chapter 4 in addition to their apostasy? (see verses 6, 9, 10, 11)
2. Note the similarities of this section: there are seven things that Israel does (6:4-5) and seven things that God hates (5:21-22). The LORD expects Israel to recognize the mini-judgments as a call to repent, but they don't. They are oblivious. How should this affect the way that we read the "signs of the times"?
3. What are some tangible ways described in chapter 5 that Israel's apostasy is demonstrated? How has their distorted view of God affected the way they treat others?
4. Three times in Amos 4-5 "name" is mentioned explicitly in reference of the LORD. What do you think is the significance of that?

"Amos prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel in days of outward prosperity but spiritual famine. He was sent right to the center of corruption, namely, the cult city of Bethel, where their first king, Jeroboam, had built high places of idol worship and set up his own priesthood and new holy days (1 Kings 12:25-33). The Israelites were very religious... But it was a sham. They were using the name of God for their own religious purposes, while their hearts were far from him, made obvious by their oppression of the poor and needy (Amos 5:21-24). Many years after Amos, Jesus confronted this kind of hypocrisy in the Pharisees, who were also full of religious show and pretense (Mt 23:4-5, 23, 28). Jesus is the only hope for religious hypocrites. Only he can give us the courage to face the truth about ourselves and the grace we need to trust him under the weight of that truth. Only he can work an internal transformation so that we can walk in humility and integrity." –Nancy Guthrie

Read

Matthew 23:1-12

Day 3

Read Amos 7-9. Read Acts 15. Why is the quotation of Amos used? (see Acts 15:15–19). What position does it support?

Questions: Amos 7-9

1. What is the significance of being “small”? Does being “small” matter to God? Why or why not? (see 1 Sam 16:11)
2. Chapter 9 features the fifth vision of destruction in the set that began in 7:1 (7:1, 4, 7; 8:1; 9:1). See together, what do these vision share in common? What is different?
3. There are actually three hymns in Amos. Compare the hymns below. What are some common themes? What are some differences?

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Amos 4:13	Amos 5:8-9	Amos 9:5-6
<p>“For behold, <i>he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth— the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!</i>”</p>	<p>“<i>He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name; who makes destruction flash forth against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress.</i>”</p>	<p>“The Lord GOD of hosts, <i>he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt; who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth; who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the surface of the earth—the LORD is his name.</i>”</p>

Read

2 Timothy 4:3-5

Kent Atkinson's Story

“[The cursed land] will never be inhabited, or lived in for all generations... But desert creatures will lie down there, and owls will fill the houses... Hyenas will howl in the fortresses, and jackals in the luxurious places” (Isaiah 13).

Hyenas and jackals, the desert dogs, are commonly seen in the Old Testament inhabiting desolate and cursed lands. By night they feed on things already dead, and they prowl once beautiful places that are now undone by God. The lonely creatures seem constrained by their own nature to slink outside the light, and outside the blessing of God.

I felt abandoned as a child, by my family and especially by my father. While some love was present in my family, I turned away from it and embraced sorrow until it settled into the marrow of my bones. I felt like a dog, shunned, kicked away like an obnoxious pest. At the age of ten I adopted Alcohol as my parent, and I nursed at its bottle. Peer pressure, insecurity, and bitterness, mingled to make me a despairing sinner. I placed the obliterating effects of drunkenness on my altar. I placed my money at its feet. I worshiped its power—the wonderful feeling of drowning woes in oblivion. But Alcohol is a harsh god: “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). Idols have insatiable thirst, and I became like my idol. I too had an insatiable thirst.

By 19 I depended on alcohol to sooth the agony in my soul. However, like all idols, Alcohol gives a fleeting glory of drunken joy; but that always yields a hangover full of shame. I assumed that my life would be tragic. I narrowly passed high school, and failed most of my community college courses. I snarled and slinked outside God’s blessing, outside the light. In demented journal entries, I confessed the elemental hatred I had for those around me, for my father, and for myself. Some entries etch a sunless picture: July 15 2010 reads, “I am hoping every day that I get shot or hit by a car and die... I hate my life and myself. I need to escape. I want to die...;” July 19: “God, please take my life;” July 27: “God please end my life;” August 6: “I hate myself. Why can’t I just die?” Not much variety, but surely there is a trajectory. Were it not for the grace of God, I believe my suicidal dreams would have born their final, dark fruit.

I was arrested twice for public intoxication and put on probation, which was the beginning of God's mercy. His apocalyptic grace shattered the Citadel of Bottles I had fashioned in my heart. The fear that came with being on probation wore down my devotion to Dionysus. Habitual drunkenness is part cause, part symptom of being outside of light and love. It is agony to be the enemy of your Creator. The weak voice of my heart, with oozing lips of sin, whimpered for help. And the God of all mercy and grace answered.

By God's good providence, (ask me sometime, it's complicated) I ended up at a small, one year bible school in Montana. God saved me on September 12th, 2010: "God has shown me the way of life and there is no other way to live. I am a student at Montana Wilderness School of the Bible, and I am happy. Tears of joy every other night thanking God... I love God, this place, these people, my life, my family." The grace of God took me in. All my sin, passed over because of the sacrifice and victory of the Lamb of God. No longer a perverse drunk. No longer kicked away from the table of love and fellowship. Since then, my entire

family has experience revival—my father is my best friend.

“The desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose... The parched ground will become a pool of water, and the thirsty land sings of water. In the haunt of jackals, in their lairs, there will be grass, reeds, and papyrus” (Isaiah 35). When God blesses, his blessing reaches the darkest corners, and the sickly crawlers that dwell in them. The jackal, the shunned dog that feeds on carcasses and roams abandoned lands, is given a bed of deep, green grass. He is led to still waters. His nature, along with his home, is transformed to beauty. The pathetic creature, once relegated to the land of God’s curse, becomes part of the household of the Blessed.

Sermon Notes

October 18, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 4

Obadiah

The God
Who
Judges
Pride

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Author*: Obadiah (“servant of Yahweh”), a prophet from Judah
2. *Date of prophetic activity*: Just after a major attack on Judah.
 - a. Some posit the early 9th century.
 - b. It seems more likely the prophecy should be dated to the early 6th century, very soon after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem (probably ca. 586 B.C.).
 - i. After the great destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, Ezekiel offered an oracle of judgment against Edom for their hatred toward Jerusalem.
 - Ezek. 35:5–6, 14–15. Because you cherished perpetual enmity and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment, therefore, as I live, declares the Lord Yahweh, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; because you did not hate bloodshed, therefore blood shall pursue you.... 14 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: While the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate. 15 As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you; you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am Yahweh.
 - ii. Similarly, with Israel in Babylon, mourning the loss of Jerusalem, the psalmist prayed that the Edomites be destroyed. This is the most likely context for Obadiah’s message.
 - Ps. 137:7. Remember, O Yahweh, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, ‘Lay it bare, down to its foundations!’”
 - iii. Finally, in the wake of Jerusalem’s destruction, the prophet (Jeremiah?) declared Edom’s downfall.
 - Lam. 4:21–22. Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz; but to you also the cup shall pass; you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare. 22 The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished; he will keep you in exile no longer; but your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish; he will uncover your sins.
3. *Message*: Proud in her own security in the heights of Gilead, Edom has gloated over Israel’s destruction by foreign powers. However, her participation in that disaster will bring Yahweh’s wrath. Edom will be destroyed, Mount Zion and Israel will be delivered, and God’s kingdom will triumph.

Excursus: Why are oracles against foreign nations in Israel’s Bible?

1. To show that Yahweh is God of the world, with universal authority (Mal. 1:5: “Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, ‘Great is Yahweh beyond the border of Israel!’”)
2. To heighten Israel’s hope in Yahweh’s faithfulness to his Abrahamic promise, “The who curses you I will curse” (Gen. 12:3).
3. To confront the taunts of the nations that propose Yahweh’s is unable or unwilling to protect his people (Deut. 32:26–27; Ezek. 36:20–21).
4. To affirm that if Yahweh is to deliver his people completely and permanently, he cannot leave their enemies free to strike again.

5. To emphasize that Yahweh is grieved when anyone rejoices over another's grief.
6. To display Yahweh's zeal against sin, passion for his fame, and commitment to judge all sin, whether those of his people or of the nations.
7. To shame Israel for looking to someone other than Yahweh for help and deliverance and to stress that Yahweh alone is savior (see Isa. 20:6: "And the inhabitants of this coastland [i.e., Judah/Israel] will say in that day [that Egypt and Cush are destroyed], 'Behold, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?'"
8. To move Israel to return to Yahweh and thus escape devastating punishment (Zeph. 3:6–7: "I have cut off nations; their battlements are in ruins; I have laid waste their streets so that no one walks in them; their cities have been made desolate, without a man, without an inhabitant. 7 I said, 'Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.' But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt.")

A Brief History of Israelite-Edomite Tensions

1. Before birth, Jacob and Esau were fighting in the womb (Gen. 25:22–26).
2. The brothers competed for the birthright and blessing of their father (22:29–34; ch. 27), a conflict that forced Jacob to flee. While later formally reconciled, their descendants were not.
3. Edom refused passage to Moses and the Israelites on their march from Egypt to Canaan (Num. 20:14–21).
4. Saul campaigned against Edom (1 Sam 14).
5. David subjected the nation and incorporated them into his empire (2 Sam. 8:13–14).
6. The Edomites unsuccessfully revolted against Solomon (1 Kgs. 11:14–22).
7. During the time of Elisha, under Jehoram of Israel, the Edomites successfully revolted (845 B.C.) (2 Kgs. 8:20–22).
8. Enmity continued until Jerusalem's fall in 586 B.C., when Edom encouraged the destruction of the city (Ps 137).
9. Denunciations against Edom for their hatred toward their brother make up the most common foreign nation oracle in the Prophets (Jer. 49:7–22; Ezek. 25:12–14; Isa. 21:11–12; 34:5–15; 35:1–15; Amos 1:11–12; cf. Joel 3:19; Mal 1:2–5; Lam 4:21–22)
10. The fulfillment of Obadiah's prophecy was not realized until 312 B.C. when Nabataean Arabs overran Petra, the Edomite stronghold, forcing the Edomites west into southern Judah (where they came to be called Idumaeans). The Maccabaeans forced the Idumaeans to adopt Jewish law including circumcision.
11. But the Roman overlords seemed to favor the Idumaeans, appointing one of their own—Antipater—as procurator of Judaea in 47 B.C. He was succeeded by his son Herod the

Great in 37 B.C., the man who tried to placate the Jews by rebuilding the temple for them and the man who tried to have the up-in-coming “King of the Jews” killed in Bethlehem.

12. The Idumaeans joined the rebellion against Rome in A.D. 70, for which Titus destroyed them, wiping them off the face of the earth.

Literary Overview

1. Superscription (1:1a)
2. Announcement of Judgment Upon Edom (1:1b–14)
 - a. Edom’s Humiliation (Thesis) (1:1b–2)
 - b. Edom’s Indictment
 - i. Condemnation of Pride (1:3–9)
 - ii. Condemnation of Hatred/Violence (1:10–14)
3. Day of Yahweh in Edom: Turning the Tables (1:15–21)
 - a. Announcement of Doom for Edom (1:15–16)
 - b. Announcement of Salvation for Israel (1:17–21)

Message

1. Proud in their own security (1:3–4), the Edomites delighted in Israel’s destruction by a foreign power (1:12). They failed to help (1:11) and instead actually looted the remains and assisted in the capture of fugitives (1:13–14).
2. In response, God promises to bring them down (1:4), to cut them off forever (1:10), to do to them as they did to Israel (1:15), to consume them until there is no survivor (1:18), and to let their land be overcome with the restored of Israel (1:19–21), whom God will reestablish in Zion (1:17–18).

A Future for Edom?

1. An overview of the OT picture:
 - a. More respect is given to Edom than is accorded any other neighboring people—e.g., the biblical writers neither attack Edom’s gods by name nor include Edom on lists of countries practicing “abominations.”
 - b. There are references to theophanies by Israel’s God in areas traditionally associated with the Edomites (see Hab 3:3; Judg 5:4).
 - c. In contrast to Deuteronomy’s handling of the Ammonites and Moabites, it holds out the possibility of the Edomites becoming a part of the “assembly of Yahweh” (Deut 23:8[9]; cf. Amos 9:11–12).
 - d. Biblical authors revered Edomite wisdom traditions (Jer. 49:7), and Job may have been conceived as having some Edomite connections (Lam. 4:21).
2. Edom will be fully destroyed.
 - Mal. 1:2–5. I have loved Jacob 3but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert. 4If Edom says, “We are shattered but we

will rebuild the ruins,” Yahweh of hosts says, “They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called ‘the wicked country,’ and ‘the people with whom Yahweh is angry forever.’” 5Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, “Great is Yahweh beyond the border of Israel!”

3. Edom’s destruction does not stop God from preserving a remnant and granting them a new identity in the people of God.
 - a. Obadiah’s portrait of Edom’s future is dismal but not completely hopeless.
 - i. In one breath he declares total destruction for Edom (1:18), but in another breath, the prophet notes that a remnant will be preserved (1:17). This appears to mean that those who were once Edomite have now gained a new identity.
 - Obad. 1:17–18. 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. 18The 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 Yahweh has spoken.
 - ii. As in Jer. 30:8–11 where the non-ethnic Israelite “foreigners” “serve Yahweh their God and David their king” but are distinguished from “the nations” of whom God makes “a full end,” so here, because all of Edom is destroyed, the remnant are portrayed as having gained a new identity within the possession of Jacob.
 - b. Like Obadiah, Amos sees a remnant of Edom being incorporated into the restored Davidic kingdom.
 - Amos 9:11–12. “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, 12that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares Yahweh who does this.
 - c. In the Jerusalem church, James cites the Amos text to support his claim that God is doing a work among the Gentiles through the ministry of Paul.
 - Acts 15:14–19. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. 15And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, 16“After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18known from of old.” 19Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God.

Day 1

Read the intro to Obadiah in a Study Bible, read Obadiah, and describe the theme.

Obadiah: God's People Will Triumph by David Mathis

We know very little about this prophet called Obadiah, which means “worshiper of Yahweh” (Yahweh is God’s personal name.) The short book — the shortest in the Old Testament — was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and before the fall of Israel’s sister nation (Edom) some 33 years later in 553 B.C. Verses 1–15 address Edom in the second person singular (“you”).

At the time of this prophecy, Israel felt down and out (to say the least; utterly decimated is more like it), while Edom was up. But Obadiah tells of a great reversal that is coming. God’s ancient promises to Jacob (Israel), the younger twin, that he would rule over his brother Esau (Edom), will be fulfilled. For now, God’s people may seem down, but it’s only a matter of time. God will vindicate his people, and decimate their enemies, especially their brother nation Edom who has turned against them and taken advantage of their destruction under Babylon.

Two verses from the last section of the final chapter of Amos setup Obadiah. This is likely why Obadiah is placed where it is in the sequence of the twelve minor prophets. Amos 9:11–12 reads, “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, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the LORD who does this.”

Outline

- vv. 1–4 first judgment
- vv. 5–7 second judgment
- vv. 8–15 accusation and warning
- vv. 16–18 promise of triumph to God’s people
- vv. 19–21 promise of triumph for Yahweh’s king

Questions: Part 1 of Obadiah

1. What is the guilt of the nation of Edom? How has the people of Esau (Edom) sinned against the people of Esau’s twin brother, Jacob (Israel)?

“As I have reflected on the book of Obadiah, it has occurred to me that this book, perhaps uniquely among the prophets of the Old Testament, speaks more directly to a time like our own. Most of the other prophets speak to Old Testament believers – and to Christians in churches. But Obadiah proclaimed a vision from the sovereign God to a people who knew no theology and who had no place for the knowledge of God in their lives. Unlike the audience of the other prophets, Obadiah’s audience made no pretense of acknowledging God. In other words, he spoke to a society much like our own.” –Mark Dever

2. One aspect of Edom’s guilt is that they have mistreated family; they have not just sinned against any nation, but the nation whose founder is the twin brother of their namesake (see especially verse 10). The crime is more severe when committed against one to whom we have obligation to care for and support. Some of the apostle Paul’s most striking words are directed toward those who do not fulfill their responsibility to family: “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). Consider your relationships and the concentric circles of your relational obligations. Evaluate the status of those relationships, thank God for his grace where things are well, and repent and ask for help in places you are lacking.

“Human Pride (vv.2-10). Like Isaiah, Obadiah considers pride the root of other sins. The Edomites’ pride is based on their status among the nations (v.1), their seemingly impregnable capital (vv.3-4), their famous wise men (v.8), and their valiant warriors (v.9). These attainments have led to the self-deception that they are beyond the reach of any higher power (v.3). Thus, they believe they can act as they wish against Israel (v.10). In other words, Obadiah depicts Edom in a manner similar to Isaiah’s description of Assyria (Isaiah 10:1-19). If so, it is ironic that small nations have the same delusions of self-sufficient grandeur as larger ones.” –Paul House

3. Define “pride”. How would you describe pride to a co-worker?

4. Not only did Edom not come to Israel’s rescue against Babylon, but Edom has gloated over the misfortune of his brother nation (verse 12). Assess your own heart in this regard. In which relationships are you tempted to gloat over others’ failures and misfortunes? Repent of the pride in your heart that would want others to be brought low, so you could be raised up, and ask God for the humility and love to rejoice when good comes to others, not bad.

Read

1 John 2:15-17

Day 2

Read Obadiah. Note the use of “heart”.

Questions: Part 2 of Obadiah

Obadiah and the context into which he prophesies serves as an important episode in the long unfolding saga between Jacob (Israel) and his twin Esau (Edom). The twin brothers had the same father and mother, and yet God chose Jacob. One Old Testament scholar writes, “Two nations struggled in the womb of Rebekah according to the ancient prophetic declaration (Gen. 25:23). Jacob the ‘supplanter,’ the latter-born twin, embodies the principle of God’s undeserved, unmerited grace in his work of redemption. Esau the firstborn represents the part of humanity that persists in rebellion against God. The continuing significance of this distinction is made evident by the appearance of the Jacob/Esau contrast in Malachi, the very last of Israel’s prophetic voices (Mal. 1:2–5). Somewhere between the narrative of Genesis and the prophecy of Malachi is the message of Obadiah.” For today’s study, read the following texts related to Jacob and Esau and the longstanding relationship between their descendants, and use the space below to record observations about the relationship and what God is teaching us through it. (One major cross reference remains, which we will look at tomorrow: Romans 9.)

1. Genesis 25:19–23
2. Numbers 24:15–19 (The land of Edom was also known as Seir.)
3. Lamentations 4:22 (written around the same time as Obadiah, after the fall of Jerusalem)
4. Malachi 1:2–5

“A sense of outrage permeates this little book, outrage directed toward Edom... The repeated use of the name Esau and the description of Jacob as his brother move us beyond the realm of international politics and into the world of family relationships. These two nations – Israel and Edom – are inextricably bound together from their birth in the tents of Isaac and Rebekah.” –Tremper Longman

Read

Mark 7:14-23

Day 3

Read Obadiah. Note which verse catches your attention and explain why.

Questions: Part 3 of Obadiah

1. Note the contrast between God exalting “Mount Zion” and bringing low “Mount Esau.” (Only Obadiah uses the term “Mount Esau,” verses 8, 9, 21.) What comfort should the people of God take from this in any time or season where we feel ourselves brought low and our enemies exalted?
2. Even though Esau had Isaac as his father and Abraham as his grandfather, he was not the child of promise. Read Romans 9:7–13 and reflect on how it related to Obadiah’s promises of judgment to Edom (Esau) and salvation to Judah/Israel (Jacob).
3. Not only is God’s wrath coming on Edom but also “all the nations.” Yet verse 17 says there will be some who escape the coming wrath. Who does Obadiah say they are, and how do you think this promise relates to us today?
4. There is a glimmer of hope for Edom in the book’s final verse. Being ruled by Mount Zion (Jerusalem) may be solely judgment for Edom, but how might it hold out hope? If the people of Israel will find “escape” under the rule of the Lord from the judgment they justly deserve, how might Edom find escape from their judgment under the rule of Israel?

Read

Romans 8:31-32

Eagle
Edom Will
Come
Down

John Piper

Obadiah is the shortest Old Testament book (21 verses). We don't know anything about the author's background. There are 11 other people with this name in the Old Testament, but there is no evidence for connecting this prophet with any of them. The prophecy was delivered after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC and has two main parts. Verses 1–16 are directed against Edom (the descendants of Esau who lived to the southeast of the Dead Sea), and verses 17–21 focus on the vindication of Israel and the final establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The main point of the prophecy seems to be that God's oppressed people should take courage because God is still the righteous Master of the universe: wrongs will be righted through judgment, and the Judge of all the earth shall rule openly someday with all his people in safety forever.

Let's read the book together, making some explanatory observations along the way. Then we will ask what lessons are here for our life as Christians.

Judgment Pronounced Against Edom

Verse 1: "The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom: We have heard tidings from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: 'Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!'" The first thing the prophet tells us is that his vision is from the Lord, and that it concerns the nation Edom, and that there is a report that has gone out from the Lord to the nations to prepare them for battle against Edom.

Then God himself addresses Edom directly in verses 2–16. "Behold, I will make you small among the nations, you shall be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is high, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the Lord." Here the Lord declares to Edom the root cause of her impending doom: her pride which has deceived her into thinking she is secure as an eagle above the reaches of men. But God declares, "Eagle Edom will

come down." Then the Lord describes how thorough her destruction will be.

Verse 5: "If thieves came to you, if plunderers 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? How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out!" In other words, the ruin that God will bring upon Edom will be total, not like a thief or a grape gatherer who always leaves something. Verse 7: "All your allies have deceived you, they have driven you to the border; your confederates have prevailed against you; your trusted friends have set a trap under you—there is no understanding of it." The Edomites will have nowhere to turn, and they have no understanding of the fact that all their former allies have turned against them. This is the fulfillment of verse 1 where God sends out a report to summon the nations against Edom.

Verses 8 and 9: "Will I not on that day, says the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of Mount Esau. And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter." Teman was a grandson of Esau and a chief city in Edom—evidently a cultural and military center where the intellectual and military elite gathered. But God is not impressed or threatened: he will cut them off in their pride, wise and powerful together.

Edom's Pride

Then in verses 10–14 we see how Edom's pride had shown itself during the time of Israel's deepest need and humiliation, when the Babylonians were carrying them off into exile.

For the violence done to your brother, Jacob (that is, to the people of Israel), shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. 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. But you should not have gloated over the day of your brother, in the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; you should

not have boasted in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people in the day of his calamity; you should not have gloated over his disaster in the day of his calamity; you should not have looted his goods in the day of his calamity. You should not have stood at the parting of the ways to cut off his fugitives; you should not have delivered up his survivors in the day of distress.

When a person is in the bondage of pride, he takes whatever opportunity he can to exalt himself over others. Nations, adults, and little children have this in common: apart from the grace of God we all tend to derive pleasure from another person's failure. It soothes our inadequacies and magnifies our successes. Edom relished the destruction of Judah, stood aloof, gloated, boasted, looted, and cut off the stragglers.

Obadiah and his people knew that their own distress and calamity were deserved. Judah had sinned, and God had promised judgment, as Habakkuk had said. But they also knew that Edom, too, was guilty. But Edom should have seen God's judgment on Judah and trembled. She should have humbled herself and repented of her own pride and cried out to the Lord for mercy, lest she fall prey to a similar fate (cf. Luke 13:1–5). But instead she gloated. And God reveals to Obadiah that he will not let this sin go unpunished.

Verses 15 and 16, "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. For as you have drunk upon my holy mountain, all the nations round about shall drink; they shall drink and stagger, and shall be as though they had not been." Obadiah looks into the future and sees the great and terrible day of the Lord coming, when all accounts will be settled. But, in typical prophetic perspective, Obadiah does not distinguish between the more immediate historical judgments of God upon Edom and the final day of judgment at the end of the age. The near future and the distant future merge in the prophet's vision. For what matters is not so much the timing of the judgment, but that justice is going to be achieved: the violent nation will not boast forever. Very soon the recompense

will come, and after that all the nations will render an account to God.

That's the end of part one: verses 1–16. Eagle Edom will come down because of her pride and violence.

Hope for Those in Zion

In part two, verses 17–21, Obadiah assures the people of Judah that on the day of the Lord there will be hope for those in Zion. Since Judah had recently been driven into exile for her unbelief, and since judgment was coming upon Edom and the nations because of their pride and violence, we must assume that the people who escape God's judgment are those who humble themselves and trust God for his mercy (as Habakkuk 2:4 said). So the second part of the book holds out the hope of salvation to the remnant of Israel, and promises that in the end the kingdom will not belong to the Babylonians nor to the Edomites but to the Lord.

Verses 17–21:

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. 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 to the house of Esau; for the Lord has spoken. Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah the land of the Philistines; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel who are among the Canaanites as far as Zarephath; and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negeb. Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

The promises made long ago to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that they and their descendants would possess the land, will not be frustrated.

From our New Testament perspective we can see how much larger the fulfillment will be than Obadiah saw. The people of God is not to be limited to the Jewish remnant

but now reaches out to embrace all those who trust Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28, 29). And not only is the people of God larger than Obadiah foresaw, but the fulfillment of the promised land is bigger. Paul says in Romans 4:13 that the descendants of Abraham will inherit the world, not just a near eastern territory of Palestine. And Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

And isn't this implied at the very end of Obadiah. He closes with the words, "and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." Can we really imagine that God would establish his own final kingdom in such a way that he would only rule over a portion of the earth? No. As Psalm 22:28, 29 says, "The kingdom belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. Yea, to him shall all of the proud of the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust." Repentant, Christ-honoring Israel will have her land, but it will be only one little province in the world-wide kingdom of the Lord. And like all the other provinces, it will be freely shared with people from every tongue and tribe and nation who have accepted Jesus as Savior and submitted to him as King.

Five Lessons

In conclusion now, let me draw out five brief lessons which will affect the way we live. First, God rules in this world right now and turns the course of nations and history as he pleases. If this were not so, he could not promise Judah that he would cut off Edom and establish Jacob. No Christian should have the jitters that the world is careening out of control toward a meaningless catastrophe. We may feel like people tossed around in an old stagecoach pulled by six wild horses, but fear not, God sits serenely over our heads, and the hands that made the world hold the reins.

Second, pride is deceptive. Verse 3: "The pride of your heart has deceived you." Pride makes us think we are independent, self-sufficient, invulnerable. Pride is based on a lie. The person who yields to the tempta-

tion of pride surrenders his capacity to think and feel and act without deception. Pride distorts every area of thought and life. My own conviction is that most of our perplexity regarding moral and theological issues is owing to the distortions caused by our pride, not to the complexity of the issue.

Third, God abominates pride and will bring it down. Verse 4: "Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the Lord." Or as Jesus says in Luke 16:15, "What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

Fourth, therefore proud nations and proud individuals will reap what they sow. Verse 15: "As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head." If we choose in our pride to live without God, then he will grant us our independence in the day of the Lord. And he will not be our refuge or our righteousness in that day. And our self-confidence will be like a feather in a hurricane when God's wrath is revealed from heaven (cf. Psalm 76:7).

Fifth, God has made a way of escape and salvation from his wrath. Verse 17: "In Mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy." Those who have fled from the wickedness of pride to the holiness of humility will find refuge on the day of the Lord. Zion, the city of God, shall be holy because it will be filled not with people who never sinned, but with people who have been broken and humbled by their sin and have thrown themselves for mercy on Jesus and have come to love him more than anything and any person in the world, because "he loved us and gave himself for us."

Sermon Notes

October 25, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 5

Jonah

The God
Who
is Free
in His
Steadfast
Love

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Content*: Through a very reluctant prophet, God shows compassion for Assyria, one of Israel's hated enemies.
2. *Author*: Jonah ("dove"), son of Amittai, a prophet to northern Israel
3. *Date of prophetic activity*: around 770 B.C., during the reign of Jeroboam II (see 2 Kgs. 14:25)
4. *Canonical Note*: Jonah is the only Minor Prophet to begin with the conjunction "and," suggesting that it is to be read in direct association with Obadiah.
5. *Emphasis*:
 - a. Yahweh as creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all, who can have compassion on whomever he wills—even the Gentiles (represented by Nineveh).
 - b. Israel's reluctance (represented by Jonah) to acknowledge Yahweh as a God free in his compassion for all peoples, including the nations.

Literary Overview

1. *Theme*: Where Yahweh is exalted among those he upholds, he is compelled to show steadfast love, both in Israel and throughout the world.
2. *Outline*:
 - a. Jonah's first experience of Yahweh's steadfast love (1:1–2:10)
 - i. Yahweh's initial call for a mission of steadfast love (1:1–2)
 - ii. Jonah's personal need for steadfast love (1:3–16)
 - iii. Yahweh's demonstration of steadfast love (1:17)
 - iv. Jonah's positive response to Yahweh's steadfast love (2:1–10)
 - b. Jonah's second experience of Yahweh's steadfast love (3:1–4:11)
 - i. Yahweh's second call for a mission of steadfast love (3:1–2)
 - ii. Nineveh's corporate need for steadfast love (3:3–9)
 - iii. Yahweh's demonstration of steadfast love (3:10)
 - iv. Jonah's negative response to Yahweh's steadfast love (4:1–3)
 - v. Conclusion: Yahweh's lesson on his steadfast love (4:4–11)

Literary Features in the Book

1. In contrast to the other prophetic books, Jonah is primarily biographical (see 3:5 for the summary of his message).
2. *Inclusio*: The story is framed by Jonah's flight from God (1:3) and the reason for his flight (4:2); also the sailor's response to God's salvation of them anticipates God's compassion to be shown to Nineveh.
3. Examples of rhetorical irony:
 - a. The pagan sailor's sacrifice to Yahweh, whereas Yahweh's prophet is defiant.
 - b. Jonah himself declares at the end of his psalm (of deliverance), "Salvation is from Yahweh," which is then played out by Nineveh's repentance and Yahweh's withholding judgment.

- c. Jonah the prophet of God does not really like the character of God (4:2).
 - d. Jonah is rescued from death by God, but in the end wishes to die rather than to live—because the Ninevites get to live rather than die.
4. Characterization: Who is the main character in the story?
- a. Yahweh calls Jonah to Nineveh.
 - b. Yahweh sends the storm when Jonah disobeys, and Yahweh intensifies it to keep the sailors from rescuing him.
 - c. Yahweh provides a great fish to rescue the prophet.
 - d. Yahweh is the object of Jonah’s praise from the belly of the fish.
 - e. Yahweh graciously sends Jonah a second time to Nineveh and causes the prophet’s message to be received.
 - f. Yahweh provides the plant, the worm, and the scorching east wind to instruct Jonah in Yahweh’s ways.
 - g. *Jonah is but a foil to exalt God and his amazing steadfast love.*

The Main Point

Don’t be like Jonah, but be like God in his boundless steadfast love!

1. Yahweh, not Jonah, is the main character.
2. Central issue: What is God like? Jonah cannot accept the orthodox definition of God’s steadfast love (4:2)—except when he is the beneficiary!

Is Jonah a Parable or History?

1. Overview of the question:
 - a. While none should question that Jonah’s character represents the state of Israel as a whole, many today even from evangelical circles are asserting that the story itself is parable, not history. The conservative L. C. Allen (1976: 175–81, 194–97) has been one of the most resolute advocates for the parabolic nature of the book of Jonah, and he argues that Jesus’ mention in the Synoptics that Jonah was in the belly of a whale three days (cf. Matt 12:39–41; 16:4; Luke 11:29–30, 32) in no way points to the story’s historicity (cf. Longman and Dillard, 2006: 444–45).
 - b. Jesus regularly taught in parables, but I believe his use of the story in the context of the Gospel accounts strongly suggests, if not requires, a historical reading of Jonah—a view that is easily justifiable when an openness to the supernatural accompanies an evaluation of the book’s internal witness and the extra-biblical evidence (cf. e.g., Stuart, 1987: 435–38, 440–42; 1994: 816–17; Alexander, 1988; Baldwin, 1993: 544–48). Due to space limitations, I will not reiterate here all the arguments for and against the parabolic view of the book. Instead I will detail and evaluate Allen’s view of Jesus’ use of the Jonah story and will argue that Jesus’ words indeed call for the book to be approached as history.
2. Allen’s View: Jesus did not employ a “strict exegesis” of the Jonah story, and so his words cannot be cited as support for the historical interpretation of the book (1976: 180). His focus was “not to expound the book of Jonah but to reveal truth concerning himself in terms his Jewish audience acknowledged and could understand” (196–97). This is seen most directly in Matt 12:40, where the parallel Jesus’ creates between Jonah and himself requires that Jonah’s “three days and three nights in the belly of the sea creature” be viewed

not positively as the book demands (i.e., as a place of salvation) but “negatively” (i.e., as a place of death). Allen states, “The implication of the time reference appears to be that Jonah would spend only ‘three days and three nights’ *in Hades*; after a short stay Jesus too would return to life” (196, italics added).

3. Evaluation: Allen (1976: 196) is correct that within the book, Jonah’s prayer of *thanksgiving* from within the belly of the sea creature requires that the fish be regarded as an instrument of divine salvation rather than judgment (Jon 2:1[2]; cf. Young, 1977: 265; Andersen, 2000:105–107; *contra* Luz, 2001: 217). I question, however, whether the actual implication of Matt 12:40 is so negative. Furthermore, Allen fails to address the more critical issue of Nineveh’s repentance in the context of Jesus’ words.

- a. Weakness 1: Failure to grasp the “sign of Jonah”

- i. *The Proper Focus: The Delivered Person and not the Time.* While Matt 12:40 parallels the prophet’s experience in the fish with Christ’s time in the tomb, the “sign” itself is not in the length of stay in their respective “graves” but in their rescue from the enemy power, whether fish or death (cf. Jeremias, 1965: 410 + n.28; cf. John 2:19). So, as Luke explicitly states in 11:30 and both he (11:29) and Matthew (12:39) imply in the genitive construction “the sign of Jonah” (= either appos. or subj. genitive), Jonah himself as one delivered from a great fish became a sign that called the Ninevites to repentance, and in the same way “the Son of Man will be [fut. *estai*—i.e., after his resurrection from death] for this generation.” Read properly, Matt 12:40 is the counter-parallel to Luke 11:30, Matthew describing the nature of the deliverance (i.e., both Jonah and Christ being set free from their dark “tombs”) and Luke its significance (i.e., both Jonah and Jesus’ deliverance supply signs for the people).
- ii. *The Sign of Jonah and the Fish-Goddess.* Nineveh was the “city of the fish.” E. H. Merrill (1980: 26–27) has cogently argued that the chief deity of Nineveh at the time of Jeroboam II and thus the prophet Jonah (2 Kgs 14:25) was the *fish-goddess* Nanshe. While such a connection is never made explicit in the story, it does help explain how the call to repentance from a God who had power to deliver his prophet from a great *fish* could have gained such immediate and universal acceptance (Jon 3:4–9; Merrill, 1980: 28–30; cf. Harrison, 1969: 908–09). It also helps provide a plausible source for the manner by which Jonah became “a sign to the Ninevites” and how the restored Jonah could serve as a picture of the resurrected Christ (Merrill, 1980: 29; on Jonah as a “type” for Christ, see France, 1971: 44; Luz, 2001: 218).
- iii. *The Interpretive Key: Proper Perspective on the Deliverance.* Regardless of Jonah’s perspective on his salvation (i.e., that the fish was God’s agent of salvation rather than punishment), Jesus is focused on how Jonah served as a sign to the *Ninevites*. And therefore we should expect him to speak of the prophet’s deliverance from the perspective of the Ninevites (i.e., that the fish was the enemy power rather than just the water). Jesus’ use of the OT is thus explained. This interpretation also elucidates any proposed rabbinic evidence viewing the fish as a threat to Jonah (e.g., Str.-B. 1:642–49). But contrary to Allen’s assertions, neither the LXX on Jonah 2 or Josephus’ comments in *Antiquities* (9.213) in any way support such a view. Furthermore, while 3 Macc 6:8 (1st cent. BC) may attest to this “negative” view of the fish, both it and Josephus’ statements clearly affirm the historicity rather than the parabolic nature of the Jonah account. I conclude, then, that although Jesus’ words offer a different perspective on Jonah’s deliverance than Jonah’s prayer does (i.e., for Jonah, his placement in the fish was a sign of salvation, not judgment), Jesus does so with historical grounding and for rhetorical affect. His 1st century audience is being

compared with the Ninevites of old, and now “something greater than Jonah is here” (Matt 12:41; Luke 11:32).

- b. *Weakness 2: Failure to account for the flow of Jesus’ argument—Rhetorical Effect & Historicity.* Allen never deals with the fact that in order for Jesus’ warning to bear any type of rhetorical jab to his hearers it is necessary that both the story of the Ninevites repentance and the account of the Queen of the South’s journey actually happened (cf. Harrison, 1969: 906; Stuart, 1987: 440). Few question the historical authenticity of the Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon (1 Kgs 10:1–13; 2 Chr 9:1–12—for a response to the minimalists, see below). Why then should we question the authenticity of the Ninevites repentance at Jonah’s proclamation? The very fact that Luke places the comments regarding Solomon and the Queen of the South in between the statements regarding Jonah as a sign and the Ninevite’s future judgment suggests that the latter depiction is to be read just as the former— as a historically accurate and thus rhetorically searing comment about the present generation’s wickedness.
4. *Synthesis: Historicity & the Lasting Message.* While it may be true in one sense that theological message of Jonah does not change whether or not the story actually happened (so Longman and Dillar, 2006: 445; Childs, 1994: 393), in another sense the rhetorical power of the story is lessened and some of theological message lost if it is read as fiction when it was intended to be read as history (Stuart, 1987: 440). As Allen himself writes (1976: 175), “The modern reader can read it [i.e., Jonah] aright only if he understands it as it was originally intended.” Numerous arguments from within the book itself can be proffered for a historical rather than a parabolic interpretation (cf. Stuart, 1987: 435–38, 440– 42; 1994: 816–17; Alexander, 1988; Baldwin, 1993: 544–48), and Jesus’ use of the Jonah story makes little sense if it is not a historical account.

Day 1

Read the introduction to Jonah in a Study Bible and read Jonah. Describe the theme of Jonah.

Questions: Jonah 1

1. What comes to mind when you think about the story of Jonah?
2. Why do you think Jonah disobeys Yahweh's command to preach to Nineveh?
3. Jonah is unique in that this is the first time a Hebrew prophet is sent to preach in a city outside of Israel. Why might this be so significant?
4. The fear of the Lord shows up a number of times in this first chapter. Note each time and anything significant about how it appears.

“Jonah didn’t want to go to Ninevah because he knew God. He knew about God’s heart of mercy toward wicked Gentiles and his longing that they repent and be saved from judgment. Jonah knew that God would have mercy and bring his enemies to repentance, And Jonah didn’t want them to repent; he wanted them to be destroyed. He selfishly wanted the Israelites to keep salvation to themselves. What a contrast to the One was greater than Jonah! While Jonah was selfish, resentful, and unmerciful toward the nation’s enemies, Jesus moved toward his enemies, coming into this sin filled world with compassion, love, and mercy. This is especially good news for us because we were once God’s enemies.” –Nancy Guthrie

Read

Read John 5. Study John 5:22-24

Day 2

Read Jonah 2-3. What are some things that Jonah does that you can relate to?

Questions: Jonah 2-3

1. Jonah 2:9. Describe what “salvation” means to you.

- A functional savior is something in your life that you think saves you or completes you. It's also called an idol. What functional saviors do you deal with in your life?

2. Jonah's prayer in the belly of the fish is a prayer of thanksgiving. What does he thank God for? Why is the last line of Jonah's prayer so significant?

3. Jonah 3 introduces the second group of Gentiles in the book. What is ironic about the response of Gentiles to God in this book?

4. Are you surprised by the Ninevites response? Do you think God could extend mercy on your block where you live and do this? How did God make it happen in Ninevah and how might he do it on your block?

“The people of Jesus' day wanted a miraculous sign. The only sign promised them is not the message but the person of Jonah himself as provided to the Ninevites. The sign of Jonah for Jesus refers to the prophet's descent and revival as it anticipated his own death and resurrection. If Jonah's three day descent into Sheol is to be regarded as historical fiction, then the parallel with the experience of Jesus inevitably would open the door to regarding his three day burial and subsequent resurrection as also fictional in character. But if the people of Ninevah did in fact repent at the preaching of Jonah as Jesus affirmed, if a real last judgment actually will occur in which the Ninevites of Jonah's generation will fare better than the unbelieving contemporaries of Jesus, if Jesus was buried and rose from the dead in three days after the pattern of Jonah's experience, then the most consistent way of viewing the record of Jonah's descent to the bottom of the sea and his rising again becomes quite clear.”

—O. Palmer Robertson

Read

Read Matthew 12. Study Matthew 12:38-41.

Two questions to answer in your devotion time: What significance does Jesus draw from the story of Jonah? What passages in Jonah support Jesus' words?

Day 3

Read Jonah 4. What is something new you learned about the story of Jonah and the whale?

Questions: Jonah 4

1. Why was Jonah displeased by God's actions?
2. What is the lesson of the plant that covers Jonah in chapter 4?
3. Jason DeRouchie summarizes the message of Jonah as "The God Who Is Free in His Steadfast Love." How do you see God's freedom throughout this book?
4. Describe one aspect of the story of Jonah that you could share with a neighbor that would help explain the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"In Jonah's offering of himself up to die so that others might live (1:12), we see a picture of Jesus offering himself up to die so that we might live. Yet a glaring contrast reveals why Jesus is "greater than Jonah" (Matthew 12:41). Jonah had to offer himself because he had been disobedient in refusing to submit to God's will. Jesus, the obedient prophet, did what Jonah had been unwilling to do. Jesus didn't run from preaching repentance and announcing judgment. He didn't refuse to invite people outside the boundaries of Israel to God's Kingdom. He welcomed them. Jesus didn't avoid God's will; his greatest joy was in accomplishing God's will, saying to God, "I want your will to be done, not mine" (Matthew 26:39)." –Nancy Guthrie

Read

Read Romans 11. Study Romans 11:6.

David Esterwood's Story

I became a Christian at the age of four while living in seminary student family housing. I still believe all of the core doctrines I learned as a child. I led Bible studies in high school and I was on the student leadership team of a college campus ministry. That's a fairly unremarkable testimony, right? I certainly thought it was. I didn't like to share my testimony when asked because I didn't think it was worth sharing. I didn't think I had any of those things in my story that would make people say, "Wow! Praise God!" I didn't think I had much to my testimony that made God look really good. God always looks really glorious and mighty when he saves the thief on the cross or knocks a persecutor off his donkey and makes him an Apostle. Those are the stories worth telling and re-telling. How hard is it to save a four year old? I may have had the core doctrines down from a young age, but I clearly lacked understanding.

Though I had been a Christian since I was four, there were major aspects of the gospel that I had yet to grasp. First, I had to see that dead is dead. The four year old, on his own, is just as dead in his sin and rebellion against God as the hard living forty year

old with a lifetime of bad choices behind him. When you can't remember a day when you weren't a Christian, you sometimes fall into the sin of believing that you almost became a Christian on your own. Like you were almost there and God just gave you a little hand to get you over. Not true, not even a little. As Christians, all of us were dead in the sins and trespasses in which we once walked and we all desperately needed the "But God" of Ephesians 2:4 to give us life.

Second, God's glory is without qualifiers. He does not appear more glorious in saving one person than he does in saving another. He is simply and purely and completely glorious. It was not easier, nor harder, for God to save me as a child than it was for him to save anyone else. God sending his Son to die on a cross in the place of sinners and raising Him from the dead so that a person may have life and spend eternity with God is always glorious. How God chooses to call someone to repentance is always amazing and we should stand in awe of the myriad ways in which he does it.

Third, the Christian's identity is not primarily in who he or she was before Christ.

The title says it all. A Christian's identity is in Christ. Who we were before Christ, how he called us to repentance, and how we turned and trusted Christ matter only in so far as those things may be used by God to reveal his glory.

I used to think that last part was true only for those with what I considered to be remarkable testimonies. Then, two years ago I was on a short-term missions trip in Ecuador. We had a team member become frighteningly ill and we had to get to a hospital. As a few of us sped down the Pan-American Highway in the middle of the night, through the legendary twists and turns, the team member's condition only worsened. The person we were racing to save was about ten years younger than me and recently baptized. I asked God what I should say. I desperately wanted to say something that might encourage all of us.

It was then that I realized that I had been a Christian for nearly 30 years, much longer than this sick team member and even far longer than almost all the others in the cab of the truck. So I told them that in nearly 30 years of being in Christ, I had only ever known God to be good, to be faithful, to be trust-

worthy. I told them of his faithfulness even when I had been unfaithful, his mercy in all the moments I deserved wrath. I believe that was the first time I realized how grateful I was to be able to look back so far into my life and testify to God's goodness and mercy over a lifetime. I realized just how remarkable an "unremarkable" testimony can be when it is used to point to Jesus.

Sermon Notes

November 1, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 6

Micah

**The God
Who
Testifies
Against
Sin**

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Author*: Micah (“Who is like Yahweh”), a Judean prophet; contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea
2. *Date of prophetic activity*: An extended time between the accession of Jotham and the death of Hezekiah (ca. 737–690)
3. *Canonical Placement*: Sums up the realities of sin spoken of in the former books. Like the nations, Israel is wrapped in sins of idolatry and social injustice, and judgment is inevitable for all; but punishment will eventually redeem Israel and the nations by separating the righteous remnant from the wicked majority.

Literary Overview

1. Superscription (1:1)
2. Devastation and Renewal for Israel and Judah (1:2–5:15)
 - a. Destruction and Consolation (“Hear”) (1:2–2:13)
 - i. Promise of Judgment beginning with northern Israel (1:2–2:11)
 - ii. Promise of Deliverance for the Remnant (2:12–13)
 - b. Degradation and Exaltation (“And Hear”) (3:1–5:15)
 - i. Parade of Iniquity and the People’s False Confidence (3:1–12, esp. v. 11)
 - ii. Parade of Righteousness, Peace, and Hope for All Who Treasure God’s Reign (4:1–5:1)
 - iii. Arrival of the King and Restoration of the Remnant (5:2–15)
3. Condemnation and Consolation (“Hear”) (6:1–7:20)
 - a. Basis for Judgment (6:1–16)
 - b. Lament for the Nation (7:1–6)
 - c. Hope for the Nation (7:7–13)
 - d. Prayer for the Nation (7:14–20)

Devastation and Renewal for Israel and Judah (1:2–5:15)

1. Destruction and Consolation (1:2–2:13)
 - a. Yahweh declares massive destruction on the northern kingdom centered in Samaria, with the wake of the judgment stretching into Judah unto the gate of Jerusalem.
 - i. The nature of the judgment:
 - Mic. 1:6. Therefore I will make Samaria a heap in the open country.
 - Mic. 1:12. ...Disaster has come down from Yahweh to the gate of Jerusalem.
 - Mic. 1:16. Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for the children of your delight; make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they shall go from you into exile.
 - Mic. 2:3. 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.
 - ii. The reason for this open judgment on the northern kingdom is clear:
 - 1) Their idolatry and failure to honor God as God (1:7).

- 2) Their negative influence on Judah (1:9, 12–13).
 - 3) Their enemy-like scheming, greed, and oppression (2:1–2, 8–9).
 - 4) Their false security (2:6).
 - 5) Their failure to heed God’s word and walk uprightly (2:7).
- b. Yahweh also promises a restoration of a remnant—a remnant that will follow Yahweh their king (2:12–13).
2. Degradation and Exaltation (3:1–5:15)
- a. The House of Pride Centered in Jerusalem: Indictment and judgment
 - Mic. 3:9–12. 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, 10who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. 11Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on Yahweh and say, “Is not Yahweh in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.” 12Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.
 - b. The judgment reversal – How should we understand God’s relenting from his earlier promise?
 - Jer. 26:16–19. Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, “This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of Yahweh our God.” 17And certain of the elders of the land arose and spoke to all the assembled people, saying, 18“Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and said to all the people of Judah: ‘Thus says Yahweh of hosts, “‘Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.’ 19Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear Yahweh and entreat the favor of Yahweh, and did not Yahweh relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster upon ourselves.”
 - Jer. 18:7–10. If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. 9And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.
 - c. The Establishment of God’s Kingdom
 - i. The scope and nature of the kingdom
 - Mic. 4:1–5. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of Yahweh shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, 2and many nations shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. 3He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; 4but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken. 5For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of Yahweh our God forever and ever.

- 1) What rhetorical power would the placement of this oracle have directly after the declaration of Judah's destruction in 3:12?
 - 2) What pastoral role does 4:5 serve in the context?
 - 3) How should we explain the fact that this passage is almost identical to Isaiah 2:2–5?
- ii. The king of the kingdom
- Mic. 5:2–5. 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. 3Therefore 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. 4And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. 5And he shall be their peace.

Condemnation and Consolation (6:1–7:20)

1. Yahweh's "case" against Israel (6:2)

2. A Call for True Loyalty (6:6–8)

- Mic. 6:6–8. With what shall I come before Yahweh, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

3. Israel's only Hope (7:18–20)

- Mic. 7:18–20. Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. 19He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. 20You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

Message

The necessity of divine judgment for breaking covenant with Yahweh, yet the certainty of divine restoration for the whole world—a restoration focused on Jerusalem through the promised Davidic king.

1. Yahweh accepts no rivals (1:7; 5:12–14) and stands as a God of justice and mercy who pleads the cause of the poor and requires his people to do the same (2:1–2, 8–11; 3:1–3, 8–11; 6:10–12; 7:2–3).
2. Yahweh as the God of all the nations and Israel through its Messianic king (5:5) as the channel of blessing to the nations (4:1–4; 7:11–13; cf. 7:20 with Gen 12:3).

3. Gems in Micah:

- a. His eschatological vision of Zion as the capital of the world (Mic. 4:1–5).
- b. His prediction of the Messiah, who will come from lowly Bethlehem but whose reign of peace will extend to the ends of the earth (2:13; 5:2–5; cf. Matt. 2:6 with 28:18–20).
- c. His definition of true piety and godliness (Mic. 6:6–8).
- d. His appeal to Yahweh to shepherd his flock, and his portrayal of God as a gracious and covenant keeping God (7:14–20; cf. Exod 34:6–7).

Canonical Arrangement: Hosea–Micah, the Prophets of Sin

Similarities between Hosea and Micah suggest an intentional inclusio:

1. Yahweh's lawsuit. Hosea and Micah include the only references to Yahweh's having a "case" (*rib*) against Israel.
 - Hos. 4:1. Hear the word of Yahweh, O children of Israel, for Yahweh has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land.
 - Mic. 6:1–2. Hear what Yahweh says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the *indictment* of Yahweh, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for Yahweh has an *indictment* against his people, and he will *contend* with Israel.
2. A prostitutes wages: The only references in the Minor Prophets to Israel's prostitution with respect to their earning a harlot's wages:
 - Hos. 9:1. Rejoice not, O Israel! Exult not like the peoples; for you have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a *prostitute's* wages on all threshing floors.
 - Mic. 1:7. 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.

Flow of Thought in the Sin Prophets:

1. *Hosea*: Israel, Yahweh has a case against you: You have played the harlot and been like an unfaithful wife, departing from faithfulness, steadfast love, and knowledge. Please return to Yahweh your husband!
2. *Joel*: For the Day of Yahweh is at hand, and repentance is your only hope! I will be a refuge to my people, but a roaring, devouring lion against all who fail to heed my voice!
3. *Amos*: How secure you feel, yet how insecure you actually are! I have disciplined you, yet you have not learned from the discipline. You anticipate my coming, but for you this Day will be darkness, not light. Prepare to meet your God, for the fulfillment of my kingdom promises is only for those who truly repent!
4. *Obadiah*: Know this: Pride and hatred have no place in my coming kingdom; this is why your brother Edom will be destroyed.
5. *Jonah*: Yet be warned, Israel, for your own pride and hatred of others resembles that of Edom and stands in direct contrast to the mercy Yahweh gives to whomever he wills.

Don't be like Jonah; be like Yahweh and extend compassion rather than gloating in others' destruction, lest God's judgment fall on you!

6. Micah: Yahweh, from his courtroom, has found you and the nations guilty! Yet your final judgment Day has not come, and in his mercy, he will still forgive your sins, if you but return. Soon God, through his Word and Messiah, will be exalted over all things. Will you be a part of the judgment or the redemption?

Day 1

Read the intro to Micah in a Study Bible, read Micah 1-3, and describe the theme of Micah. Read Exodus 19.

“The prophets have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of theme or see what they are getting at.” –Martin Luther

“No prophet illustrates Luther’s statement better than Micah. It is easy to get lost in the mix of his judgment and salvation speeches. The structure is hard to fathom.”
–Tremper Longman III

“The book is Micah’s file of sermons delivered on different occasions. But his sermon files have been skillfully fitted together like pieces of a rose window in a cathedral, pieced together by catchwords and logical particles.” –Bruce Waltke

Questions: Micah 1-3

1. What seems to be the priority of chapters 1–3? What is the common theme?
2. Judah thought their actions would not affect their relationship with God, and therefore, they had a false sense of security. See Micah 3:9–12. In what ways might the American church have a false sense of security in God?
3. How is Judah’s wickedness described? See Micah 3: 1–2. What connection does this have to Amos 5:14–15?
4. Micah ministered for approximately 25 years. Describe the importance of consistency in your life to endure for 25 years. What “things” tend to derail you from walking with Jesus, and/or what do you think will attempt to derail you from walking with Jesus in the future? How do you plan to persevere in the faith for 25 years and minister to people along the way?
 - Describe what you consider a “life of ministry”.

Read

John 3:19. A few questions to consider:

Describe what it means to fall under God's judgment. Describe what "sin" means to you and why "sin" is a problem between you and God. Cf Matthew 12:36-37.

Matthew 26:66 (Context, Matthew 26:57-68). Consider the depravity of man, that though these men should have understood the reality of their personal sin and the just reward of judgment and subsequently their need for a Savior, these men rather, in the end, pass "judgment" on God, Jesus Christ himself. Describe this irony from the passage. Cf James 2:13.

Day 2

Read Micah 4-5. Read Exodus 20. What are and when are the “latter days”? (Hebrews 1:1-2.) In what way does the “latter days” point to Jesus and in what way does the “latter days” point to the “end of the age”? Which do you think Micah has in mind, or do you think he is unclear?

Questions: Micah 4-5

1. What is the promise given in Micah 4:1–2? (Compare this promise to Isaiah 2:2–4; Zechariah 8:20–23; Psalm 102:21; 86:9; Ezekiel 36:23–28)
2. Tim Keller has described three insights that we learn from the gospel about God’s way of doing things: upside-down (life comes by death), inside-out (the heart affects the whole), and forward-back (future reality has invaded the now). Which of these insights seem to be operative in chapter 4? What is different from the world’s way of thinking?
3. Read Micah 5:1–5 closely. Who is the ruler described? What does Micah say about him? See Matthew 2:1-6 and John 8:58.
4. 5:7-8. Define “remnant”. What is the first imagery that Micah uses and how does the remnant fit into the imagery? Describe the second imagery that Micah uses and again, how does the remnant fit into the imagery?

“Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem may not be the most striking thing about this prophecy. Micah wrote that the child born to a woman in Bethlehem will be “one whose origins are from the distant past”. Though the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem that was not the beginning of his life. He would be a ruler whose life would stretch from the distant past into a glorious future, describing the Messiah as eternal – not just a man, but God himself.” –Nancy Guthrie

Read

Read Micah 5:9. Study 1 John 2:18-25.

Day 3

Read Micah 6-7. Read Exodus 33:1-34:17. Not the use of the term 'indictment'. Define 'indictment'. How is it used here in this context?

Questions: Micah 6-7

1. 6:3-5. Look up Exodus 12:1-13, 13:17-22, 14:1-31. What did God do for the people of Israel in Egypt?

- Numbers 22-24. What did God do with Balak and Balaam?
- Numbers 25:1-9. What happened at Shittim?
- Joshua 2-5. And finally what happened at Gilgal?
- From all these examples, what is Micah's point about God? (Matthew 1:21, Luke 19:10, John 3:17)

2. Judah is doing the talking in Micah 6:6-7? What do you think they mean by this question? How does God respond?

3. Chapter 7 opens and Micah finds himself in the midst of godlessness. What is his resolve? What can we learn from him?

4. The name "Michaiah" means in Hebrew, "Who is like YHWH?" How is the LORD different? What makes him shine as unique and holy? (see Micah 7:18-20)

Read

John 3:14-15

Consider in your quiet time: Describe God's faithfulness in conjunction with us "looking" to God. To do this, compare Micah 7:7, Numbers 21:8-9, and the fulfillment of Jesus as found in John 3:14-15.

**From
Bethlehem
in the
Majesty of
the Name
of the Lord**

John Piper

The book of Micah begins by telling us when Micah prophesied and the cities he addressed. “The word of the Lord which came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.” Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel, and Jerusalem was the capital of the southern kingdom, Judah. The years of the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah extended from about 735 to 700 BC. So Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and prophesied during those tragic days when Assyria conquered Samaria, took the ten northern tribes into captivity (722 BC), occupied Judah, and besieged the holy city, Jerusalem.

Micah is a hard prophet to understand because the book alternates back and forth between threats of doom and promises of hope. It is hard to figure out what situations he is referring to and how the hope and doom relate to each other. Probably the reason the book is arranged like this is to make the point that where God and his people are concerned, there is always hope, even in the darkest catastrophe. So Micah mingles gloom and glory through his book. We will take a look at the gloom first and then focus in on his great promise about the Messiah who will come from Bethlehem in the majesty of the name of the Lord.

Israel’s Sin Brought Their Doom

Prophets like Micah didn’t bring doom; they simply announced the doom which Israel and the nations brought on themselves through sin. For example, in 1:6, 7, God’s judgment on Samaria is owing, first, to its idolatry, “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. All her images shall be beaten to pieces, all her hires shall be burned with fire, and all her idols I will lay waste.” In a universe created by God for the display of his glory, the rejection of God brings down omnipotent opposition. God cannot be righteous and yet be indifferent to unbelief.

Idolatry, then, always leads to sins which ruin human life. In 2:2, 3, Micah puts

his finger on covetousness and stealing and oppression and pride:

They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. Therefore, thus says the Lord: Behold, against this family I am devising evil, from which you cannot remove your necks; and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time.

Idolatry and haughtiness go hand in hand, and lead to covetousness and stealing and oppression.

This spirit of greed was widespread even in Jerusalem, not just Samaria. In 3:9–11 Micah tells us how covetousness corrupted justice and even made the leaders and priests and prophets take bribes:

Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong. Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire; its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, “Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us.”

The rulers abhor justice, pervert equity, shed blood, and take bribes. Priests teach for money, and prophets tell you what you want to hear if you will pay for it. For all this Micah promises doom and destruction: Samaria will become a heap of ruins (1:6)—that happened in 722 BC—and Jerusalem will go into exile in Babylon (4:10)—that happened in 586 BC. Micah was long since dead when Jerusalem fell. He didn’t destroy the nation. They destroyed themselves with idolatry, covetousness, and perverted justice.

Gloom and Glory

But mingled with all this gloom are glimpses of future glory for a repentant and humble people. Micah describes in 6:7, 8 what God requires if glory is ever to dawn over Israel.

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good; and

what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

In reverse, the three requirements are a humble fellowship with God, that is, childlike dependence on him; then a love for kindness, that is, a heart that loves to show mercy; and then deeds of justice, that is, an active life, especially on behalf of those who are mistreated. I think these are the same three things Jesus had in mind when he criticized the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23 for neglecting “the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith.” Humble faith in God’s mercy to us inclines our own hearts to show mercy, and that leads us to seek justice for the mistreated.

But if that is true, then what assurance does Micah give us that God will have mercy? The picture of sin and judgment is so dark. Is there mercy and forgiveness with this avenging God? Micah closes his book with words that leave no doubt in our mind.

Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger for ever, because he delights in steadfast love (cf. 6:8). He will again have compassion upon us, and he will tread our iniquities under foot. Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as thou has sworn to our fathers from the days of old. (7:18–20)

So there is great hope ahead for Israel if they will turn and do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.

The Promise of the Coming Messiah

But if we stopped here, Micah’s picture of the future would be like a portrait without a person. I don’t mean that God isn’t a person; he is. And he will dwell in the midst of his people. But you can’t see God. He is spirit; he is invisible. Yet God wills to show us himself as much as possible. Therefore from the days of David he promised to send a human king through whom he would rule the world. And he would be so closely and mysteriously identified with this king that the king would be called, “Mighty God, Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6). So when Isaiah or Micah paints

a picture of God’s future, the visible person at the center is the Messiah. Therefore, to get Micah’s whole picture of the future glory, we have to go to Micah 5:2–4, where he predicts the coming of Messiah out of Bethlehem.

In prophesying these words about the coming of the Messiah, Micah reveals to his contemporaries and to us at least three things about God which should turn us away from idols and cause us to want to trust God above all else. Let’s read the text and then look at these three things.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore, he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed 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.

The three things revealed about God are: first, God always acts to magnify his glory, especially the glory of his freedom and mercy. Second, God keeps his promises. Third, God protects his people. If those three things are true, then who would not want the Lord above any idol? Who would not want to be protected by omnipotence and made an heir of promises which involve infinite glory? So let me try to whet your taste for God by showing how Micah reveals these three things.

God Magnifies His Glory

First, God acts to magnify his glory. In 5:2, God speaks and contrasts the littleness of the town of Bethlehem with the greatness of the ruler who will come out of her. Bethlehem is scarcely worth counting among the clans of Judah, yet God chooses to bring his magnificent Messiah out of this town. Why? One answer is that the Messiah is of the lineage of David, and David was a Bethlehemite. That’s true, but it misses the point of

verse 2. The point of verse 2 is that Bethlehem is small. God chooses something small, quiet, out of the way, and does something there that changes the course of history and eternity. Why? Because when he acts this way, we can't boast in the merits of men but only in the glorious mercy of God. We can't say, "Well, of course he set his favor on Bethlehem; look at the human glory Bethlehem has achieved!" All we can say is, "God is wonderfully free; he is not impressed by our bigness; he does nothing in order to attract attention to our accomplishments; he does everything to magnify his glorious freedom and mercy."

When God chose a replacement for king Saul, he sent Samuel to the little town of Bethlehem. When he chose the sons of Jesse, he set his favor on the youngest, not the oldest (remember Jacob and Esau: "the elder will serve the younger"—Romans 9:12). When God chose a man to defeat giant Goliath, it was little David. When he chose a weapon, it was a slingshot. Why? Why does God do his great work through little towns and youngest sons and slingshots and mangers and mustard seeds? David tells us in 1 Samuel 17:45–47, just before he slays the giant. He says to Goliath,

I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all the assembly may know that the Lord saves not with the sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.

God uses little towns and youngest sons and slingshots to magnify his glory by contrast, to show that he is not the least dependent on human glory or greatness or achievement. The apostle Paul puts it like this in 1 Corinthians 1:27–31. "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God . . . Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." God chose a stable so no inn-keeper might boast,

"He chose my inn!" God chose a manger so that no wood worker could boast, "He chose the craftsmanship of my bed!" He chose Bethlehem so no one could boast, "The greatness of our city constrained the divine choice!"

"What then becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? The principle of works and human merit? No! But on the principle of faith in God's mercy. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Romans 3:27, 28). The divine choice of little Bethlehem as the place of the incarnation is essentially the message of justification by faith apart from works of the law. Bethlehem means that God does not bestow the blessing of salvation on the basis of our merit or our achievement. He does not elect cities or people because of their prominence of grandeur or distinction. When he chooses, he chooses in freedom in order to magnify the glory of his mercy. So when Micah contrasts little Bethlehem with the greatness of the Messiah, he shows God acting in his typical fashion: to magnify his glory and to turn human boasting into gratitude and praise and faith. "Glory to God in the highest," the angels said, and so should we.

God Keeps His Promises

Second, God keeps his promises. Any Jew, hearing Micah predict the coming of a ruler out of Bethlehem who would feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, would think immediately of two people: David and the coming son of David, the Messiah. David was from Bethlehem; David was a ruler in Israel; David was a shepherd. The link between the coming Messiah and king David is the link of promise. What Micah is doing is reasserting the certainty of God's promise to David. You recall from 2 Samuel 7:12–16 how God said to David, "I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever." The amazing thing about Micah is that he reasserts the certainty of this promise not at a time when

Israel is rising to power but at a time when Israel is sinking toward oblivion. He witnesses the destruction of the northern kingdom, and he predicts the fall and exile of Judah.

You can tell how firmly someone believes God's promise by whether it gives him strength and hope when life caves in around him. And Micah, it appears, never wavered. He knew God would keep his promise.

There are not many things in our lives that are sure and unshakable. And the older we get, the less sure and the more shakable everything around us becomes, because our very lives become fragile. I think that when I am 86 instead of 36, Christmas will be pleasant with nostalgia and tinged with the sadness of loss. I think it must not be easy to know that the Christmases you have left you can count on one or two hands. What does the world offer to an octogenarian? Ah, when we were in our twenties and thirties and forties, we are prime targets for the PR of the flesh. Everything seems to have a firmness about it. But near the end we get wiser. If the secular social worker at the nursing home lets me see her eyes, I can tell: beneath her projects and games and therapy she has nothing to offer, nothing. Everything is withering, everything is fading, unless the Word of God is sure. And if it is, there will be strength and hope and joy to the end. The point of Micah is that two centuries and terrible circumstances do not nullify the Word of God. What he has spoken will come to pass. "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field . . . The grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of the Lord will stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:6–8). God keeps his promises. And there is nothing more firm in all the world.

So the first thing we learn about God from Micah 5:2–4 is that God magnifies his glory, and the second is that he keeps his promises. There's a beautiful passage in Romans 15:8, 9, which shows how the coming of Christ confirmed both these truths. Paul said, "For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy." Christmas is intended to magnify the glory of his

God's mercy and confirm the truthfulness of his promises.

God Protects His People

Finally, we learn that God protects his people. Verse 4: "He shall stand and feed 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." God's purpose in sending the Messiah is not only to glorify himself but also to shepherd his people. Everybody in this room needs a divine Shepherd. You may not feel that need now in your strength, but you will feel it keenly, especially if you have to go through the valley of the shadow of death without the comfort of his rod and staff. We need a shepherd, and God has sent Christ just for that need.

Look what he offers in this verse. First, he will stand. He won't lie around waiting for us to serve him. He will be on his toes, alert, working for those who chose him as their shepherd. Second, he will feed his flock. He will not leave us to find our own food. He will lead us in green pastures and beside still waters. There will be no want unsatisfied. Third, he will serve us in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. His good intentions for us will not be hindered by lack of strength. The strength of the Lord is omnipotent strength. Therefore, if you are trusting in Christ, omnipotent strength is on your side. Walk like an obedient sheep behind him, and he will overcome every obstacle to your purification and joy forever. Finally, notice that he shall be great to the ends of the earth. There will be no pockets of resistance unsubdued. Our security will not be threatened by any alien forces. Every knee will bow and confess him Lord. The whole earth will be filled with his glory.

So the sum of the matter is this. Jesus Christ has come out of Bethlehem. Like his town, he was humble and obscure and poor in his first coming. But he will come again in great glory to gather his flock into the kingdom. Micah's promise of his coming proclaims three things to us about God that should make us want him above all else this Christmas. 1) He magnifies the glory of his

freedom and mercy. 2) He keeps his promises, through the darkest times. 3) And he protects his people. Is there anybody here who doesn't want to be protected forever by divine omnipotence? Is there anybody who doesn't want to be the beneficiary of promises which involve infinite glory?

Sermon Notes

November 8, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 7

Nahum

**The God of
Universal
Power Who
Humiliates
the Arrogant**

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Content*: a prophecy of God's judgment against Nineveh (Assyria) for her oppression, cruelty, and idolatry, concluding with the announced destruction of the city
2. *Author*: Nahum ("Comforted [by Yahweh]"), a prophet from Judah otherwise unknown
3. *Date of prophetic activity*: sometime after the fall of Thebes (No-Ammon, 3:8), the capital of Egypt, in 663 B.C. but before the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C., during the period of Judah's vassal-ship to Assyria
4. *Emphasis*:
 - a. Yahweh's judgment on Nineveh for her oppression, cruelty, idolatry and wickedness
 - b. "An oracle concerning Nineveh" (Nah. 1:1). "Oracle" is the same Hebrew word for "burden" (massa'), which clearly points to the weighty nature of Nahum's message.

Literary Overview

1. Superscription (1:1)
2. The Arrival of the Divine Lord: a Hymn (1:2–8)
3. The Announcement of Judgment on Nineveh (1:9–2:13)
 - a. Yahweh's design for Nineveh (1:9–14)
 - b. The Significance of his actions for Judah (1:15–2:2)
 - c. The Description of Nineveh's fate (2:3–12)
 - d. Yahweh's Disposition toward Nineveh (2:13)
4. The Pronouncement of Woe upon Nineveh (3:1–19)
 - a. The Announcement of Judgment (3:1–7)
 - b. The Analogy (3:8–15)
 - i. The picture of Thebe's fall (3:8–10)
 - ii. The picture of Nineveh's fall (3:11–15)
 - c. The Ironic Funeral Dirge (3:16–19)

Message

1. Key Verses: 1:2–3, 6–8 (cf. Ps. 46)
 - Nah. 1:2–3, 6–8. Yahweh is a jealous and avenging God; Yahweh is avenging and wrathful; Yahweh takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. 3Yahweh is slow to anger and great in power, Yahweh will be no means clear the guilty.... 6Who 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. 7Yahweh is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.
2. The Question and Response:
 - a. The Question (v. 6): Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? Cf. Isa 33:14–15; Joel 2:11; Mal 3:2; Rev 6:17.
 - b. The Answer:
 - i. For "those who take refuge in him" (v. 7), God will be "a stronghold in the day of trouble."

- ii. For those who persist in standing against him as “adversaries,” he “will make a complete end” (v. 8).
3. Nineveh’s sins:
- a. Idolatry (1:14)
 - b. Cruelty and injustice: slavery of nations (3:4), her merchants have stripped lands clean (3:16), endless cruelty (3:19). Against such evils, god’s goodness and compassion stands in polar opposite
4. Main Point: While “Yahweh is slow to anger and great in power,” extending mercy to all who repent (as a previous generation of Ninevites experienced in the days of Jonah), he “will be no means clear the guilty” (Nah. 1:3). Those who act unjustly and abuse humans in bloodthirsty ways (ch. 3 contains the most vivid war song in the Bible) will receive full punishment for their sins. No one should presume on the longsuffering lovingkindness of God.

Day 1

Read the introduction to Nahum in a Study Bible, read Nahum, and describe the theme. In what ways is this book a sequel to the book of Jonah?

Questions: Nahum 1

It is interesting to see that one generation repented (Jonah) and a few generations later we see an unrepentant people that are very arrogant. This highlights the importance of discipleship. It is critical for one generation to invest in the next generation. Now in Nahum we are dealing with a generation that went headlong into pleasing themselves, consumed by idolatry, and thinking they are the greatest people ever.

1. What does Nahum's name mean and why is that important?

2. 1:1-5. Describe how God can be vengeful, wrathful, and jealous but at the same time slow to anger.

3. 1:6-11. Describe how God can have indignation and also be good.
 - How do you think these people could have escaped God's wrath? How do you plan to escape God's wrath?

 - 1:12-14. Describe what God is so upset about

4. 1:15. What promise and hope is given in this verse? How does this point to Jesus?

Read

Psalm 46. Study Psalm 46 and then apply it to Nahum 1.

Day 2

Read Nahum 1-2. Look at 1:6-8. Study these cross references: Isaiah 33:14–15; Joel 2:11; Malachi 3:2; Revelation 6:17. Who is God going after in Nahum?

Questions: Nahum 2

1. Look again at 1:15. Define peace. Where do you find peace?
 - Romans 10:14-17. How do you suppose others are to receive this peace? Given the vivid imagery of Nahum, what happens when someone doesn't have this peace?
2. 2:1-7 is the story of God taking the city of Ninevah. vv.1-2 announces the coming siege; vv.3-4 is the approach of the assaulters; v.5 is Ninevah's resistance; v.6 entry is gained; and v.7 the city falls. This is a massive point in God's story. The reason the people of Israel were in bondage to Assyria was because of their sin. And now God rescues his people by plundering the enemy. Describe how this is a picture of a person coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Did the people of God deserve this salvation?
3. 2:8-10. The city is plundered. Describe the people who are being plundered. What was their perspective on life when they were "on top"? Now describe their thoughts?
4. 2:11-13. The City is humbled. Describe the emotions and feelings associated with being humbled by God. Describe a time that you've been humbled. Did it turn out to be a good thing? Explain.

"The long shadow of Assyrian supremacy cast a cloud over God's people. Israel, Judah's sister kingdom to the north, had already fallen to the Assyrians, and now Judah faced the same imperial enemy. Into this gloom and doom, God sent his prophet, Nahum, whose name means "comfort". And that is exactly what Nahum's prophecy brought to Judah – the message that her Assyrian oppressors would face utter destruction. Nahum's oracle after oracle of certain and irrevocable judgment on Assyria comforted the people of Judah, assuring them that even though it may have seemed slow in coming, God was enacting his righteous judgment on their enemies. Nahum's prophecy proved true when Ninevah was destroyed in 612 BC, making the end of the great empire." –Nancy Guthrie

Read

Acts 10:36, 42-43

“In the middle of Nahum’s menacing pronouncement of woes is the Good News of the gospel (1:15)... Nahum’s “good news” was that the God who brings judgment also provides an escape from judgment. The One who executes judgment on the enemies of God is also an emissary for peace with God.” –Nancy Guthrie

Day 3

Read Nahum 3. What happens to the Ninevites?

Questions: Nahum 3

“The mighty world-power of Assyria with its capital city of Ninevah had carried into exile a significant portion of the population of the northern kingdom of Israel in the previous century. So how would the sovereign Lord respond to the excessive brutality of Assyria in its treatment of his own people, despite the fact that this nation had been the Lord’s appointed instrument of judgment? Nahum focuses his message exclusively on the Lord’s coming work of destroying Assyria’s capital city of Ninevah. Throughout the three chapters of his prophecy, he drums the theme: Ninevah shall fall.” –O. Palmer Robertson

1. Romans 2:1-11. How were the Ninevites living out Paul’s explanation of God’s judgment?

- What aspects of your life could be viewed from the perspective that you have a hard heart, and not repenting, thus storing up wrath? What do you need to repent of?

2. 1 Peter 1:17-19. What does it look like to conduct yourselves with fear? How were the Ninevites not heeding this wisdom?

3. Describe a proud and arrogant person. How do they view God and others?

4. Study Proverbs 21:1-6. How does God view arrogant people?

- Describes ways in which you live out an arrogant attitude towards others. How is this offensive to people and how can the gospel change that?

Read

Colossians 2:13-15

Kyle and Allie McIver's Story

Kyle

I grew up in a Christian home with parents who love the Lord. I remember regular family devotions, being encouraged to read my Bible every day, and having a lot of friends from church. A good family however, didn't save me. It wasn't Jesus that I loved, but myself. I was extremely competitive and harsh with myself and others when competing. I loved lust and was often consumed by sinful thoughts and desires. I wanted to be seen as humble by other people and would work hard to achieve it in a way that only fueled my pride when others thought well of me. And yet in all of this I managed to convince myself that I was a Christian. Deep down, I thought, "God couldn't send me to hell because... I'm me. I'm good at things and do kind things for others and am well liked." This attitude carried me all the way through high school and in to college at Bethel University where I continued to lead a double life of attempting external godliness while on the inside I loved my sin the most.

During the summer after my sophomore year at Bethel I was a camp counselor at Trout Lake Camps. God began working at my heart

through a group of incredible men working there that summer. They talked about and revered the Bible like nothing I had encountered before. They read the entire Bible (not just small portions like I did) and lived under its authority. In God's providence, when the summer was over, my older brother picked me up and had planned to discuss my view of the Bible during the three hour drive. By the time we got home my desire to read and take the Bible seriously had grown even more intense. I started reading through the entire Bible and attending Bethlehem Baptist Church. I wanted to read every gospel-centered book I could get my hands on because it felt like the life giving Christian faith I had heard about for so long, but hadn't experienced.

Somewhere along the way, I was born again. I turned from trusting myself to be good enough for God's love and began trusting wholly in Jesus and his finished work on the cross to reconcile me to God. I remember hearing the gospel for what felt like the first time and realizing that this was just basic facts for unbelievers, but the foundation of the entire Christian life. Since being born again, I still struggle with the same sins. Yet now, rather

than just covering over my sin so that others can't see it, rather than sin being my greatest love, Jesus has been slowly but surely transforming me by his grace so that he is my greatest love and deepest satisfaction.

Allie

I grew up in a single parent home. My mom left my dad when my little brother was three and I was five. My dad really valued my brother and me being exposed to church and religious education, and from little on I remember faithfully attending our Lutheran church and school. Whether or not my ears ever heard the true gospel in those places I do not know. I do know that my heart did not. I grew up believing that if I was baptized, went to church regularly, went to “good” schools, and was a “good” person, I was in a good place with God. Even though we didn't have money, I was very spoiled and felt entitled to the things I received. Our way of communicating was through screaming and hitting (occasionally by Dad). I loved myself and rarely loved anyone else.

Most of the way through high school I

was a very poor student and craved intimate attention from my guy friends. I was a quality contributor to my dance line and went on mission trips every year, continuing my thought that I was good enough (even just barely) to be in God's graces. Then, early in my junior year of high school my dad unexpectedly passed away from a stroke, and my life crumbled, though I wouldn't have let on to that. I was depressed, rebellious, anxious, promiscuous, and now living with my estranged mother. Thankfully, I started going to a youth group where the leader was different from any Lutheran I had met. He was funny, but serious about grace. It was through his youth group that my stony, dead heart finally heard Truth and felt the warmth of Grace.

Though still loving my sin, I wanted to know Jesus more. The beginning of college at Bethel was awesome. I have never experienced such joy! I loved my believing friends and reading my Bible. My joy was soon squashed, though, when I became one of those "young, restless, and reformed" stereotypes in my junior year. I loved God's justice to a fault, and forgot (completely) about God's joy as a Father and His loving mercy. Only recently do I feel

like the wounds of those errors are starting to mend.

I wish I could say that since I was given a new heart, ridding it of sin has been easy, but that would not be true. I very much still struggle with self-absorption, entitlement, materialism, unrighteous anger, fear of death, lack of trust, anxiety, depression, pride, and more. But, though those sins are still very real, I know and am comforted that because of Christ I need not be (because I am not) a slave to them (Romans 6:1-14), and that he has promised to complete this good work that He has started in me (Philippians 1:6)! What mercy!

Sermon Notes

November 15, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 8

Habakkuk

The God
Who
Inspires
Faith in
Crisis

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Author*: Habakkuk, a prophet of Judah, is unknown apart from this book
2. *Date of prophetic activity*: Sometime between 612 and 599 B.C. when Babylon had begun to dominate the international scene but before she had attacked Jerusalem; contemporary of Jeremiah
3. *Emphases*:
 - a. God's justice and power in the light of his apparent toleration of evil.
 - b. The proper stance of the righteous in all circumstances is surrendered confidence and persevering trust in the God who acts in his time.
4. *Question*: Habakkuk is made up of a dialogue between the prophet and God. Why was Habakkuk perplexed, and what was God's response?

Literary Overview

1. Superscription (1:1)
2. Divine Tolerance of Evil (1:2–2:20)
 - a. Round 1 (1:2–11)
 - i. Habakkuk's Complaint: Why do you tolerate community injustice against the righteous? (1:2–4)
 - ii. God's Response: Evil will soon be punished (1:5–11)
 - b. Round 2
 - i. Habakkuk's Complaint: How can you tolerate foreign injustice against the righteous? (1:12–2:1)
 - ii. God's Response: Evil will be punished and faith rewarded (2:2–20)
 - c. Habakkuk's Hymn of Trust (3:1–19)

Message

1. Habakkuk's Complaints
 - a. Hab. 1:2–4. O Yahweh, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? ³Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ⁴So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.
 - b. Hab. 1:12–13. Are you not from everlasting, O Yahweh my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Yahweh, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. ¹³You 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?
2. The Contrast of the Wicked and the Righteous
 - a. *The Wicked*: Those who put their confidence in human strength, who define on their own what is right and wrong, and who ultimately sin against themselves by failing to give proper reverence to God.

- Hab. 1:4. The law is paralyzed and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice is perverted.
 - Hab. 1:7. They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.
 - Hab. 1:11. Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!
 - Hab. 2:5, 9–10. 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.... Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm! You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life.
 - Hab. 2:14–15. For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea. Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness. You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in Yahweh’s right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory!
- b. *The Righteous*: Those who in all circumstances express surrendered confidence and persevering trust in the ever-just God who acts in his time.
- Hab. 2:4. Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.
 - Rom. 1:16–17. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “*The righteous shall live by faith.*”
 - Gal. 3:9–12. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. 10For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” 11Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “*The righteous shall live by faith.*” 12But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”
 - Heb. 10:35–39. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. 37For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but *my righteous one shall live by faith*, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” 39But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.
 - John 3:36. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
 - Hab. 3:2, 16–19. O Yahweh, I have heard the report of you (cf. 3:3–15), and your work, O Yahweh, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years

make it known; in wrath remember mercy.... I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. 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, yet I will rejoice in Yahweh; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Yahweh, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.

3. "In Your Wrath, Remember Mercy: Habakkuk 1:2–4; 3:2–19 Recast in English Verse" (Jason S. DeRouchie [12/8/2010])

Injustice prevailing; your law unheeded;
The righteous surrounded. In the wicked is seated
A heart filled with violence,
Yet you remain silent.
How long, O LORD,

Will there remain a sword
Cutting the good while serving the wrong,
Hurting the helpless to promote the strong?
The oppressed of faith all do crave
For you to come, for you to save.

From of old a report did ascend,
That's now come to my ear.
A storm of power that did lend
Aid to all who fear.
Revive this work that all may see;
In your wrath, remember mercy.

In glorious array, you came before—
The heavens you mounted in splendor.
With bright light and a lion's roar,
Your verdict ready to render.
Unveil your power in these days,
Filling the earth with your praise.

The self-sufficient were in your path,
But plague was at your heels.
The nations quaked under your wrath,
Your mighty hand revealed.
From everlasting your purposes stand,
Weigh now the hearts of all in hand.

All the mighty from earthly view
Trembled at your arrival.
Your bow was freed, the arrows flew,
All for your people's survival.
The sun and moon stood as if dead,
As your unleashed fury did spread.

The mountains saw you and thrashed;
The liquid torrents gushed.
Upon your enemies you lashed,
The heads of the strongest crushed.
You rode upon your chariot throne,
Working salvation for your own.

My body trembles at your might,
Lord, save me from such an hour.
My lips and limbs quiver at the sight
Of your majestic power.
Your day of trouble I await to arrive;
Please keep you anointed and people alive.

Though the fruit no longer yield,
The crops no longer fill the field;
Though in the stall the sheep should die,
No longer milk to supply;
Though pains and trial should sustain,
Faithful to Yahweh I will remain.

He, my Treasure, Redeemer, and King,
He is for me, so I can sing.
I will trust, with no fear of fire,
My Savior, Sovereign, and Satisfier.

“To the choirmaster,” ends this song—
From faith for faith throughout the ages
To join the prophet in persevering long,
Believing good news, which alone can saves us.
Christ, the Victor—we in him secure;
The wicked will perish, the righteous endure.

—Jason S. DeRouchie (12/8/2010)

4. “Faith” or “faithfulness” in Hab. 2:4? “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith” (ESV).
 - a. A number of scholars have argued that the term translated “faith” in Hab. 2:4 should actually be translated “faithfulness” or “trustworthiness,” just as it is almost universally translated in every other occurrence in the OT.
 - 1 Sam. 26:23. Yahweh rewards every man for his righteousness and his *faithfulness*, for Yahweh gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against Yahweh’s anointed.
 - Isa. 11:5. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and *faithfulness* the belt of his loins.
 - Hos. 2:20. I will betroth you to me in *faithfulness*. And you shall know Yahweh.
 - Ps. 119:30. I have chosen the way of *faithfulness*; I set your rules before me.

- Prov. 28:20. A man of *faithfulness* will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.
- b. While certainly the righteous man is characterized by “faithfulness,” the contrast between the righteous and the self-exalting and self-confident wicked suggests that Hab. 2:4 is indeed focused on the life characterized by “faith” or “steadfastness” in relation to God and his ways. The righteous one will enjoy life as he manifests a godward heart that is steadfast in trust, surrendered to God’s timing, and confident in God’s present sustaining power and future redemption. The thrust throughout is not on man’s faithfulness to God but in his surrendered trust in God’s faithfulness to the righteous (cf. Gal. 3:11; Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38).

Day 1

Read the intro to Habakkuk in a study Bible, read Habakkuk 1, and note the theme of the book.

Questions: Habakkuk 1

1. Read Habakkuk 1:1–11. Summarize Habakkuk’s complaint to God in verses 2–4 about the wickedness and moral decay he sees around him in his own nation.
2. God’s answer in verses 5–11 surprises Habakkuk, to say the least. What kind of answer might have Habakkuk expected?
3. What is God’s surprising answer, and what problem is now raised by God’s response to Habakkuk’s complaint?
4. Put yourself in Habakkuk’s shoes. If you complained to God about the injustice and wickedness you see around you in society, and God were to answer you along the same lines as he answered Habakkuk, how would you feel?

“Two expressions introduce the complaint of the prophet: ‘How long’ and ‘Why’. The first implies that the prophet had spent some time already in petition to God out of his deep concern for the prevailing circumstances of his day. Many times over he had returned with heart broken to pray over the awful situation. Finally he has come to the point of utter puzzlement over the silence of God. He cannot understand how the Almighty can allow the situation to continue any longer.” –O. Palmer Robertson

“Paul’s quote implies that the message of ch. 1 about a coming judgment on Israel may be understood properly only when it is seen as supportive of the message concerning justification by faith found in ch. 2. By the devastation of those who thought themselves to be righteous by their deeds, the foundation is laid for the message of justification by faith alone.”
–O. Palmer Robertson

Read

Galatians 3:7-10

Day 2

Read Habakkuk 2. Describe in your own words what is transpiring in Habakkuk 1-2.

Questions: Habakkuk 2

1. Read Habakkuk 1:12–2:20. Habakkuk had been surprised by God’s answer in 1:5–11. Now summarize Habakkuk’s reply back to God in verses 12–17.
2. Reread Habakkuk’s seemingly prideful response to God in 2:1. When he says he will “take his stand,” and figuratively drops the mic, what is he standing to watch for?
3. Recall a time when you felt like Habakkuk: you had made your complaint to God and rested your case, thinking that surely you were in the right and somehow he was in the wrong. Consider how God might respond to you in view of his reply to Habakkuk in verses 2–20.
4. God’s answer to Habakkuk’s second complaint is that he will punish the guilty more than Habakkuk even knows. Habakkuk clearly has underestimated God. Review verses 18–20 contrasting idols with the living God. What created things tend to capture your heart rather than the living God? Spend a few minutes considering the two or three most significant things and contrast their emptiness with God’s fullness.

“Unlike some of the other prophets, Habakkuk didn’t call people to repentance. When he began to prophesy, it was too late for that. Instead, he predicted the destruction of Judah. But even though destruction was surely coming for the nation, Habakkuk held out hope for those who would hold fast their confidence in God. “Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked,” Habakkuk said, before drawing a contrast with the righteous people, “but the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God” (Habakkuk 2:4). The prophet was saying that no matter what happened, the righteous would put all of their hope in God – and he would save them.” –Nancy Guthrie

Read

Romans 3:24-26

“Habakkuk didn’t clarify how righteousness and faith are related or how sinful, faithless people will become righteous, faithful people. But Habakkuk’s words do become clear when Paul speaks in the New Testament about justification by faith.” –Nancy Guthrie

Day 3

Read Habakkuk 3. How does Hab. 2:20 set the stage for this prayer? How does Jesus fit into this picture of “praying to God in a temple”?

Questions: Habakkuk 3

1. The dialogue between Habakkuk and God in the first two chapters now gives way in chapter 3 to a greater vision of God and bowing before him in worship. Habakkuk is no longer complaining. Now he is praying, and praising. As intimidating as the vision of God in verses 2–12, what turn does the vision take in verse 13?
2. Habakkuk summarizes his response in verse 16 to this vision of God in his justice and wrath. He “will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon the people who invade us.” How is Habakkuk now changed from the start of the book, when he made his first complaint?
3. Verses 17–19 have been described as “the most beautiful spirit of submission found anywhere in Scripture.” (Habakkuk is now living out the life of faith God commended in 2:4.) Explain these beautiful verses of submission to God’s will in light of Habakkuk’s context and what God has revealed in this book is coming upon his nation.
4. See the strange note that end the book: “To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.” This is a musical notation, as we see in the Psalms. Habakkuk is now singing in worship as he ended the book. Summarize his progress in this short book from protest to praise.

“Now at last the struggles of Habakkuk come round for a final resolution. As often happens when finite human beings venture to dialogue with infinite God, the solution to Habakkuk’s problem does not come in the manner in which he might have expected. Instead of God’s announcing controlled and modest chastening of the disobedient in Israel, Habakkuk had heard with alarm the word of utter devastation. Instead of stern rebuke for his personal audacity in complaint, Habakkuk had received a word of comfort, consolation, and reassurance. So the prophet has been forced to readjust radically what he might expect from the Lord. It is not that the God of the covenant has proven himself capricious or inconsistent. But the prophet must alter his perspective on the ways of God with mankind.” –Robertson

Read

1 Peter 4:16-19

One question to consider in your devotion: What is Habakkuk doing that can serve as an example for us?

From Protest to Praise

David Mathis

Habakkuk prophesied in the generation leading up to the three Babylonian invasions of Judah, the southern kingdom of God's people. The northern kingdom (called Israel) had been conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. Now, almost a century later, the Assyrian empire is waning, and Babylon is on the rise. Habakkuk likely prophesies between 640 and 615 B.C.

In 612, the Babylonians would conquer Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian empire which had ruled over God's people from a distance for a century. In 609, Judah's young, promising king, named Josiah, would be killed in battle against Egypt. Finally, in 605, the Babylonians would finish their full conquest of Assyrians, and that same year, march to Jerusalem for the first of what would be three invasions of the holy city (first 605, then 597, and finally 586 B.C.), each time taking a wave of exiles.

But before all this happens, God reveals ahead of time to the prophet Habakkuk what he is going to do, and the dialogue begins when, like Job, Habakkuk questions God's justice. Habakkuk complains about the wickedness surrounding him in Judah, and God makes it the occasion of revealing his plans to Habakkuk. The book consists of the dialogue between Habakkuk and God, and unlike the other prophets, never addresses the people.

An amazing progression occurs in the three short chapters. The book begins with the prophet protesting that God seems to be standing idly by while his people plummet into rampant evil and injustice (1:2–4). God responds that it's not going unnoticed, and to Habakkuk's surprise, God is already attending to it—by raising up the wicked Babylonians, “that bitter and hasty nation,” to punish Judah (1:5–11).

Habakkuk protests the justice of punishing a wicked people with a people even more wicked (1:12–2:1). The prophet appears confident that he has God cornered and does not expect God will be able to answer him sufficiently on this score. He will “look out to see what [God] will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint” (2:1). The prophet is optimistic that he can rebut whatever answer God has to give for this.

When God answers, Habakkuk is again floored: God will punish the Babylonians

(Chaldeans) in due course and bring destruction to their home in Babylon (2:2–20). He assures the prophet, “The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him” (2:20). That includes Habakkuk and his plans for rebuttal.

Habakkuk marvels at the plans of God and consents that he has been duly silenced: “I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us” (3:16). Only he pleads that God will “in wrath remember mercy” for his people (3:2).

Habakkuk now joyfully submits to the sovereign hand and plan of God. One commentator calls these last three verses (3:17–19) “the most beautiful spirit of submission found anywhere in scripture”:

*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,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*

The book's final line reads, “To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.” Habakkuk has ended in song! He has caught a glimpse of the glory of God, and despite the certain suffering that looms on the horizon, he knows that this God will be enough for him. He will go out for the salvation of his people (3:13). What a progression happens in the heart of this prophet in this short book, as he moves from protest to praise:

*. . . I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*

Outline

- 1:1–4 Habakkuk complains
- 1:5–11 God responds
- 1:12–2:1 Habakkuk complains again
- 2:2–20 God responds again
- 3:1–19 Habakkuk prays and worships

Sermon Notes

November 22, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 9

Zephaniah

**The God
Who
Punishes
to Create a
Remnant**

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Content*: A single expanded oracle of coming catastrophic judgments against Jerusalem / Judah and surrounding nations and of restoration for the remnant of God's people
2. *Author*: Zephaniah ("Yahweh hides, protects"), a potentially black prophet from Jerusalem, probably of the royal lineage of Hezekiah; his very presence in the lineage of David in the midst of a dark age gives hope.
3. *Date of prophetic activity*: sometime during the reign of Josiah of Judah (640– 609 B.C.); in light of both an apparent awareness of Deuteronomy but the certainty of sins' pervasiveness, the book was probably written in early 622, after the Book of the Law was found in the temple but before the full reformation was carried out.
4. *Likely historical backdrop*: The early part of the Josianic Reformation (2 Kgs 22–23).
5. *Emphases*:
 - a. The coming day of Yahweh as judgment for Judah and the nations.
 - b. Yahweh as divine warrior and guardian of his remnant.
 - c. A summons to satisfaction by means of a patient pursuit of God.
6. *Main Theme*: In light of the impending day of YHWH's wrath, Zephaniah summons the remnant of Israel to patiently pursue YHWH as the means for ultimate delight in God and for God's delight in saved sinners.

Outline: A Summons to Satisfaction

1. *The Superscription to the Summons* (1:1)
2. *The Setting for the Summons* (1:2–18)
 - a. The Reason for the Call to Silence Declared: Judgment Is Coming (1:2–6)
 - b. The Makeup of the Call to Silence Defined (1:7–18)
3. *The Essence of the Summons* (2:1–3:20)
 - a. Stage 1 of the Summons to Satisfaction: Pursue Yahweh to Avoid Judgment (2:1–4)
 - b. The Ground of the Summons to Satisfaction (2:5–3:7)
 - i. Ground 1 ("Woe"): The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels from the Foreign Nations, Colored with Statements of Hope for the Remnant (2:5–15)
 - ii. Ground 2 ("Woe"): The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels from Jerusalem (3:1–7)
 - c. Stage 2 of the Summons to Satisfaction: Wait on Yahweh, Ultimately to Enjoy Satisfaction (3:8–20)
 - i. The Charge to Wait for Yahweh Asserted (3:8)
 - ii. The Dual Basis of the Charge Declared (3:9–10)
 - iii. The Ultimate Motivation of the Charge Expounded: The Remnant of Judah's Satisfying Salvation (3:11–20)

Message

1. *The Superscription to the Summons to Satisfaction* (1:1)

- a. The nature of the prophecy: the Word of Yahweh
- b. The messenger of the prophecy:
 - i. Because Zephaniah was “son of Cushi” (1:1) and shows a unique interest in the sin and future restoration of the Cushites (i.e., Ethiopians, 2:12; 3:9–10), it is possible that the prophet was a black Jew. This could help explain his apparent interest in global judgment and restoration (1:2–3, 17–18; 3:8–10).
 - ii. Zephaniah is the only prophet that includes a five generation genealogy, which suggests part of the purpose is to identify him with Hezekiah, likely reforming king in the line of David. The prophet’s participation in the royal family potentially explains his high awareness of and concern for Israel’s covenantal and religious heritage, the international climate (e.g., 2:5–15), and the ethics of Jerusalem’s political and religious leadership (esp. 1:4, 8–9; 3:3–4).
- c. The time of the prophecy
 - i. Zephaniah’s prophetic ministry occurred sometime during Josiah’s three-decade reign (ca. 640–609 B.C.), yet the exact timing is difficult to pinpoint.
 - 1) The prophet’s anticipation of the destruction of Assyria’s capital Nineveh (2:13–15) makes the latest possible date 612 B.C., when the city was overthrown.
 - 2) On the spectrum’s other end, King Josiah began to reign in 640 B.C. at the age of eight, and in his eighth year (ca. 632 B.C.) “he began to seek the God of his father David” (2 Chr 34:3). In his twelfth year (ca. 628 B.C.), he started removing all Canaanite pagan shrines and emblems from Jerusalem and Judah on up into the area once designated to the northern kingdom (2 Chr 34:3–7). Finally, in his eighteenth year (ca. 622 B.C.), after the recovery of the Book of the Law of Moses (probably at least including the core of Deuteronomy; cf. Deut 29:21; 30:10; 31:26), the king instituted a mass religious reform throughout the land (2 Chr 34:8–35:19), which included the complete eradication of all remaining signs of Baal worship in Jerusalem and its environs (2 Kgs 23:4–20).
 - ii. A number of features suggest Zephaniah ministered early in 622 B.C., after the king’s initial 628 B.C. cleansing and after the finding of the Book of the Law but before the reform movement got fully underway:
 - 1) The book lacks any reference to child sacrifice, which suggests Josiah had already begun to curb the contaminating evil that made the previous reigns of Manasseh and Amon so foul (2 Kgs 21:6, 21; cf. 24:3–4).
 - 2) Zephaniah’s message confronts religious syncretism and indifference, covenantal disloyalty, and political and social oppression (Zeph 1:4–13; 3:1–4, 7), and it is characterized by calls back to the basics of seeking God, prayer, right order, humility, and patient trust (e.g., 1:6; 2:3; 3:2, 8)—all features consonant with early stages of reform.
 - 3) Zephaniah appears to regularly allude to Deuteronomy (see especially 1:5, 13, 15, 17, 18; 2:3, 7, 9; 3:5, 7, 10, 17, 19), which implies he was acquainted with the book.
 - 4) A “remnant of Baal worship” including “idolatrous priests” still remained in Jerusalem (1:4), which means Josiah’s full reformation was yet complete (cf. 2 Kgs 23:5).

2. *The Setting for the Summons to Satisfaction* (1:2–18): A Call to Dreadful Silence in Light of the Nearness and Nature of Yahweh’s impending judgment on Judah and the World. Sets a

context for the book's main exhortations in chs. 2–3. The prophet calls his Judean listeners to pause in silence in light of the nearness and nature of Yahweh's impending judgment on Judah and the world. Verses 2–6 highlight the base reason for the call, and vv. 7–18 define the makeup of the call.

- a. The Reason for the Call to Silence Declared—Judgment Is Coming (1:2–6): Yahweh promises to bring devastating judgment on the broad world (vv. 2–3) and on Judah and Jerusalem in particular (vv. 4–6) in light of rampant wickedness and idolatrous rebellion.
 - b. The Nature of the Call to Silence Defined (1:7–18): Like a herald readying an audience for an angry king's arrival, Zephaniah charges his audience to become quiet (v. 7a) and then further describes the basis for the call, detailing the imminent timing and sacrificial makeup of Yahweh's impending judgment day with respect to both Judah (vv. 7b–13) and the whole world (vv. 14–18).
3. *The Essence of the Summons* (2:1–3:20): Charges to Repent and Wait upon the Lord in Light of the Impending Judgment Against Rebels and the Future Joy Promised to the Remnant. Building off the context of dreadful silence sparked by the encroaching day of Yahweh (1:2–18), the book's main section calls the remnant of Judah to repent and wait for God (2:1, 3; 3:8). The dual charges frame 2:5–3:7, which highlights the lamentable state and fate of the rebels from the foreign nations (2:5–15) and from Jerusalem (3:1–7) in order to clarify some reasons why Judah should turn to Yahweh, looking and longing, hunting and hoping, entreating and trusting.
- a. Stage 1 of the Summons to Satisfaction: Pursue Yahweh to Avoid Judgment (2:1–4). Stage 1 in the summons to satisfaction is repentance, defined here in two parts as gathering together (v. 1–2) and seeking Yahweh (v. 3abc). Only by this means may a remnant from Judah “perhaps . . . be sheltered” from God's destruction of the wicked (v. 3d), like those from Philistia (v. 4).
 - b. The Ground of the Summons to Satisfaction (2:5–3:7): This unit develops the judgment mentioned in 2:4 and by this develops the rational basis for the charges to “seek” and “wait” found 2:3 and 3:8. The rebellious Judeans should patiently pursue Yahweh because he has promised to judge not only the rebels of the foreign nations (2:5–15) but also those from Jerusalem (3:1–7). Each reason for repentance and rest begins with the term “woe” (2:5; 3:1) and laments the state and fate of the respective groups.
 - i. Ground 1 (“Woe”): The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels from the Foreign Nations, Colored with Statements of Hope for the Remnant (2:5–15). With the call to Judah to repent in focus (2:1–4), this unit announces God's judgment on the foreign peoples surrounding Israel, beginning with the Philistines to the west (vv. 5–7) and followed by the Moabites and Ammonites to the east (vv. 8–11) and the Cushites/Ethiopians and Assyrians to the south and north (vv. 12–15). Implied is that the judgment that spans the populated world will reach Judah (cf. Hab 2:16–17) unless they return to Yahweh and become part of the preserved remnant (see Zeph 3:7, 9).
 - ii. Ground 2 (“Woe”): The Lamentable State and Fate of the Rebels from Jerusalem: A Woe Oracle against the City (3:1–7). As implied in the preceding lament against the rebels from the foreign nations (2:5–15), this brief unit further unpacks the sinful makeup and certain judgment of those in Jerusalem by highlighting their stubborn resistance to learn from God's correction of them or from his punishment of the foreign nations (cf. 1:4–6). In turn it provides a further reason why the remnant from Judah should indeed pursue Yahweh (“gather” and “seek,” 2:1–3) with patient trust (“wait,” 3:8).

- c. Stage 2 of the Summons to Satisfaction: Wait on Yahweh, Ultimately to Enjoy Satisfaction (3:8–20). Added to the command to repent (2:1–3) is here a call to enduring patience (3:8), and together they make up Zephaniah’s two-stage summons that explains the means to lasting joy, which climaxes in God’s delight in those he has saved (highlighted in the final section, 3:9–20).
- i. The Charge to Wait for Yahweh Asserted (3:8a)
 - ii. The Dual Basis of the Charge Declared (3:8b–10). Both the clause beginning with “I have decided” in 3:8b and the sentence in 3:9 begin with Hebrew causal conjunctions (“because/for”) that stand in series. The two reasons why the remnant from Judah should continue to wait upon Yahweh is because he still intends both to judge the rebel nations (3:8b; cf. Hab 1:2; 3:17–19) and to save a group from the nations of the world, reversing the effects of the Tower of Babel (Zeph 3:9–10). Specifically, on the very day Yahweh stands in judgment as covenant witness (“then”), Yahweh will do a work of new creation, transforming peoples from all over the world into true worshippers—a picture now realized eternally in the church (Matt 28:18–20; Rom 11; Eph 2:11–22; Rev 5:9–10; 7:9–10).
 - iii. The Ultimate Motivation of the Charge Expounded: The Remnant of Judah’s Satisfying Salvation (3:11–20). The lack of conjunction at the head of 3:11 and the content of all that follows suggest that the whole unit from 3:11–20 clarifies for the remnant from Judah the implications of the global transformation highlighted in 3:8b–10. For the preserved from Jerusalem, the restoration through judgment will include the removal of the proud and the preservation of the God dependent (vv. 11–13), the verbal expression of joy in the wake of the King’s irreversible victory (vv. 14–15), and Yahweh’s deliverance of and delight in his remnant, which secures provision and protection (vv. 16–20). Thus, the call to patiently pursue Yahweh that shapes the book’s body (2:1–3; 3:8) is nothing less than a summons to satisfaction. See Introduction: Message. The first and last sub-units, each of which begins with “on that day” (3:11, 16), expound the primary implications for Judah of Yahweh’s judicial decision (3:8), and they together frame vv. 14–15, which stand as an intrusive call to celebrate, as if the promise of unpolluted pleasure in God’s presence is already fulfilled.

Remnant Theme in Zephaniah

1. The remnant defined:

- a. Remnant of Baal (1:4): Those in Judah and elsewhere identified more with Baal than with Yahweh (see 1:4–6, 12; 3:1–2).
- b. Remnant of Yahweh/Judah (2:7, 9, 13): All from the earth who are surrendered solely to Yahweh, including those from Judah and Jerusalem (see 2:3).

2. Moving from Remnant of Baal to Remnant of Yahweh through Repentance

- Zeph. 3:7. I said, “Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction. Then your dwelling would not be cut off according to all that I have appointed against you.” But all the more they were eager to make all their deeds corrupt.
- Jer. 18:7–10. If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. 9And if at any

time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.

- Ezek. 33:13–15. Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. 14Again, though I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, 15if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Canonical Arrangement: Nahum–Zephaniah, the Punishment Prophets

Introductory Comments

1. Zephaniah summarizes the punishment of the wicked similar to the way Micah summarizes their sin.
2. Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah are all prophets of “punishment”
 - a. Nahum declares punishment against haughty Assyria
 - b. Habakkuk declares punishment against haughty Judah and Babylon
 - c. Zephaniah declares punishment on all nations

Flow of thought:

1. *Nahum*: Know this for certain: Yahweh is a stronghold only for those who accept his terms of peace, but he will justly judge all his unrepentant enemies.
2. *Habakkuk*: Yahweh is just, and in his time he will indeed punish all wrongdoers and preserve all who walk by faith, looking to him for help, guidance, and satisfaction.
3. *Zephaniah*: Please be part of the remnant that draws near to God, so that the coming Day may be one of rejoicing! Yet for all who fail to heed God’s voice, the Day of Yahweh the warrior will be sure destruction!

Day 1

Read the intro to Zephaniah in a Study Bible, read Zephaniah 1, and describe the main point.

Questions: Zephaniah 1

1. Zephaniah 1 focuses extensively on the day of the Lord. What are the key features of this day?

2. The first part of Zephaniah highlights idolatry as the cause of judgment. What does Zeph. 1:5 suggest about the nature of this idolatry?

3. Make a list of the other sins that awaken God's anger in Zephaniah 1. Some of the sins may not be immediately obvious. Reflect on the puzzling ones and try to discern why they were so offensive to God.

- Compare Zephaniah 1 with Genesis 6.

4. 1:6. What does it mean to seek the Lord or inquire of him? What does this look like in your life?

- Why does one who was following God turn back and stop following God?

“The concept of the day of Yahweh as a day of decisive punishment permeates the book of Zephaniah, which nevertheless ends on a note of joy for those who have come through the judgment. From the sweeping declaration at the beginning onward, Zephaniah is characterized by its use of comprehensive language for the scope of this judgment. This scope is reflected in twenty-three occurrences of the phrase “all/the whole.” –Thomas Renz

Read

Matthew 6:33

Day 2

Read Zephaniah 2. Define pride and how is it an issue in this chapter?

Questions: Zephaniah 2

1. Compare 2:3 with Psalm 105:1-5; how does humility play a crucial role in our following God?
2. What hope does Zephaniah hold out in chapter 2? What can Israel do to avoid disaster?
3. What is the response of the surrounding nations to Israel's troubles? What does God promise to do to these nations? Be specific.
4. Why might Zephaniah 2:15 be a particularly convicting word to Americans?

“God is Judge of the entire world. We can be thankful because we know that he will do what is just and right, even if we have to wait for it. So far, Zephaniah’s prophecy has largely been directed to God’s own people. But beginning in 2:4, he broadens his scope and makes it clear that all nations are in God’s sight.” –Mark Dever

Read

1 Peter 1:13

One word to meditate on in your devotion: hope

Day 3

Read Zephaniah 3 and compare with Isaiah 62.

Questions: Zephaniah 3

1. Zephaniah 3 begins with a focus on the leaders of the people. What sins have the leaders of the people committed?
2. Zephaniah 3:9-13 is the “turn” in the book. What does God promise to do?
3. Spend time meditating on Zephaniah 3:14-20. Why is this passage such an encouragement after the first three chapters?
4. What does 3:14-20 show us about judgment and mercy in the Minor Prophets?

“The great news of Zephaniah is that God will save all his people. He will vindicate and change and gather and exult in his people! That is his plan and our great hope. In that sense, these last verses provide an Old Testament equivalent to the last chapters of the New Testament book of Revelation, where God lovingly gives his people who are about to endure a great trial a clearer view of their final end, so that they might be strengthened, encouraged, and prepared to follow him down a difficult path to a worthwhile destination.” –Mark Dever

Read

Luke 15:8-10

**The Lord
Will
Rejoice
Over You**

John Piper

According to Zephaniah 1:1, the prophet Zephaniah delivered the Word of the Lord during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. Josiah reigned from 637 to 608 BC. So his reign came to an end just 20 years before Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonians and Israel was taken into captivity. Josiah is the king, you recall, who found the long-lost book of the law in the temple and tried to reform the people who had drifted so far into idolatry and wickedness. Zephaniah, then, was a part of this effort to call Judah, and especially Jerusalem, back to God.

What I would like to do this morning is give a brief outline of the book of Zephaniah, then let each section have its say, and as we go apply the teaching to us, especially the section on God's joy at the end.

Outline of Zephaniah

I think the book falls naturally into five parts. First, chapter 1 announces the coming judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. Verse 4, "I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem." Second, chapter 2, verses 1–3, calls the nation back to God, and specifically (as it says in verse 3) to "seek righteousness and seek humility." Third, in chapter 2, verses 4–15, Zephaniah announces the judgment that is also coming on the lands that surround Judah: the Philistines to the east (vv. 4–7), Moab and Ammon to the west (vv. 8–11), the Ethiopians to the south (v. 12), and Assyria to the north (vv. 13–15). The fourth section of the book is chapter 3, verses 1–7. Here Zephaniah turns his attention to Jerusalem again and lengthens the catalogue of God's accusations against her. Finally, chapter 3, verses 8–20, proclaims the conversion of the peoples (v. 9), the conversion and re-gathering of Israel (v. 10), and the glorious future of all the godly as God rejoices over them with gladness.

I think the main point of the book is 2:3, "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility." The rest of the book is mainly made up of warnings that judgment is coming upon the proud, and promises that the humble and righteous who seek refuge in the Lord will be saved (3:12, 13). So there

are three things: commands, warnings, and promises. Obedience to the command in 2:3 is Zephaniah's main goal, and the warnings and promises are incentives for the people to repent and obey.

Sin and the Coming Day of Judgment

That's the general outline and structure of the book. Now let's go back to the beginning and listen more closely as each section has its say. Chapter 1 announces coming judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. Just like in Joel, the coming judgment is called the "day of the Lord." Verse 7: "Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand." Verses 14 and 15 describe the judgment in words almost identical to Joel (cf. Joel 2:2):

The great day of the Lord is near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the mighty man cries aloud there. 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.

But unlike the book of Joel, Zephaniah not only warns of judgment, but in doing so, exposes the sins which kindle God's wrath. We can see these both in chapter 1 and in 3:1–7. The list begins in 1:4, "I will cut off the remnant of Baal." Manasseh had built altars and high places to this foreign god, even in the temple of Yahweh himself (2 Kings 21:3, 5, 7). Josiah had torn them down during his reform effort. But there remained a remnant of Baal worshipers. These God will cut off in the day of the Lord.

Verse 5 describes two other forms of idolatry. There are people in Judah "who bow down on the roofs to the hosts of heaven," that is, sun and moon and stars. As Paul said six centuries later, they exchanged the glory of God for the derived glory of created things. Then there was another group who tried to serve two masters: "those who bow down and swear to the Lord, and yet swear by Milcom." Milcom is another name for Molech, the national god of the Ammonites. But (as we saw in Joel) God's purpose is to show that he alone is God, and there is none else (2:27), and that, therefore, the people

should return to him with all their heart (2:12). If you try to serve two masters (to give God 50% or 95% of your heart, but not all), you will be swept away into judgment at the day of the Lord.

In chapter 3, verse 2, the problem with the people in Jerusalem is stated most simply: “[Jerusalem] listens to no voice, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God.” The essence of the sin against which the Lord is coming is self-sufficiency. They won’t listen to anybody. They won’t accept correction from anybody, not even God. They do not need God. So they don’t trust him nor even draw near to him. This may seem like an inconsistency: a self-sufficient rejection of Yahweh on the one hand (3:2), and a dabbling in idolatry on the other hand (1:5). But it’s not. There is in every human, I think, a deep longing to worship something great—to have a god or a hero or some beautiful or powerful thing to admire. But there is also in every human the sinful and insatiable longing, too, for self-determination and autonomy—we will do our own thing and get our own glory. Therefore, man does not cease to be a worshipping creature when he rejects the true God. Rather he searches out a god in his own image who will give him all the leeway he craves and exert on him no moral constraints of which he does not approve. There may be no more arrogant man on the face of the earth than the man bowing humbly before the god he has created in his own image. So the day of the Lord is coming upon Judah and Jerusalem because of their arrogant refusal to seek the Lord and take refuge in him.

But chapter 1 also stresses that God’s wrath is against those who love money and rely on their gold and silver. Verse 18 warns: “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord.” Verse 9 describes servants of the rich who fill their master’s houses through violence and fraud. Verse 11 says, “All who weigh out silver will be cut off.” And verse 12 refers to those who are “thickening upon their lees,” which means those who have grown hard and calloused in their abundance and say, “The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.” In other words, the love of

money is not a separate problem from the arrogance and self-sufficiency and idolatry we saw earlier. They are all of a piece. In their race toward self-reliance, they do not reckon with God’s reward or punishment. They are thickening upon the dregs of their self-wrought security. And, as verse 18 says, “In the fire of his jealous wrath [they] shall be consumed.”

Call to Repentance and Humility

The second section of the book (2:1–3) is a call to repentance. Just like Joel, Zephaniah holds out the hope that the guilty can be yet spared from wrath if they turn and seek the Lord. It shouldn’t surprise us, after what we have seen in chapters 1 and 3:1–7, that the specific things Zephaniah calls for are righteousness and humility. Verse 3: “Seek the Lord all you humble of the land, who do his commands: seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the wrath of the Lord.” I’m not sure why Zephaniah calls for the “humble of the land” to seek humility and righteousness when it is the arrogant idolaters, who love unrighteous mammon, that need to repent. Probably what he is saying is this: anyone in the land who is humble enough to submit to God’s commands, here is what you should do and keep on doing—stay humble, seek the Lord, and do righteousness. These are the very three conditions laid down by God in 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.” And if this summons applies to the humble of the land, how much more to the arrogant, the idolaters and the lovers of money! So the main point of Zephaniah’s prophecy is to call everyone who reads it to a deep humility, which frees a person to seek refuge in God, which in turn produces a righteous life.

Motivations for Obedience

The third section of the book, 2:4–15, is introduced by the word “for” (in v. 4), which suggests that this unit is the ground of Zephaniah’s call to repentance. It gives reasons

why we should listen and obey the summons of 2:3. I see three ways that 2:4–15 motivates us to obey 2:3. First, it warns us that there is no escape when the day of the Lord comes. If we flee to the west, we will find the wrath of God falling on the Philistines (vv. 4–7). If we flee to the east, we find that Moab and Ammon are famished under the wrath of God (vv. 8–11). If we flee to the south, the Ethiopians are being slain by his sword (v. 12). And if we flee to the north, Assyria is destroyed and its great city Nineveh is a desolation. In other words, there is no escape on the day of the Lord. Every staff on which we try to lean in our pride will snap and pierce us through. One refuge will be secure: God. Therefore, humble yourselves, seek his face, and do righteousness.

The second way that 2:4–15 motivates us to obey 2:3 is by promising that there will indeed be a faithful remnant who survives the day of the Lord. When it says in 2:3, “Perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord,” it does not mean that God’s saving work is uncertain. It means that our being a part of it depends on each individual’s conversion to humility and faith and righteousness; and of that Zephaniah is not certain. But he gives us strong encouragement to repent and seek God while there is time, because he assures us there will be a saved remnant. The last part of verse 9: “The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them.” Again in verse 7: “The seacoast shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah, on which they shall pasture.”

Do you see the implication of this promise? How could God be sure some would humble themselves and seek him and thus survive his judgment? He could be sure because he is the one who performs the conversion which guarantees salvation. When the catastrophe fell several decades later, God spoke to his beleaguered people in Ezekiel 36:26, 27, “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you . . . I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.” God can require conversion for salvation in Zephaniah 2:3 and yet speak with absolute certainty that there will be a saved remnant in 2:7–9, because in his mercy

he will sovereignly perform the conversion and thus secure the remnant. This is a great incentive to obey Zephaniah 2:3 because now we know we are not left to ourselves to overcome the obstacles to our salvation, but rather we work out our salvation for God himself is at work in us to will and to do for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12, 13).

The third way that 2:4–15 motivates us to obey the command to be humble in 2:3 is by showing that the reason the surrounding nations are being judged is because of their pride and arrogance. Verse 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.” Verse 10: “This shall be their lot in return for their pride, because they scoffed and boasted against the people of the Lord of hosts.” Verse 15 pronounces judgment on Nineveh, the capital of Assyria: “This is the exultant city that dwelt secure, and said to herself, ‘I am and there is none else.’ What a desolation she has become!” When we hear why the nations are being judged, then surely we will feel strongly moved to obey when Zephaniah commands, “Seek the Lord, . . . seek righteousness, seek humility.” The way of escape in the day of wrath is godly humility.

The Glorious Future of the Godly

The third section of the book is Zephaniah 3:1–7, but we already looked at this together with chapter 1 concerning God’s accusations against Jerusalem. That brings us to the final unit: 3:8–20 which describes the glorious future of the godly. The first thing to notice here is that even though the amazing promises of this section relate most directly to the converted and restored people of Israel (v. 10), nevertheless it is a necessary implication of the prophecy that the blessings promised flow out beyond the bounds of Israel and include us who through faith in Christ become Abraham’s seed and heirs of the promise (Galatians 3:29). Verse 9 shows that God intends to save more than just Jews: “Yea, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord.”

What is it, then, that will characterize all

the redeemed who will enjoy the promises of this section? Verses 11–13 describe them:

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 the proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord, those who are left in Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies.

In other words, the people who will experience the fulfillment of the promises of 3:14–17 are the ones who obeyed the three-fold call back in 2:3: “Seek the Lord, . . . seek righteousness, seek humility.” Therefore, humility which takes refuge in God (or as we should say today, humility which takes refuge in the death of Jesus Christ for our sins) is not only the way of escape from divine wrath, it is even more the way of entrance into divine joy.

Verse 14: “Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!” This is what the humble and lowly will do for all eternity. And verses 15–20 give the reasons why they can rejoice. The judgment that had been directed against them is turned away—no more condemnation (v. 15). Every enemy and opponent and hindrance to joy is cast out (v. 15). The king of Israel, the Lord, is in their midst, mighty in strength, and there can be no more fear (vv. 15–17).

But the most amazing promise of all is in verse 17: “The Lord will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love (or better: he will be silent, i.e., make no accusations, in his love), he will exult over you with loud singing (or: a shout of joy).” Jesus said, “There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” And Zephaniah tells us that when all those repentant, humble, lowly sinners gather before God—what will he do? Will he look down with disapproval, and glower at our guilt, and frown with malevolence? Will he ignore us and look over our heads in sublime indifference? Will he grieve that his flock

is so shabby? NO! “He will rejoice over you with gladness . . . He will exult over you with a shout of joy.” “As a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Isaiah 62:5).

Will God Really Exult over Us?

We must banish from our minds forever any thought that God admits us begrudgingly into his kingdom, as though Christ found a loophole in the law, did some fancy plea-bargaining, and squeaked us by the Judge. No way! God himself, the Judge, put Christ forward as our substitutionary sacrifice, and when we trust him, God welcomes us with bells on. He puts a ring on our finger, kills the fatted calf, throws a party, shouts a shout that shakes the ends of creation, and leads in the festal dance.

Someone may ask: Isn't that a bit unseemly and undignified of God to get so excited and shout and carry on this way? But I answer: Remember David's wife, Michal. When David danced with joy before the Lord with all his might, Michal despised this immoderate display of emotion. And the Lord struck her barren for the rest of her life! For he intends to be mightily enjoyed, and one day he will show us how to rejoice with all his might.

Another may ask: But doesn't it belittle God to have him rejoicing over us? Not necessarily. It would be unrighteous if he made us his god—if we and not he himself were the ultimate spring of his joy. But we aren't. We are not his god. He is his own God. And when we stand before him redeemed in Christ Jesus, he will behold his own handiwork. “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.” According to 3:12 it is God himself who will see to it that there is in the midst of Zion a humble and lowly people who take refuge in his name. Does it belittle the designer of the IDS tower to exult over the beauty of that building at dawn in September? Does it belittle Michelangelo to rejoice with tears as he looks at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? Nor does it belittle God when the divine work of your redemption is done and all the millions are gathered before his throne, the humble and lowly, that God

should break forth in singing and rejoice over you with all his heart and with all his soul.

Therefore, while the day of the Lord waits, “seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, . . . seek righteousness, seek humility . . . Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem” (2:3; 3:14). Amen.

Sermon Notes

November 29, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 10

Haggai

The God
Who
Renews
the
Temple

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Content*: oracles encouraging the people to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem
2. *Author*: Haggai, a postexilic prophet in Jerusalem and contemporary of Zechariah (cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14)
3. *Date of prophetic activity*: a four-month period during the second year of Darius of Persia (520 B.C.)
4. *Emphasis*:
 - a. Yahweh's passion for a place for his presence and worship (see Exod 33:15–16; 19:5–6).
 - b. Failure to rebuild the temple has brought on the present hardships.
 - c. A glorious future awaits the people of God and Zerubbabel (thus David's kingly line); the glory of the future temple will far surpass the old one (Hag. 2:7, 9)

Literary Overview of Haggai

1. The Need for the Temple (1:1–15)
 - a. A call for a divine residence (1:1–12)
 - b. The promise of the divine presence (1:13–15)
2. Oracles Pointing to the Fulfillment of Abrahamic Promises (2:1–23)
 - a. The promise of divine presence (2:1–9)
 - b. The promise of community blessing (2:10–19)
 - c. The promise of a royal deliverer (2:20–23)

Message of Haggai:

1. Theme: God's passion for his own renown
2. The Need for the Temple (1:1–15; see esp. vv. 5, 7)
 - a. Upon their return, Israel was experiencing some great problems in the land. What was the nature of these problems, and of what were they a sign?
 - b. For what reason did God call them to rebuild the temple?
 - c. What did God say that would have given assurance that success would be experienced?
3. Oracles Pointing to the Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Promises (2:1–23)
 - a. What purpose does recalling the earlier condition of the temple (2:3) play in Haggai's message?
 - b. The opposition was great, so why should the remnant, "Be strong ... Be strong ... Be strong ... Work!" (2:4; cf. Josh. 1:6–7, 9, 18; 23:6; 24:14; Isa. 41:10)?
 - c. What does God promise?
 - d. What role does the imagery of holiness and uncleanness play (2:10–14)?
 - e. What has restored the reality of blessing rather than curse (2:19)?
 - f. How are we to understand the imagery of the signet ring (2:23)?
 - Hag. 2:23. On that day, declares Yahweh of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares Yahweh, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares Yahweh of hosts.

- Jer. 22:24–25, 28, 30. As I live, declares Yahweh, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off and give you into the hand of those who seek your life, into the hand of those of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans. . . . 28 Is this man Coniah a despised, broken pot, a vessel no one cares for? . . . 30 Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.

4. Summary:

- a. God is passionate about establishing his kingdom.
- b. He ensures his kingdom's success by placing his presence in the midst of his people and by making great and precious promises about his glory and his Messiah that enable and motivate lives that witness God to the world.

Haggai and Zechariah's Historical Context and Message

1. Political and Social Conditions

- a. The short life of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (625–539 B.C.) vs. the extended life of the Persian Empire (539–323 B.C.): About 65 years after the dissolution of the Assyrian state with the fall of Carchemish, the glory of Babylon disappeared. Under the Indo-European Achaemenid dynasty the Persians would rule the ancient Near East for more than two centuries until the establishment of the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great.
- b. In 538 B.C., Cyrus decrees that the Jews can return to Jerusalem & rebuild the temple of Yahweh. Only a small group return to Jerusalem (42,360 Jews + 7,337 servants = 49,697 individuals; see Ezra 1:64–65), which suggests life was good in “exile.” The first return was led by Zerubbabel the governor and Jeshua the priest; Haggai and Zechariah were the prophets.

2. The Crisis of Faith

- a. Haggai, Zechariah, and Ezra 1–6 testify to a “crisis of faith,” which was not resolved even after 100 years into the ministries of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi.
- b. The glorious hope held out by the prophets of a previous era had not been realized, and the people were paralyzed in a general climate of despondency and moral lethargy.
 - i. The land remained but a small province in the backwaters of the Persian empire (Ezra 9:8–9).
 - ii. The glorious Edenic future with the Messianic King had not yet been realized.
 - iii. Yahweh had not (yet) come to his temple (Mal. 3:1) with majesty and power to exalt his kingdom in the sight of the nations.

3. The Ministries of Haggai and Zechariah

- a. Following the 538 return to rebuild the temple, the foundations were quickly laid with great praise, thanksgiving, and mourning.
 - Ezra 3:11–13. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to Yahweh, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.” And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praise Yahweh, because the foundation of the house of Yahweh was laid. ¹²But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, ¹³so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the

sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.

- b. Soon construction ceased, due to oppression from outside and despondency within. Haggai and Zechariah helped rekindle the passion for the temple and its construction and helped spark new hope in God's restoration promises (Ezra 5:1).
 - i. *The question:* How can this remnant of re-gathered Israelites continue to be the people of God while under the lordship of Persia and in the absence of a Davidic ruler and full control of the entire land of Israel?
 - ii. *The answer:* Only partial fulfillment now and hope for consummation in the future! Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah thrust the Davidic hope into the eschatological future (cf. Hag 2:21–23; Zech 4:6b–10a) and encourage the people to relax and take care of the business at hand.

Excursus: The Purpose of Dated Oracles in the Prophets

1. The dates of Haggai's oracles, as presented in Parker and Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.–A.D. 75* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1956):
 - a. Oracle 1 (1:1) – Aug. 29, 520
 - b. Oracle 2 (2:1) – Oct. 17, 520
 - c. Oracle 3 (2:10) – Dec. 18, 520
 - d. Oracle 4 (2:20) – Dec. 18, 520
2. Only three prophets have their oracles dated, and all are part of the exile: Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah. The dates suggest that the books' messages are bound up with a timeline, most likely associated with Jeremiah's "70 years."
 - a. While the 70 years is likely an ideal figure for a perfect period of exile (a sabbath rest) this does not stop the enslaved Jews from counting the time and viewing it as literal (see the discussion of Daniel and Zechariah below).
 - b. In Jeremiah's prophecy, the 70 years appear to point alone to Babylon's power over exiles (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10), perhaps suggesting a span between ca. 605–538 B.C. (67 years: the initial exile when Daniel and his friends were taken to the initial decree of Cyrus that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple) or ca. 608–538 B.C. (70 years: the time of Josiah's death to Cyrus' initial decree).
 - Jer. 25:11–12. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon *seventy years*. 12Then after *seventy years* are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares Yahweh, making the land an everlasting waste.
 - Jer. 29:10. For thus says Yahweh: "When *seventy years* are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place."
 - c. In the first year of Darius' reign (ca. 522–486 B.C.), some seventeen years after the Persian's ended the Babylonian empire (= 539 B.C.) and sixteen years after the first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem (= 538 B.C.), Daniel recalled the 70 year prophecy as having not yet been fulfilled (Dan. 9:2). Similarly, in the second year of Darius' reign, the prophet Zechariah was still holding fast to the hope of Jeremiah's predication (Zech. 1:12; 7:5). Both these references suggest that the end of the 70 included some of the

Persian period while the Judean slaves awaited the rebuilding of the temple. Significantly, the period between the temple's destruction and rebuilding was 70 years to the month (586–516 B.C.).

- Dan. 9:2. In the first year of [Darius'] reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.
 - Zech. 1:12. Then the angel of Yahweh said, "O Yahweh 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?"
 - Zech. 7:5. 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?"
- d. As will be highlighted in the discussion of Daniel, Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years focused on the completion of only one part of exile—namely, return to the land. However, Daniel highlights that it will take another 70 weeks of years before the second part of exile—namely, forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God—will be realized. This happens only in the time of Christ.

Day 1

Read Haggai. Read Nehemiah 1-3. Read the intro to Haggai in a Bible Study. What aspect of life prompted by the book of Haggai are you looking forward to addressing this week?

Questions: Haggai

1. Upon their return, Israel was experiencing some great problems in the land. What was the nature of these problems, and of what were they a sign?
2. For what reason did God call them to rebuild the temple?
3. What did God say that would have given assurance that success would be experienced?
4. When you read about the temple in the Old Testament what concepts or imagery come to mind?

“The book of Haggai contains a series of messages from the Lord delivered to his people after the Exile. Many of them returned to Jerusalem. They planned to rebuild their destroyed Temple, but they got sidetracked fixing up their own homes. Through his prophet Haggai, God encouraged a change in priorities (1:4). So the people began to restore God’s Temple, but they soon realized with great sadness that it would never be as glorious as Solomon’s Temple had been. So God sent another message, assuring them that he would once again fill his Temple with his glory (2:6-7).” –Nancy Guthrie

Read

John 2:18-22

Read

Matthew 12:5-8

Day 3

Read Haggai. Read Nehemiah 8-13. Summarize Haggai in your own words.

Questions: Haggai

1. What role does the imagery of holiness and uncleanness play (2:10–14)?
2. What has restored the reality of blessing rather than curse (2:19)?
3. How are we to understand the imagery of the signet ring (2:23)?
4. In what way do you see Jesus in Haggai?

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“How was [2:6-7] fulfilled? When did or will this shaking come? Like so many of the Old Testament prophecies, it is being fulfilled in stages, with a partial fulfillment in the coming of Jesus and a final fulfillment yet to come. BY the time Jesus began his ministry, Herod had rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. And the Lord did indeed fill his Temple with his glory just by Jesus stepping into it and beginning to teach. But this was not the end of the shaking or the ultimate filling with glory that God had in mind. Jesus predicted another shaking of the Temple that would come when he was crucified. Jesus said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up”. When Jesus said, ‘this temple’ he meant his own body (John 2:19,21). And we know there is more shaking and more filling with glory to come. That glory will be the reality we live in for all eternity in heaven. John described his vision of heaven, saying, “I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev. 21:22).” – Nancy Guthrie

Read

Revelation 21:22-27

Take
Courage:
You Build
More Than
You See

John Piper

In 586 BC the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and took most of the Jews into exile. About 50 years later Cyrus, the Persian, took Babylon, and brought the Babylonian Empire to an end. The next year (538 BC) he allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. All of this was owing to the sovereign hand of God fulfilling the prophecies of Jeremiah (Ezra 1:1).

Return to the Land

Among the returning exiles were (probably) the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Ezra 5:1, 2 sums up for us what these two contemporaries accomplished:

Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Jozadak, arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

So Haggai and Zechariah were sent by God to assist in the rebuilding of the temple. This work was begun, according to Haggai 1:15, on the 24th day of the sixth month of the second year of the reign of Darius, which in our dating is September 21, 520 BC. So you can see that about 18 years went by between the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the temple. This delay is what brings forth the message of Haggai.

The way Haggai motivates the Jews to build the temple of God has a powerful application to our own efforts to build the Church of God. I want to focus mainly on the message Haggai delivers in 2:1–9. But since the book is small, we can take a quick tour through the two chapters to see how 2:1–9 fits into the lay of the land.

Structure of Haggai

The book is clearly divided into four distinct messages from the Lord, each of which is precisely dated. The first message, delivered by Haggai to Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the priest, is dated (according to 1:1) in the second year of Darius (king of Persia),

the first day of the sixth month (August 29, 520 BC). This message extends to the end of chapter 1. The second message is found in 2:1–9 and is dated (2:1) on the 21st day of the seventh month (October 17, 520 BC). The third message is found in 2:10–19 and is dated (2:10) on the 24th day of the ninth month (December 18, 520 BC). Finally, the fourth message comes in 2:20–23 on the same day as the third one. One of the things that we see when we look at this little book long enough is that the first and third messages are similar and the second and fourth messages are similar. This morning we will only have time to survey the first and third so that we understand the context for the second message (2:1–9).

Neglecting the Temple of God

The first message in chapter 1 reveals to the governor and priest and people that the reason they are all frustrated is that they have tried to make their own lives comfortable while neglecting the temple of God. Verses 4–6:

Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now therefore consider how you have fared (or: consider your ways). 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 earns wages to put them in a bag with holes.

So they lived in perpetual frustration and discontentment. Nothing satisfied. We can't pass over this lesson easily. It's for us, too. If you devote yourself to sowing and eating and drinking and clothing yourselves and earning wages, but neglect your ministry in the body of Christ (the temple of God, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17), you will live in constant frustration. If you spend your time and energy seeking comfort and security from the world, and do not spend yourself for the glory of God, every pleasure will leave its sour aftertaste of depression and guilt and frustration.

The reason I mention the glory of God is because of verse 8. Haggai's remedy for frustration goes like this: "Go up to the hills

and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may appear in my glory, says the Lord.” Both then and now the real problem is not the neglect of a building but indifference to the glory of God. The temple of the Old Testament existed for the glory of God. And the Church today exists for the glory of God (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). Indifference to the growth and spiritual prosperity of the Church and its mission is always a sign of failure to love the glory of God. And the sour fruit of this failure is a life of chronic frustration. He who seeks to save his life will lose it to continual frustrations; but he who loses his life for the glory of God and the good of his cause will find life, deep and fulfilling. Verse 9 sums up the situation in Jerusalem: “You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while you busy yourself each with his own house.”

Then in verses 12–15 Haggai reports that Zerubbabel and Joshua and the people obey and begin to work on the temple, on the 24th day of the sixth month. So, after 18 years of neglect and frustration, the people begin to learn their lesson: “seek the kingdom first, and all these other things will be added” (Matthew 6:33).

Half-hearted Obedience

Now, skipping over 2:1–9 (the second message), look at 2:10–19, the third message. Verse 10 dates it in the 24th day of the ninth month, three months after the work on the temple began. Things have not gone well. Evidently the attitude of the people is that mere contact with the temple makes them clean in God’s sight while, in fact, they are living in sin. The holiness of the temple is not rubbing off on them. On the contrary, their sin is desecrating the temple. That’s the meaning of verses 11–14, a kind of parable applied in v. 14 to the people like this: “So it is with this people and with this nation before me, says the Lord; and so with every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.” So, even though they have begun to obey the Lord by working on the temple,

their work is unclean because of sin in their lives.

So what Haggai does in response to this imperfect obedience is point the people back to the great turning point in their experience when they began to work on the temple. Verses 15–17 tell the people to consider what they should do now, in view of how life was for them before they started building the temple. “Pray now, consider what will come to pass from this day on (i.e., how you should live now, remembering) . . . I smote you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.” In other words, recall how miserable and frustrated you were in your disobedience before you began to lay stone on stone in the temple. The implication is: surely it is utter folly to go on in sin now, if it cost so much then. So verses 15–17 call the people to consider what they should do now, in view of how life was for them before they started building the temple.

Verses 18–19 are more positive: they call the people to consider how they should live now, in view of how life has been for them (not before, but) since they began to build the temple. “Since that day,” the prophet asks in verse 19, “is the seed yet in the barn? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you.” I think what he means is this: it has only been three months since you began to build. The seed is not in the barn but in the ground. The time for fruit-bearing is coming. I am not against you. I am for you and will help you. So consider your ways. Cleanse your hands, and keep working on my house. I promise to bless you.

So we have heard Haggai’s first and third message. They are similar in that both of them seek to motivate the Jews to build the temple by showing them how frustrated they were before they began to obey, and how much blessing they can expect from God if they press on in their work with clean hands. What is at stake is the manifestation of God’s glory, not merely brick and mortar and timber.

A Paltry Replacement?

Now, let’s go back and look more closely

at the second message in 2:1–9. According to verse 1, the message comes on the 21st day of the seventh month, a little less than a month after the people had begun to build. It seems as though the work has slowed or come to a complete stop, because Haggai's message is that they take courage and get on with the work (v. 4). What makes this message so practical and relevant is that we can see ourselves so easily in the workers. And God's encouraging words become very easily words of strength for us, too.

Verse 3 shows why the people have become weak and discouraged in their labors. Haggai asks, "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?" The workers are discouraged because the memory is still alive of how glorious the temple used to be. Less than 70 years ago it stood in this very spot, the apple of God's eye, the magnificent achievement of Solomon, for centuries the center of holy worship. But instead of inspiring the people, this memory made the people look at the pitiful edifice they were building and feel hopeless. "How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?" What's the use, they say. We can't match the glory of Solomon's temple. We're wasting our time. Nothing beautiful or worthwhile will ever come of it. We got along without it in Babylon; we can do without it here. Better to have the beauty of a great memory than a paltry imitation. So their hands are slack in the work.

Does that sound like anything in your experience? I think anybody who has ever undertaken a work for the cause of Christ has felt that kind of discouragement: the sense that you work and work and the product seems so paltry. You pour yourself into a thing week after week and month after month and the fruit is so minimal. Then you look back in history or across town and see the grand achievement of others, and your temple seems so trivial. And you get discouraged and are tempted to quit and put away your aspirations and drop your dreams and put your feet up in front of the television and coast. Who wants to devote his life to a second-rate temple?

Bethlehem is a prime target for discouragements like these. This church is the Solo-

mon's temple of the Baptist General Conference. There once was such a glory here that across the Conference Bethlehem is still thought of mainly in the past tense: once the biggest church; once she gave almost 50% of her income to missions; a thousand people used to be in Sunday School; the spawning ground of great spiritual leaders. Perhaps some Sunday School teachers remember the halcyon days of Bethlehem and grow weary and discouraged over their small ministry. Most of you have known the discouragement of feeling that what you are doing for Christ is of so little significance that you may as well quit.

Take Courage, Work, Fear Not

If that's you, this message from Haggai is tailor-made for your heart today. God confronts the discouragement of the people, first of all, with a heartening command in verse 4: "Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work." God clearly does not agree with their assessment of the situation. If they think their work on the temple is of so little significance that they can quit, they are very wrong, for God says, "Take courage, . . . work!"

He gives two arguments why they should take courage and work heartily. And both of these are crucial for us as well. The text continues in verses 4 and 5: "Work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; fear not." God's first argument why they should "take courage," "work," and "fear not" is that he is with them. For most of us the value of a job increases with the dignity and prestige of the people who are willing to do it. How could we ever, then, belittle a work when God says he is with us in it? When God is working at your side, nothing is trivial.

But the promise is not only that he will be at your side; he will also be in your heart encouraging you. Look back at the end of 1:13. "I am with you, says the Lord. 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.” If we will ask him and trust him, God not only works with us, but he moves in to stir up our spirit and give us a heart for the work. He doesn’t want crusty diehards in his work; he wants free and joyful laborers. And so he promises to be with them and stir them up to love the work.

But not only that. When he refers in 2:5 to the promise or covenant (literally: word) made at the Exodus, he shows that his presence is the same powerful presence that divided the Red Sea. Exodus 19:4 says, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” So when he promises to be with the people in their work, he means: I will use all my divine power like I did at the Exodus to help you and strengthen you and protect you. Therefore, take courage, work, fear not.

But there is one other encouraging thing about this promise. For those Jews whose minds were all taken up with the glory of Solomon’s temple, this promise may have had a very special impact. Just before David’s death he encouraged his son, Solomon, with words very similar to Haggai 2:4 and 5: “David said to Solomon his son, ‘Be strong and of good courage and work. Fear not, be not dismayed; for the Lord God, even my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you, until all the work of the service of the house of the Lord is finished’” (1 Chronicles 28:20). The implication of this similarity is that the same God who worked with Solomon to build his great temple is also at work with you now. Therefore, take courage, work, fear not.

The second argument God uses to encourage those who think their work only produces paltry results is found in verses 6–9:

For thus says the Lord of hosts: once again in a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake the nations so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says

the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts.

In other words, take courage, work, and fear not, because you build more than you see. All you see is a paltry temple. But God promises to take your work, fill it with his glory, and make your labors with a million times more than you ever imagined.

Fulfillment of the Prophecy

How was this prophecy fulfilled? Like most prophecies, it was fulfilled in stages, and the final fulfillment is yet to come. By the time Christ had begun his ministry, Herod had rebuilt Zerubbabel’s temple so that it was truly magnificent. The temple was destroyed in AD 70, but Jesus had said in John 2:19, 20, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up . . . But he spoke of the temple of his body.” Jesus said there is a direct continuity between the Old Testament temple and himself: once God met his people in the temple, now God meets us in Jesus Christ. Some interpreters believe a glorious temple will again be built in Jerusalem and stand through the millennium as Christ rules on earth (cf. Ezekiel 41ff.; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). That may be, but the final state of eternity is described in Revelation 21:22. When the new Jerusalem descends, John says, “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.”

The point is this: God had a purpose for a temple. The Jews of Haggai’s day could not see it all, and what they could see seemed so paltry. So God came to them with a word of promise: Take courage. You build more than you see. The heavens and the earth and sea and land and all treasures are mine. I will take the fruit of your little labor and make it glorious beyond measure, no matter how trivial and paltry it may seem to you now.

There is a principle here that applies to you and me: God takes small, imperfect things and builds them into a habitation for his glory. O, how we should take courage in our little spheres of influence! And is this not the message of Advent and Christmas? What more appropriate word could God have said to Mary as Jesus was growing up: Take courage, young mother, you build more than

you see. And so it is with every one of us.
Nothing you do is a trifle if you do it in the
name of God. He will shake heaven and earth
to fill your labor with splendor. Take courage,
you build more than you see.

Sermon Notes

December 6, 2015

Prayer

Week 11

Zechariah

**The God
Who
Renews
Jerusalem
as Zion**

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Content*: Visions aimed at encouraging the postexilic community, esp. the leadership, to rebuild the temple; oracles about the future coming king who would be slain and eventually triumph
2. *Author*: Zechariah (“Yahweh remembered me”) of Jerusalem, a contemporary of Haggai, but with a longer known ministry (cf. Zech. 1:1; 7:1 with Hag. 1:1; see also Ezra 5:1; 6:4)

Literary Overview

1. Theological Foundation for the Present (1:1–8:23)
 - a. Prologue: A Call for Repentance (1:1–6)
 - b. Zechariah’s Night Visions (1:7–6:15)
 - i. A – *The Report of the Patrols of the Earth* (1:7–17) [Global peace; Yahweh reigns in Jerusalem]
 - ii. B – *The Horns & the Craftsmen* (1:18–21) [The crushing of external opposition to kingdom restoration; God’s enemies defeated]
 - iii. C – *The Measurement of Jerusalem* (2:1–13) [The crushing of external opposition to kingdom restoration; Jerusalem exalted when Yahweh returns]
 - iv. D – *The Investiture of Joshua* (3:1–10) [The means for kingdom restoration: Joshua cleansed and “the Branch” victorious]
 - v. D’ – *The Lamp-stand & Olive Trees* (4:4–14) [The means for kingdom restoration: God’s Spirit will enable success to Joshua & Zerubbabal]
 - vi. C’ – *The Flying Scroll* (5:1–4) [The crushing of internal opposition to kingdom restoration; a curse against all theft and perjury]
 - vii. B’ – *The Ephah & Woman* (5:5–11) [The crushing of internal opposition to kingdom restoration; wickedness removed from God’s people]
 - viii. A’ – *Yahweh’s Patrols* (6:1–8) [Global Peace; Yahweh reigns, his wrath appeased]
 - c. Priest, Ruler, the Building of the Temple (6:9–15) [re-stressing the focus of the central visions]
 - d. Practical Oracles (7:1–8:19)
 - e. Epilogue: The Universal Longing for Yahweh (8:20–23)
2. Theological Foundation for the Future (9:1–14:21)
 - a. Yahweh’s Intervention: His Shepherd Rejected (9:1–11:17)
 - i. Yahweh’s Triumph from the North (9:1–8)
 - ii. The Arrival of the King (9:9–10)
 - iii. Cause for Celebration: Yahweh’s Victory (9:11–10:1)
 - iv. The Rebuke of False Leaders (10:2–3a)
 - v. Cause for Celebration: Israel’s Exaltation (10:3b–11:3)
 - vi. The Rejection of the Good Shepherd (11:4–17)
 - b. Yahweh’s Intervention: His Shepherd Slain (12:1–14:21)
 - i. Celebration in Jerusalem: Protection & Exaltation (12:1–9)
 - ii. Mourning for the Pierced One (12:10–13:1)
 - iii. The Purging of the Land (13:2–6)

- iv. The Shepherd Slain, the People Scattered (13:7–9)
- v. Fruit-Basket Upset in Jerusalem (14:1–15)
- vi. Yahweh's Triumph Acknowledged by All (14:16–21)

Message

1. It is not human might but God's presence with the remnant community that brings about kingdom restoration (3:6)
2. Even in the restored community, God demands ethical conduct, both for the leaders (3:1–10) and the community as a whole (7:8–14)
3. Jerusalem and Judah's bright future, full of peace and glory:
 - a. Israel's king will return to Zion in triumph and save his own (9:9–10:1, 6–10; 12:7–9; 13:1, 9), yet he will be slain for the sins of the people (12:10–13:9).
 - b. God will punish his people's enemies (9:1–6; 10:2–5; 14:3, 17–18), and many among the nations will come to know Yahweh (8:20–23; 9:17; 10:11–12; 14:16).
4. God is faithful to his eternal promises:
 - a. He will be their God (10:6; 13:9).
 - b. He will dwell among them (8:23) and be worshipped in Jerusalem (14:16, 20–21).
 - c. He will provide them with a righteous Shepherd (9:9–10; 10:2–4; 11:4–17; 13:7–9).
 - d. Both the people and the land will be holy (12:10–13:9; 14:21).
 - e. Through his people all nations will be blessed (8:13, 23; 14:16–21).

Excursus: Apocalyptic Literature

1. Key biblical books: Daniel 7–12; Ezekiel 1; Zechariah 1–6; cf. Joel 2; Isa. 24–27; 56–66; Ezek. 38–39; Zech. 9–14
2. Characteristics:
 - a. "Apocalyptic": "uncovering, revealing"
 - b. Sub-genre of prophecy
 - c. Key distinctives: eschatology, symbolism, visions, conflict, triumph
 - d. *Core feature*: Eschatological expectation of God's dramatic intervention in history to produce a glorious future for his people
3. Interpreting Apocalyptic:
 - a. The imagery is primarily that of fantasy (e.g., beasts with seven heads and ten horns; a woman clothed with the sun)
 - b. We read the vision through the lens of the divine interpretation. For example, in Revelation, John interprets most of the images:
 - i. 7 stars = 7 angels of 7 churches (1:20)
 - ii. 7 lamp-stands = 7 churches (1:20)
 - iii. 7 lamps = 7 spirits of God (4:5)
 - iv. Bowls of incense = prayers of saints (5:8)
 - v. Great dragon = Satan (12:9)
 - vi. 7 heads of beast = 7 hills (17:9)
 - vii. 10 horns of beast = 10 kings (17:12)
 - viii. Harlot = great city (17:18)

- c. Some images are fixed (e.g., a beast coming out of the sea represent an empire [usually evil]; an earthquake represents divine covenant curses; etc.); other images are more fluid, used to evoke feeling as well as mental pictures.
- d. Visions are to be seen as wholes and not pressed regarding details.

Day 1

Read the intro to Zechariah in a Study Bible. Then read Zechariah 1-5. Describe the theme.

“Zechariah is the longest of the minor prophets. It is also perhaps the most difficult. Jerome called it the ‘most obscure’ book of the Hebrew Bible, an opinion often cited and widely shared by subsequent readers. The difficulties of the book have spawned many opinions about the date and authorship of various portions as well as the interpretation of the individual periscopes. Yet it is also a very important book to Christian readers: Zechariah 9-14 is the most frequently cited portion of the Old Testament in the Passion narratives, and apart from Ezekiel, this book has exercised more influence than any other on the author of Revelation.”
–Tremper Longman.

Questions: Zechariah 1-5

1. 1:3. Define “return”. What does it mean to return to God? (c.f. Acts 2:38)

2. The visions of Zechariah can be confusing. For each one, write down what you think the main point of each vision is.
 - 1:7-17

 - 1:18-21

 - 2:1-13

 - 3:1-10

 - 4:1-14

 - 5:1-4

 - 5:5-11

“Zechariah’s vision reveals to him not only four horns symbolizing the various world powers that set themselves against God’s people. He also sees four craftsmen, skilled workers who know their trade well. Only in this case, these craftsmen possess the special skill required for topping dictators, governments, authorities. These four masters of destruction correspond in number exactly to the four horns, indicating that they will always be sufficient for the task of bringing down each and every secularistic power that arises.” –O. Palmer Robertson.

Read

John 1:14-18

Day 2

Read Zechariah 6-9. Describe how God is offering a second chance to his people.

Questions: Zechariah 6-9

1. Compare and contrast the final vision (6:1-8) with the first vision (1:8-17).

“The final vision functions as both climax and closure for the string of night visions. Clearly this vision is intended to remind the audience of the initial vision in 1:8-17 since it uses various colored horses whose role is to patrol the earth. But this allusion to the initial vision is designed more for contrast than for comparison, for here the horses pull chariots at the beginning rather than completing the mission. This contrast reveals the relationship between the first and last visions: the promise of divine liberation is now becoming reality.” –Mark Boda

2. Zechariah 8 is a description of the coming prosperity of God’s city. What makes this coming fruitfulness so attractive?

3. Zechariah 9 includes a messianic prophecy. Describe how the coming king will be known.

4. The promise of the Messiah in Zechariah 9 is book-ended by God’s dealings with the nations. How will God deal with the nations?

“Zechariah began prophesying at the same time as Haggai – in 520 BC. Like Haggai, he exhorted the Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem to get on with rebuilding the temple of the Lord. Through a series of eight visions, two sermons, and two oracles, God used Zechariah to tell God’s people that they would have a second chance! We will look at the book in these three natural sections: Chapters 1-6, which are taken up by eight visions, describe the second chance God would provide through his rule. Chapters 7-8, comprised of two sermons, describe the second chance God would give through his Word. Chapters 9-14, made up of two oracles, describe the second chance God would offer through his Son.”

–Mark Dever

Read

Read Matthew 21. Study Matthew 21:6-11.

Day 3

Read Zechariah 10-14. Describe how God is offering a second chance to his people through his Son.

Questions: Zechariah 10-14

1. The theme of shepherd appears repeatedly at the end of the book. Make observations about the shepherds of God's people from these chapters. Note each use of shepherd.

- John 10:1-21. Make observations on how Jesus is the good shepherd?

- How has Jesus been a good shepherd for you personally?

2. "For anyone to be saved from sin, a fountain of cleansing would have to be opened up. This fountain would not be the neck of a spotless lamb, but the pierced side of the Son of God. Some people resist and refuse this fountain, but it is the only way to be cleansed from the sin that stains our thoughts and motives and deeds." Nancy Guthrie. Compare Zechariah 13:1 with Hebrews 10:1-4, 22. Explain why we need Jesus from this context.

3. Zechariah 14 describes the day of the Lord. What are the key features of this day in this book?

4. How would you summarize the message of Zechariah?

Read

Read John 19. Study John 19:31-37.

There
Shall Be a
Fountain
Opened

John Piper

Three of Zechariah's prophetic messages are dated (1:1; 1:7; 7:1), so we know that Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai. Both prophets spoke to the Jews in Jerusalem who had recently returned from exile in Babylon, and both of them encouraged the people to rebuild the temple in spite of discouragements and opposition (Ezra 5:1, 2). The main point of Zechariah is probably best expressed in 8:13–15,

And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong. For thus says the Lord of hosts: "As I purposed to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the Lord of hosts, so again I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not."

The main point is: Fear not, for I purpose to do you good, says the Lord. The whole book is made up of visions and prophecies of how God is going to save Israel and make her a blessing to others. And these promises are intended to fill the Jews with hope in God and make them fearless and strong.

How Can Gentiles Benefit from Promises to Israel?

One of the problems for Gentile Christians like us is how a book full of promises to Jerusalem and Judah can be a help to us today. Let me try to sketch very briefly the principles that guide my interpretation of prophecies like this. First, I think these prophecies are aimed primarily at the ethnic people of Israel. They were the audience; and when they heard Zechariah refer to "the house of Judah and the house of Israel," they would naturally understand the Jewish people, not the church of Christian Gentiles. These prophecies are aimed at the ethnic people Israel.

Second, I think there is a glorious future for Israel even yet, when she repents. It is too simple to say that since the time of Christ the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people, even though that is true, in a sense.

The reason it is too simple is that in Romans 11 Paul teaches that God is not finished with ethnic Israel. In verse 1 he says, "Has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin." Paul insists that God has not finished with the Jews, first of all, because he is a Jew (of the tribe of Benjamin!).

Paul does admit that the Jews are temporarily rejected through their unbelief, but this is for the benefit of us Gentiles; and when the full number of Gentiles is complete, the remaining Jews, too, will repent and be saved. Romans 11:12, 15, "Now if their (Jews) trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! . . . If their (Jews) rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" Here Israel is distinct from converted Gentiles and is promised a glorious future. So a few verses later, in verses 25, 26, Paul says, "A hardening has come upon part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, and so all Israel will be saved." In the context of Romans 11:12, 15, it is unwarranted to interpret "all Israel" here to mean anything other than corporate, ethnic Israel. So one of my guiding principles in reading Old Testament prophecy about Israel is that there is a glorious future ahead, when Israel will repent, turn to Christ, and be saved.

Third, by faith in Christ Gentile believers become full partners in the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament. The two key texts to support this principle are Galatians 3:29, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise," and Ephesians 2:19 and 3:6, "So then you (Gentiles) are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God . . . (You are) fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." So by faith in Christ we Gentile believers are no longer "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel" but are full partners in the "covenants of promise" (Ephesians 2:12).

Fourth, (these first three principles imply that) the prophecies of the Old Testament

made to Israel are not less than literal (as though ethnic Israel were not intended), but more than literal, because they embrace not only the ethnic Israel but also the Gentile children of Abraham by faith (Romans 4:11), who will not be second-class citizens in the final kingdom.

Fifth, and finally, many of the benefits promised to the people of Israel are fulfilled in stages. This is especially true since the expected coming of the Messiah has occurred in stages. Christ came the first time (as Hebrews 9:26 says) “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” And he will “appear a second time not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” For the most part, Old Testament prophecy does not distinguish these two comings. Therefore, very often some aspects of Old Testament promises are fulfilled already in Christ, but the final consummation awaits the last day.

So these are my guiding principles as I seek to apply Zechariah to our lives today: 1) it is aimed primarily at ethnic Israel; 2) there is yet a glorious future for ethnic Israel when she repents; 3) by faith in Christ we Gentile believers become full fellow-heirs of the promises made to Israel; 4) therefore, the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel are not less than literal but more than literal: they embrace not only ethnic Israel but also us Gentile believers; 5) many of the benefits promised to the people of Israel are fulfilled in stages, especially since the promised Messiah himself comes in two stages (Christmas and the second coming).

The practical implication of all this is that whenever you read a “Fear not!” in the Old Testament, you can take it for yourself as a fellow heir if you are a Christian. The reasons given in the Old Testament why you need not fear will almost always relate to Israel first, but then indirectly also to you as a spiritual Jew (Romans 2:29) and a child of Abraham (Galatians 3:29).

The Most Important Promise in Zechariah

We began by suggesting that the main point of Zechariah’s prophecy is, “Fear not, for God purposes to do you good.” A very profitable way to read this book is to mark every verse

where God says he is going to do something good for Jerusalem. I marked well over 50 verses. But since we can’t look at all these, let’s focus in on the most important of all: 13:1. I call it most important because all the other benefits promised to Israel (and to us) depend on this one.

“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.” Zechariah promises the people that at some future time a fountain would be opened which would take away their sin and guilt. I say this is the foundation for all the other blessings promised because the only way sinners can hope to inherit the riches of God is if their sins are forgiven. The fountain of cleansing is the first checkpoint on the road to heaven.

To understand this Advent promise in the context of Zechariah, I want to try to answer three questions about it: first, why did a fountain still have to be opened? Second, how does this fountain bring about forgiveness? Third, for whom does this fountain provide cleansing?

Why Open Another Fount?

First, then, why did a fountain still have to be opened? Do you see what a promise like this must have meant to a discerning Jew? It must have meant that all the provision for cleansing in the old sacrificial system was inadequate to deal with sin. Hebrews 10:2–4 makes this very point:

If the worshipers (in the Old Testament) had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

Why were the animal sacrifices inadequate? Because the loss suffered by an animal does not compare to the injury which our sin brings upon the glory of God. The essential evil of sin is not the ruin that it brings on human life, but the scorn that it brings on the glory of God. If we could but grasp what a horrendous evil it is that human beings distrust and disobey their all-glorious Maker, we would not stumble over the justice of hell nor

would we be surprised that the only one sacrifice could atone for our wickedness: namely, the sacrifice of the only Son of God. Our disobedience to an infinitely worthy God is an infinitely blameworthy disobedience, deserving of endless torment (Matthew 25:46). Therefore, no finite animal or even human sacrifice could make amends for our sin. Only an infinite humiliation out of respect to God could restore the injury with which we have assailed the glory of the Almighty through our distrust and disobedience. The fountain that had to be opened was not the neck of an animal, but the pierced side of the Son of God. Zechariah couldn't see the whole story, but God showed him at least this much: if anybody is going to be saved from sin, a new fountain must be opened.

How Does This Fount Cleanse?

Second, how does this fountain bring about cleansing? In 3:8, 9 Zechariah shows that forgiveness of sin is connected to the coming Messiah, whom he calls the Branch (cf. Jeremiah 25:3; 35:15; Isaiah 11:1). At the end of verse 8 God says, "Behold, I will bring my servant the Branch." Then at the end of verse 9: "and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day." Two things are important here: first, there is a close connection between the coming of the Branch (Messiah) and the removal of guilt; and second, guilt is removed in a single day. This fits the death of Christ perfectly. He was the Messiah prophesied by Zechariah (cf. 9:9 with Matthew 21:5), and his sacrifice does not have to be repeated—he dealt with all sin in a single act of atonement once for all (Hebrews 9:24–26).

But in order for the fountain of Christ's blood to take away sin, sinners must be penitent and call upon him for mercy. Humans are not naturally sorry for the way they bring scorn upon God by distrusting and disobeying him. In order for a spirit of sorrow for sin to come into a sinner, God has to act. The Holy Spirit must convict of sin. Zechariah 12:10, 11 prophesies that this is going to happen in Israel: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him,

as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born." The only reason one mourns for an only child and weeps bitterly for a first-born is because they have died.

Therefore, Zechariah must mean that the people have pierced and killed someone and now are deeply grieved and sorry for their sin. Three things are predicted in this mysterious passage. First, the inhabitants of Jerusalem are going to pierce and kill someone tremendously important. This they did in the crucifixion of Jesus, whose hands and feet and side were pierced (opening a fountain of cleansing!). Second, God is going to convict the house of David and dwellers in Jerusalem of their sin. Third, they will be filled with sorrow for their sin and cry out to God in supplications for mercy. (Which began to be fulfilled in the Jews' response to Peter's Pentecost sermon.)

When this happens, the fountain of God's forgiveness flows freely and takes away the guilt of Jerusalem. So Zechariah can say in 14:11, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited, for there shall be no more curse; Jerusalem shall dwell in security." And in 2:5, "For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within her." And 2:10, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of you, says the Lord." And 8:8, "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." All the promises made to Israel in the book of Zechariah (indeed, in the whole Bible) depend on the opened fountain of Christ's blood and the repentance of God's people. So in answer to our second question, How does the opened fountain bring about cleansing?—we've seen three things. 1) The Messiah (called the Branch) comes, and in being killed by his own people, he removes guilt in a single act of atonement. 2) God will cause Israel to be convicted of their sin. 3) Israel will weep and call upon God for forgiveness. The result of these three things will be that her curse is removed and God dwells as the glory in her midst.

Whom Does This Fountain Cleanse?

Finally we ask, for whom does this opened fountain provide cleansing? Who can read Zechariah and find personal hope in it? The most obvious answer is the Jewish people. Even though they have displeased God (1 Thessalonians 2:15) by rejecting his Son, their Messiah, to this day, God still promises mercy. He will one day lift the veil off their minds (2 Corinthians 3:14), take away the hardening of their hearts (Romans 11:25), and pour out a spirit of grace and supplication upon them, and they will turn to Jesus and confess him as Lord and Christ. We may even be seeing the beginnings of that final outpouring in the contemporary messianic Jewish movement. And we should pray for all our Jewish friends and associates, and speak to them with boldness about Christ.

But the message of Zechariah is a word of hope to us Gentile Christians as well. If we understand what Christ has done for us in opening the fountain of his blood, then we will know that we are included in the promises of Zechariah.

When we hear God say in Zechariah 2:10, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of you, says the Lord," we can't help but also hear the words of Hebrews 12:22 addressed to us, "You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." And so we remember that in Christ we are no longer "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise" (Ephesians 2:12). The hope and joy and glory of Zechariah is our hope and our joy and our glory, as children of Abraham and citizens of the new Jerusalem.

And God has been good enough to verify that to us even from the book of Zechariah itself. For example, right after that great promise in 2:10 he says, "And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of you, and you shall know the Lord of hosts has sent me to you" (see also 9:7; 8:13, 20-23; 14:16). "Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord!" That's you and me. The fountain of forgiveness has been opened for you. And if you cleanse yourself through faith in that fountain, all the subsequent promises

to God's people are yours. "I have purposed in these days (says the Lord) to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not, but let your hands be strong!" (8:15, 13b).

Sermon Notes

December 13, 2015

Cities Church

Prayer

Week 12

Malachi

**The God
Who
Restores
His People**

Jason DeRouchie

Orienting Data

1. *Content*: In five disputes with his people, Yahweh warns them of future judgments and promises redemption to the faithful
2. *Author*: Malachi (“my messenger”), otherwise unknown
3. *Date of prophetic activity*: unknown, around the time of Ezra and Nehemiah’s reforms (ca. 430 B.C.)
4. *Historical Setting*:
 - a. While the people temporarily heeded the voices of Haggai and Zechariah, as the decades past they once again began to turn from God.
 - b. God’s people in Malachi’s day are in a state similar to some at the end of the 1st century when Revelation was written: unheeding to the voice of God, apathetic, and cynical of religion.

Literary Overview

1. Superscription (1:1)
2. The Basis of Covenant Relationship: A Call to Recognize God’s Love (1:2–5)
3. The Expression of Covenant Relationship: A Call to Recognize God’s Glory (1:6–3:15)
 - a. Honoring God in Corporate Worship (1:6–14)
 - b. Honoring God in Professional Ministry (2:1–9)
 - c. Honoring God in Marriage (2:10–16)
 - d. Honoring God in Everyday Life (2:17–3:7)
 - e. Honoring God in Generous Giving (3:8–15)
4. The Importance of Covenant Relationship: A Call to Recognize God’s Justice (3:16–4:3)
 - a. The Reward for Those who Fear God (3:16–18)
 - b. The Consumed Fate of Those who Refuse to Fear God (4:1)
 - c. The Triumphant Fate of Those who Fear God (4:2–3)
5. Postscripture (4:4–6)

Message

1. Theme: A Call to Fear and Honor God through Faith and Practice
2. Malachi’s aims:
 - a. Expose the symptoms of spiritual indifference, calling for moral and spiritual reform
 - i. Irreverence in worship (1:6–14)
 - ii. Lack of concern for God’s Word (2:1–9)
 - iii. Unfaithfulness in marriage (2:10–16)
 - iv. Exploitation and oppression of the weak (3:5)
 - v. Stinginess in one’s devotion to God (3:7–15)

b. Rekindle proper respect for Yahweh (See Mal. 1:6, 11, 14; 2:5; 3:5; 3:16.)

i. Yahweh's commitment to his exaltation:

- Mal. 1:11. 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 Yahweh of hosts.
- Mal. 1:14. I am a great King, says Yahweh of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

ii. The ways Malachi rekindles respect for Yahweh:

1) By analogy: If we show respect to our fathers and masters (1:6) or the governor (1:8) how much more should we honor Yahweh, "the Great King" (1:14).

- Mal. 1:6–8, 14. A son honor his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And I am a master, where is my fear? says Yahweh of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, "How have we despised your name?" 7By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, "How have we polluted you?" By saying that Yahweh's table may be despised. 8When 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 Yahweh of hosts.... 14Cursed 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 Yahweh of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

2) By reference to God's activity: God is the sovereign Elector (1:2–3), Creator (2:10), Judge (3:1–5a)

- Mal. 1:2–3. "I have loved you," says Yahweh. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother? Declares Yahweh. "Yet I have loved Jacob 3but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert."
- Mal. 2:10. Have we not one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?
- Mal. 3:2, 5. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? ... 5Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says Yahweh of hosts.

3) By his titles for God: God is "Father" (1:6; 2:10), "master" (1:6), "King" (1:14), and "Yahweh of Hosts" (24x in the book)

iii. The prize for all who exalt Yahweh:

- Mal. 3:16–17. Then those who feared Yahweh spoke with one another. Yahweh paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared Yahweh and esteemed his name. 17They shall be mine, says Yahweh of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. 18Then once more you

shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

c. Motivate old covenant faithfulness in the present by portraying the hope of the future.

i. He stressed the need to keep “the law of my servant Moses” (Mal 4:4; cf. Josh 1:7–8), which means that his old covenant law and the old covenant period has yet to be superseded by “the prophet like Moses” (Deut 18:15, 18; 34:10) and the era of heart-transformation and reconciliation (Deut 30:6).

- Mal. 4:4[3:22]. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.²
- Deut. 18:15, 18. The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen. . . . 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.
- Deut. 34:10. And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.
- Deut. 30:6. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

ii. He noted the coming of God’s covenant “messenger” (Mal 3:1), the new “Elijah the prophet” (4:5; cf. Matt 11:10–14; 17:11–13), who will curb and/or delay God’s encroaching judgment by reconciling the community to God and one another (Mal 4:6).

- Mal. 3:1. Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.
- Mal. 4:5–6[3:23–24]. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”
- Matt. 11:10–14. This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.” 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.
- Matt. 17:11–13. He answered, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. 12 But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” 13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

iii. He highlighted that this prophet's ministry will prepare for and precede the fiery day of the LORD (3:1–2; 4:5)—the fiery return of God's presence to his temple (3:1) when sins will be atoned as sacrificial judgment on the disobedient wicked (3:4–5; 4:1) and reconciliation for the righteous, his "treasured possession" (3:17) who have returned to obeying the LORD (3:7), served him (3:18), and feared his name (3:16; 4:2).

- Mal. 3:1–7. Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. 5 Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts. 6 For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. 7 From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?'
- Mal. 3:16–4:8[3:16–24]. Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. 17 They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. 18 Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. 4:1[3:19] For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. 4:2[3:20] 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. 4:3[3:21] 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. 4:4[3:22] Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. 4:5[3:23] Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 4:6[3:24] And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

Canonical Arrangement: Haggai–Malachi, the Restoration Prophets

Malachi is the last of the prophetic voices until John the Baptist. As recorded in 1 Mac. 9:26: "So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them" (cf. 4:46; 14:41).

This final word from Yahweh stresses through and through the centrality of God over all things, and the need to glorify God in every area of life; it is thus an apt conclusion to the Minor Prophets.

Day 1

Read the intro to Malachi in a Study Bible, read Malachi 1, and describe the theme of Malachi. Read Psalm 25.

Questions: Malachi 1

1. 1:1-3. Describe how God has demonstrated his love to the Israelites.

2. What indicates that Israel has been irreverent in their worship of God?

- The Israelites should have joyfully presented their very best stuff to God because they desired to honor him. They should have beheld his beauty and in their heart desire to give God all they had. Likewise they should have seen God as righteous and therefore seen themselves as sinners and therefore they should have feared wrath. At that moment they would have been humbled sinners glorifying God in their joy and fear. We need to start by seeing God as our Father and our Master. Then we should consider our response by presenting our very best to God. Let's consider time. Do you present your very best time to God? Or does God get the leftovers? In what ways are you offering God your leftovers?

3. Chapter 1 shows us that God is relentlessly committed to his glory. Write down the verses where this is most clear.

4. What does Israel's irreverence in worship say about their heart? How do we know they are violating God's will?

Read

Romans 6:23

The people were struggling. Their neighbors the Edomites were prospering and oppressing the Jews. Malachi reminds them of how God has chosen them, “Jacob I loved and Esau I hated” in a time when it looked like God hated his people but loved the Edomites. Malachi is reminding the people of God’s big picture love. It may not feel like love in the moment but go back to original promises. Remind yourself of God’s love toward even when you don’t feel it. The people don’t believe God because in the moment it doesn’t look like God is loving them. But God will prevail and he will in the end display more fully his love for his people. In the midst of hardship a promise we need to go back to is the message of the cross.

A question to consider in your devotion: how can an old promise like Romans 6:23 help you in a current hardship you are dealing with?

Day 2

Read Malachi 2. Read Psalm 27. What does God think of their sacrifices?

Questions: Malachi 2

1. Name two different expressions of unfaithfulness to God in chapter 2.

2. 2:1-8. Describe the things that Levi did that were good and then describe how the bad priests did it differently.

3. What do we learn about marriage in chapter 2? What is God's will for husbands? (cf. 1 Cor. 6:16-17; Gen 1:28; 2:24; 1 Peter 3:7)

4. How do you think our vertical relationship with God affects our horizontal relationships with others? Describe the important of being faithful to one another in your community. In what ways can you display faithfulness to one another?
 - 2:17. God is perfectly strong so it is strange at first to think that God can be wearied. But God cares so much for his people that he sent his only son to die for them that his people can cause heartache. Our actions and specifically our words can hurt God. Jesus once said out of the mouth comes the overflow of the heart. Jesus and the Father are always after the heart. So the words themselves probably don't hurt, but rather what your words represent. Our life should be one of repentance, so we should be ready to repent when we say something shouldn't and take it one step further to ponder the heart. Describe something you said today that you know you shouldn't have. What was going on in your heart?

Read

Matthew 13:14-15

Cursing comes as a result of an ill heart towards God, not works. God is not punishing them because they messed up a sacrifice by offering it the wrong way. God is punishing them because in their heart they did not regard God worthy to be honored. They did not fear him. God wants us to listen to him. God wants us to stop, slow down, and turn our hearts to him.

Consider also John 8:31 and Romans 8:31 in your devotion. Am I honoring God? Am I putting God's name above my name and those who I esteem highly? Am I fearing God? Do I sacrifice my very best to God out of joy because he is worthy?

Day 3

Read Malachi 3-4. Read Psalm 46. What aspects of these passage point to the importance of repentance?

Questions: Malachi 3-4

1. Who does the New Testament identify as the “messenger” of Malachi 3? (Matt 11:10–14; 17:11–13)

2. Compare 3:2-4 with Hebrews 12:7-11.

3. Study the contrast (“but”) in 4:1-2. Note the use of the term arrogant in 4:1 and then the use of the term fear in 4:2.

- Describe the imagery of the calf leaping. What does it look like for you to be that calf?

4. What is the last thing we learn from Malachi? How does this set us up for the New Testament?

Read

Matthew 3:1-12, Malachi 4:4-6

A question to consider: How does the message of John the Baptist directly apply to all that we have learned in these twelve minor prophets?

You Shall
Go Forth
Leaping
Like
Calves

John Piper

Malachi is the latest Old Testament prophet. Haggai and Zechariah preached during the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. In Malachi the temple is finished, and the worship there has already become wearisome to the people (1:13). The situation of divorce and intermarriage with unbelievers (2:10, 11), the withholding of tithes (3:8), and the oppression of the poor (3:5)—all these are like the situation in Nehemiah's time (13:1–3; 23f.; 10:32–39; 5:1–5). So the probable date for Malachi is around 450 BC.

Malachi's Day and Our Day

There are some significant similarities between Malachi's day and our own. It was a day of waiting for God to fulfill his promises. Haggai had said that the latter splendor of the temple would be greater than the former, and that treasures from all the nations would fill it. Take courage, you build more than you see! (Habakkuk 2:4–9.) Zechariah had said that their king would come to them (9:9), a new fountain of forgiveness would be opened (13:1), a spirit of prayer would descend on the people for repentance (12:10–14), many nations would join the Lord, and God would be in their midst (2:11). Now the temple is finished; time has passed. Some of the great men and women of faith who gave their all to rebuild the temple are dead and gone, and the Lord has not come to his temple. The hope that fires a people to be pure and take risks and venture great things with God is fading. Just like today, it was not easy to press on with lively expectant faith, when the Lord's coming delays year after year.

The great temptation for Israel in the Old Testament and for the church of Christ today is to forget that we are pilgrims not natives in this world. The temptation is to let the Lord's delay make us settle into the world and become passive as we wait; to forget that we are aliens and exiles, sojourners, strangers on the earth, seeking another homeland, desiring and yearning for a better country (Hebrews 11:13–16). The great threat to the church in America is not that we are persecuted and homeless and driven about like refugees; but that we are so much at home here. We have let the Lord's delay put

us to sleep: no sense of urgency, no earnest expectation, no heart-wrenching cry: "Come, Lord Jesus!" No passionate mission strategy to penetrate the un-evangelized peoples who must be reached before he comes. And inevitably, when the urgent zeal for the name of God fades, so does the moral power to be pure. And where there was once Master-God, there returns master-mammon and master-sex. So it was in Malachi's day, and so it is today.

But we don't want it to be that way. God has touched so many of you recently to make you long for freedom and power in the Spirit. Many of you have been praying with me in the secret of your closet: "God, forgive us for our complacency toward the lost, forgive us for the smallness of our vision, forgive us for the weakness of our spiritual lives. Move, O God, touch us with light and fire! Tune our hearts to sing your praise! Let us know the thrill of dying to ourselves and living unto righteousness. Let us know the soaring of soul that comes with decreasing that Christ might increase. Give us such an encounter with the living Lord that every doubt is banished, and joyful confidence and unabashed boldness drive us into mission at work and around the world." I believe that more and more of you are beginning to cry out to God like that. And we need help as we move toward this breakthrough at Bethlehem.

Malachi and Christmas

So let's look at Malachi's word to his day and ours. And I have not forgotten it is a Christmas word. If you want to put the message of Malachi to us today in one sentence, here it is: The purpose of Christmas is to purify a priestly people who live and leap for the glory of God's name. To unfold that message I ask four questions: 1) Is Christmas in view in Malachi? 2) Is the purpose of Christmas to purify a priestly people? 3) What does God aim to purify us of? 4) What is the essence of Christmas purity?

First, we ask, Is Christmas in view in Malachi? The answer is yes and no. No, in the sense that Malachi was not given the details we now know about the first coming of Jesus separated by about 2,000 years from his second coming. He did not know

that the work of Messiah to save and purify his people and to judge the world would happen in two separate comings. Peter (1 Peter 1:10–12) tells us that the prophets searched and enquired about the times when predicting the sufferings and later glories of Christ; but it was simply revealed to them that they were serving another generation and must be content to paint with broad strokes, and leave the details to be filled in by history.

But the broad strokes are true, and they do include Christmas, the first coming of Jesus. For example, notice 2:17ff. First, we see here the situation in Jerusalem which I described earlier. “You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, ‘How have we wearied him?’ By saying, ‘Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.’ Or by asking, ‘Where is the God of justice?’” God has drifted so far out of their lives that whether a person is evil or good doesn’t matter; the God of justice has delayed his coming so long he is unreal.

Then notice Malachi’s response in 3:1, “Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight (irony!); behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” There seem to be three persons coming in this verse. First, the messenger to prepare the way of God: “I send my messenger to prepare the way before me.” Second, God himself; the messenger is preparing his way. “The Lord whom you seek” refers back to the seeking of verse 17 where they ask, “Where is the God of justice?” So God himself is coming to his temple, just like Haggai 2:7 promised. Third, there is the “messenger of the covenant.” On the one hand, this person seems to be the same as the Lord who comes to his temple. But on the other hand, he is spoken of in the third person by God: “He is coming, says the Lord.” So he seems to be distinct from God.

The first person is identified for us in 4:5, 6. The messenger who prepares the way of the Lord is called Elijah: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land

with a curse.” In Luke 1:16, 17, an angel told Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, “[John] will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.” He identifies John the Baptist with the expected Elijah of Malachi 4. And Jesus confirms for us (in Matthew 11:10) that the first messenger of Malachi 3:1 is the same as the forerunner of Malachi 4:5 and is indeed John the Baptist. He says concerning John, “This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.’” So he explicitly relates Malachi 3:1 to John the Baptist, and then in Matthew 17:12f., he says that John is the Elijah to come: “I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.” Therefore, the fulfillment of the forerunner in Malachi 3:1 is John the Baptist.

Now, of course, John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Messiah. He said in John 3:28, “I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.” And Jesus himself claimed to be that Messiah. For when John asked in Matthew 11:3, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?”—Jesus answered, “Look at the signs and don’t take offense at me.” In other words, “I am the Messiah of which Malachi spoke. But the fulfillment of his prophecy is happening differently than you expect. The judgment and the glorious kingdom will not come immediately; I am here to give my life as a ransom this time. I will come again in the clouds with great glory. Don’t take offense at my humble coming, John. I am he. Christmas is not the whole story. But it is the beginning of the great day of the Lord.” So Jesus is the Lord who comes to his temple in Malachi 3:1.

From the standpoint of the New Testament we can see why “the Lord” and the “messenger of the covenant” seem distinct on the one hand, and seem identical on the other. The reason, I think, is that Jesus the Messiah is God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, 14). As Isaiah

prophesied, “For unto us a child is born . . . And his name will be called . . . Mighty God” (9:6). It is not surprising, then, that the coming of Messiah should sometimes be spoken of as the coming of God.

So in answer to our first question, Is Christmas in view in Malachi?—the answer is yes. Malachi is prophesying the coming of a forerunner and a messenger of the covenant whom John the Baptist and Jesus claim to fulfill. To be sure, his prophecy is couched in terms which embrace both the first and second coming of Jesus. But that means his prophecy began to be fulfilled at the first Christmas and that we stand in the middle of his prophecy because we stand between the first and second coming of Christ.

Christmas and a Purified Priestly People

The second question is: Is the purpose of Christmas to purify a priestly people? Notice 3:2–4, “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord.” At the end of this age when Christ returns, the final act of purification will take place; all impurities in the hearts of God’s people will be done away with.

But that promise of purity has begun to be fulfilled in the first coming of Christ. Hebrews 1:3 says, “When [Christ] had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” And Titus 2:14 says that Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.” In a word, Christ came to make us clean. Christmas is for purity. 1 John 3:8 puts it like this: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” That means our sin. Messiah has come not only to ransom us from the punishment of sin but also to give us power not to sin. He came to make us pure and zealous for good deeds. Christ came at Christmas to build a bridge across the chasm of sin to eternal life, but the name of the bridge is purity. The only way to eternal life is along

the path of sanctification. Romans 6:22 puts it like this: “Now that you have been set free from sin and have been slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life.”

So the purifying of Malachi 3 began with the coming of Christ. Now when it says in verse 3 that the sons of Levi will be purified, it does not mean God is indifferent to the purity of the whole people, but that all judgment begins at the house of God. If the priestly tribe is impure, all the people will be impure. If they are cleansed, the people will turn. But there is another truth here. God had said to all Israel in Exodus 19:6 that they were a “kingdom of priests.” And in the New Testament, Peter teaches us that the church of Christ is a “holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5) or a “royal priesthood” (2:9). All Christians are sons of Levi. And, therefore, the purification promised in Malachi 3:3 has begun in Jesus Christ and extends to all his people, his “holy priesthood.” The purpose of Christmas is to purify a priestly people.

What We are Purified Of

The third question is, What does God aim to purify us of? Of course, the answer is sin. But Malachi helps us get serious about becoming pure by being specific. Two kinds of impurity get special treatment in this book: marital unfaithfulness and the love of money. Christmas has to do with your marriage. Christ came to keep it pure and to give you the will and the power to keep your vows as long as you live. But in Malachi’s day, just like today, the people of God took their eyes off the coming of God, settled down into the world, and soaked up the mind and heart of their age, including its attitude toward marital unfaithfulness and divorce. In 2:14, the people ask why God does not regard their offerings, and Malachi answers, “Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is the your companion and your wife by covenant . . . So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel” (2:14–16).

The purpose of Christmas is to purify us from the sin of divorce. Yes, I do believe that

includes forgiveness if that act stains your past, and if you hate it like God hates it. But the good news I want to emphasize is just as important: Christmas is the power to keep us from divorce. Jesus Christ came into the world to make himself available to families. Every divorce involving Christians is owing to a breakdown in the couple's orientation on Christ. Some of you are just asking for your marriage to collapse because you are not working to build a triangle of spiritual communion with Christ. And husbands, God lays the heavier responsibility on you. It is not up to your wife to gather you to her side for prayer and spiritual conversation. You are to take the lead and gather her to your side and seek God with her as a fellow-heir of grace. May I suggest that some of you husbands get alone today and pray and seek what you should do this year to make your Christmas celebration spiritual with Christ at the center.

The Messiah is called the "messenger of the covenant" (Malachi 3:1). In the context of Malachi I think that means: Husbands and wives, cultivate with all your heart the covenant relationship between you and Jesus, and the covenant of your marriage will endure.

Christmas also has to do with your money and your possessions. The purpose of Christmas is to purify us from the love of money. The impurity of greed had gripped the people in Malachi's day. They aren't willing to tithe, and the sheep they bring to sacrifice are sick or lame. For example, 3:8-10, "Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How are we robbing thee?' In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house." But not only were they failing to tithe. God said in 1:8, "When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that no evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that no evil? Present that to your governor. Will he be pleased with you or show you favor?"

The reason people bring blind goats to the house of God and don't even tithe is twofold: 1) they love the pleasures and comforts money can buy more than they love to advance the gospel, and 2) they believe that if they maintain possession and control, they

will be able to make a more promising future for themselves than God can if they give up possession and trust his sovereign grace. In a word: their love is directed toward the world, and their faith is directed toward themselves. And the purpose of Christmas is to purify us from that kind of idolatry.

The Essence of Christmas Purity

Which leads us to the final question, What is the essence of Christmas purity? Christmas purity is not essentially the removal of sin, but the restoration of righteousness. Christ never takes away from his people one thing which he does not replace with something better. Dennis Smith said a great thing at the Pastor's Prayer and Study Group yesterday morning: "If you lose your wallet on the way to collect a million dollars, you don't get angry." Every sin you forsake out of love to Christ is replaced with a deeper and purer joy. The aim of God at Christmas is to make the goodies of the world lose all their attraction in comparison to the surpassing glory of the divine Name. The essence of Christmas purity is not what you stand against, but what you stand in awe of, the glorious name of God.

Listen to what God says in Malachi 1:11, "From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is (to be) offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts." Verse 14: "For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is feared among the nations." In 2:5 God gave his life and peace to Levi, "and he feared me, and he stood in awe of my name." And in 3:16 a book of remembrance is written for those "who feared the Lord and thought on (or esteemed) his name."

The purpose of Christmas is to purify a priestly people who live for the glory of God's name. But not just live, also leap: God says in 4:2, "But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in his wings. You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall." When you open your eyes to the glory of the name of the mighty God and set yourself to love him above all else, you will go forth leaping with

the freedom of a newborn calf. Free from the love of money; free from marital faithlessness; free to lift your hands in praise to the Savior; free to discover the thrill of godliness and love; free to decrease that Christ might increase and that God might be all in all.

Summary Questions

Jason DeRouchie

1. Why are the 12 Minor Prophets called “minor”?

2. How is Israel portrayed in the first three chapters of Hosea?

3. Within the book of Joel, what do the massive locust plague and severe drought that open the book anticipate? In view of the context, what is the answer to the question raised in Joel 2:11?

4. According to Amos 4–5, what was the nature of Israel’s sin and what would be God’s response?

5. The message of Amos is dominated by a picture of the God of judgment as a roaring lion (Amos 1:2; 3:8). In view of this, how do the last five verses of the book balance out the book’s message?

6. What is the primary theme of the book of Obadiah?

7. Summarize the message of Jonah in your own words.

8. “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.” In which book is this quote found?

Sermon Notes

December 20, 2015

Cities Church

Go back towards the beginning, and look at “Flow of Thought in the Twelve” by Jason DeRouchie. Which book stood out to you the most? Which has been most surprising? Comforting? Reflect on one main takeaway from this journey through “The Twelve.”

Appendix

Observation:

1. *Context* – Make observations about where the passage falls in the flow of the text
2. Biblical definitions, and Dictionary definitions of key words
3. Linking words (because, if, since, then, therefore, but, and)
4. Who's writing? To whom? Who else is involved?
5. Culture/Personalities/Locations of people involved
6. Language, repeated words, emphasis
7. Purpose of verse (admonition, exhortation, rebuke, command); what is the passage about?
8. Metaphor, simile, cause/effect, comparison
9. Ask yourself basic questions about things in the verse and answer them. What is this? What is that? When does this take place?
10. Why does the writer use certain words to convey his point?
11. Make some objective conclusions (observations) on the text
12. When with respect to Jesus (before? after? during?)
13. Time of day? Or year? Verse surrounded by any major events?
14. Attitudes of people involved

Interpretation:

1. Content
 - a. Look at observations and start to dig into what they mean.
2. *Context, context, context!*
 - a. Read verse before
 - b. Read paragraph it is in
 - c. Read chapter it is in
 - d. Read book it is in (if not too big)
3. Comparison
 - a. Read other versions
 - b. Use cross reference verses and a concordance
4. Culture
 - a. Use “Content” and use observations of culture to interpret how the writer uses words in light of the culture
 - b. What was the original meaning of the author?
5. Consultation
 - a. Commentaries
 - b. Study bible
 - c. Godly people

Application:

S.P.E.C.K.

1. *Sin* to confess
 - a. Look inward for a moment of self-inspection (only for a little while)
2. *Promise* to claim
 - a. What do the verses say that is a promise from God?
 - b. How will this promise change you?
3. *Example* to follow
 - a. How do you want to model your life after the verses you studied?
 - b. How do you *not* want your life to be modeled after reading the verses?
4. *Command* to obey
 - a. What do the verses command you to do?
 - b. How will you start to obey in your beginning steps of faith to accomplish the command?
5. *Knowledge* to gain
 - a. What important doctrinal truths must be memorized and taken away from the verses?

Note: Scripture cannot mean now, what it couldn't mean when it was written. Remember to use lots of other verses... let Scripture interpret Scripture.

