

The Minor Prophets

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

Student Copy

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Lesson 1

The Prostitute (Hosea 1-3)

The Big Picture

After the death of King Solomon, his son Rehoboam pursued a course that divided the nation into two kingdoms. Rehoboam reigned over Judah, the southern kingdom, composed of Judah and Benjamin; and Jeroboam II ruled over the remaining ten tribes that formed the northern kingdom of Israel, also called Ephraim. Fearful that the people would go back to Jerusalem to worship, Jeroboam I put golden calves at Bethel and Dan, thus leading the ten tribes into idolatry. Along with idolatry came immorality, and soon the religion of Israel became an evil blend of Jewish ritual and pagan idolatry. The people loved it. The prophets were God's spokesmen to call Israel and Judah back to the covenant God had made with them at Mt. Sinai. But the people refused to listen, and both kingdoms suffered for their disobedience. Israel became an Assyrian vassal in 733 BC and then was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. The Babylonians invaded Judah in 606 BC and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. Thousands of Jews died, and thousands more went into exile in Babylon.

Hosea ministered in the northern kingdom from about 760 to 720 BC. Israel was enjoying great prosperity, but Hosea could see that the nation was rotten to the core; for honest government, pure religion, godly homes, and personal integrity had vanished from the land. Judgment was inevitable. Hosea faithfully preached the Word, but the nation refused to repent and was finally swallowed up by Assyria.

1. What do you think is the attraction of idolatry? Why do idolatry and moral/political corruption go together? How do you think Hosea's story is like that of preachers and teachers today?

2. Prophets sometimes do strange things. For three years, Isaiah embarrassed people by walking the streets dressed like a prisoner of war. For several months, Jeremiah carried a yoke on his shoulders. But no prophet preached a more painful "action sermon" than Hosea. He was instructed to marry a prostitute named Gomer, who subsequently bore him

three children, and he wasn't even sure the last two children were fathered by him. Then Gomer left him for another man, and Hosea had the humiliating responsibility of buying back his own wife. Why did these men do these peculiar things?

3. In your own words, what was Hosea's story all about?

4. Read Jeremiah 2—3; Ezekiel 16; 23. Why was prostitution used as a symbol for idolatry? (See also Ex. 19—21.) Why might this have been a particularly appropriate comparison considering the Israelites during Hosea's time?

5. As with Isaiah's two sons (Isa. 7:3; 8:3), and numerous other people in Scripture, Gomer's three children were given meaningful names selected by the Lord, what were they and what were the new names God would eventually give these children? (See Hos. 1:10—2:1.) What are the meanings of these new names? What message did God give in the changing of the names?

6. Hosea's three children have taught us about the grace of God, and Gomer taught us about the holiness of God. Now Hosea will teach us about the love of God. The repeated "I will" statements in Hosea 2:14–23 assure us that God has a wonderful future planned for the Jewish people. Make a note of His promises.

Lesson 2

Amazing Love (Hosea 4-14)

The Big Picture

“Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just.” Thomas Jefferson wrote those words about the United States of America, and as the prophet Hosea surveyed the kingdom of Israel, he would have agreed. From his bitter experience with his wife, Hosea knew that sin not only breaks the heart of God, but also offends the holiness of God, for “righteousness and justice are the foundation of [His] throne” (Ps. 89:14 NKJV).

God wanted to forgive the sins of His people and restore their fellowship with Him, but they weren't ready. They not only would not repent, but they also wouldn't even admit that they had sinned! So, God conducted a trial and brought them to the bar of justice. It's a basic spiritual principle that until people experience the guilt of conviction, they can't enjoy the glory of conversion.

1. How does sin offend the holiness of God? (Compare your thoughts with Psalm 89:14.) Why can't we enjoy conversion until we've been convicted? How did God convict His people through the words of Hosea?
2. The picture of God bringing men and nations to trial in His courtroom is a familiar one in Scripture. (See Isa. 1:12; Jer. 2:9, 29; 25:31; Mic. 6:2; Rom. 3:19 KJV.) Why does God use this sort of metaphor so often? What does that say about His people? What covenant had they broken? What was the punishment for such a crime? How did God choose to respond instead?
3. The phrase “your mother” in Hosea 4:5 refers to the nation of Israel (Hos. 2:2, 5). Why did God use this particular phrase? How does Matthew 5:13–16 apply to what was going on with God's people? What happens to a society when leadership is corrupt? How was this happening in Hosea's time?

4. When you read the words in Hosea 6:1–3, you get the impression that the nation is sincerely repenting and seeking the Lord, but when you read what God says, you see how shallow their “confession” really was. “They do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him” (7:10). “They have spoken lies against me” (v. 13). “They return, but not to the most High” (v. 16). What went wrong with this “confession”?
5. In what ways were the people seeking happiness instead of holiness? Change of circumstances instead of a changed heart? What does this reveal about the people and their motives for repentance?
6. Review Hosea 6:4-7:16. Circle all the similes and metaphors Hosea used to describe the people.
7. Review Hosea 14. The Lord gives them promises to encourage them to repent. What are they?

Lesson 3

The Day of the Lord (Joel)

The Big Picture

Each prophet had his own unique approach to his own special message. Hosea's message was an application of his sad domestic trials, emphasizing God's jealous love, but Joel's message was an interpretation of a national calamity—a plague of locusts and a drought—and emphasized God's glorious kingdom.

Joel may well have been the first of the writing prophets; he probably ministered in Judah during the reign of King Joash (835-796 BC). You find the record in 2 Kings 11-12 and 2 Chronicles 22-24. Joash came to the throne at the age of seven and Jehoiada the priest as his mentor. This may explain why Joel says nothing about the king since Joash was learning the job. Joel's major theme is the "day of the Lord" and the need for God's people to be prepared.

After God uses the locust plague of chapter 1 to warn of an invading army of judgment from the north, in chapter 2, his people repent and turn back to him, and the Lord takes pity on them. Now, in light of their restored relationship with God, his people await his judgment upon their enemies. In due time, God takes his seat as judge of the nations and holds court against them, charging them with their crimes and pronouncing the guilty verdict and impending punishment. This judgment of God and vindication of his people promises full restoration of God's people, and the book of Joel closes with hope, "for the Lord dwells in Zion."

1. What is the "day of the Lord" that Joel referred to? What did Joel say about preparing for this day? How is that message equally applicable today?
2. Locust Invasion (1:1–1:20) The locust, a kin of the grasshopper, can travel in large swarms and bring devastation upon all surrounding plant life. Describe the devastation that the locust plague has brought upon Judah, as recorded by Joel. Read verses 13–20 again. How does Joel tell the people to respond to their grief?
3. In light of [Deuteronomy 28:47](#), why does Joel tell the people to rend their hearts and not their garments ([Joel 2:12–13](#))? What does it mean to "rend" their hearts?

4. Review your answers from the “Locust Invasion.” Then reread [Joel 2:24–25](#). What are these verses promising? What hope is being offered? Simple restoration of lifestyle or material goods is not the primary goal of God’s mercy to his people. Read verses 2:26–27. What is the ultimate goal of God’s mercy?

5. A Lawsuit (3:1–8) The Lord Almighty is Judge of the earth, and the Bible often presents his judgments in the form of a lawsuit (e.g., [Psalm 82](#); [Isa. 41:21–29](#); [Jer. 2:5–13](#); [Micah 6](#)). [Joel 3:1–8](#) similarly brings charges and a verdict against Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia. Read the passage again and list the charges. In this lawsuit against God’s enemies, what is the verdict and the punishment?

6. Judgment on God’s Enemies (3:9–16). These verses describe the desperate situation of the enemy of God. Read the verses again and note some of the extreme pictures of the enemy’s desperation.

7. Just as the Lord repays his enemies according to the law of retaliation, he also restores the blessings of his people according to what they have lost. How does this passage (3:17–21) reverse the effects of the locust plague and invading army from Joel 1–2? Joel ends with the promise that “the Lord dwells in Zion.” How is the eternal presence of God in the midst of his people an assurance in times of suffering?

Lesson 4

The Lion/What God Says (Amos 1-4) Part 1

Background

The book of Amos begins with prophetic words of judgment against the nations surrounding Israel, the northern kingdom of the Israelite people. These opening verses also include judgments against the southern Israelite kingdom, Judah. These judgments condemn the nations for their treatment of Israel and even for their treatment of each other, revealing that all must give an account before God for their actions. This section turns in chapter 2 to a judgment against Judah, who is held to a higher standard because of her knowledge of God's law. Throughout this beginning section, we can easily imagine the people of Israel (the northern kingdom) nodding in smug agreement over the judgment against their neighbors and their southern rival, Judah. But Amos is subtly setting them up to hear their own judgment in the following chapters.

1. The book of Amos opens with judgment oracles against the nations surrounding Israel. Cities of Damascus, Gaza, and Tyre, and the nations of Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah. What strikes you about the location of these recipients of God's judgment?
2. Judgment on Judah (2:4–5) Why is Judah judged? What crime has Judah committed? What are the lies that have led Judah astray? Read [Hebrews 10:26–28](#). How is judgment against Judah different from judgment against the other nations named so far in Amos?
3. Judgment on Israel (2:6–16) As the Israelites hear the judgments Amos proclaims against their neighboring nations, we can easily imagine the growing enthusiasm over the destruction of their enemies. With each new "For three transgressions . . . and for four," anticipation would grow as the Israelites eagerly awaited whichever people group might be named next. But then Amos names Israel itself (v. 6). What are the sins of Israel listed in these verses?
4. In 4:1–5, the Lord specifically addresses the women of Israel. Why is this addressing of the Israelite women significant?

5. Review 5:10–13. What sins of Israel are listed here?

6. Bethel and Gilgal were places significant in Israel's history because of their connection to the worship of God. With biting sarcasm in 4:4–5 (see also 5:4–7), the prophet condemns Israelite worship practices. How has their worship become a transgression against God and his law? How are our worship practices today in danger of becoming transgressions?

Lesson 5

Avoiding the Storm/Listen (Amos 5-9) Part 2

Background

This section of Amos presents the judgment against Israel in the form of three woe oracles. In the first oracle, the Lord condemns the worship of Israel because it is not accompanied by lives that match the people's professed faith: the Israelites do not show concern for the less fortunate around them. The second oracle condemns Israel's complacency and self-confidence, while the third pronounces judgment against Israel for its self-indulgence and lives of luxury built upon the suffering and abuse of others. The section ends with a promise that the wealthy, apathetic, and self-indulgent will be the first carried off into exile.

1. What are justice and righteousness?
2. Read 6:1–3. In spite of the disasters that have come upon the surrounding nations (through the Assyrian army, many of whom were larger and stronger than Israel, why do you think the Israelites remain at ease? See also verse 13.
3. What is the difference between the “ease” of self-confidence and resting in the protection and provision of the Lord?
4. Read 7:1–9. As Amos describes the first two visions he receives from the Lord, there is a back-and-forth between Amos and God. First, God shows Amos the vision; then, Amos intercedes for Israel; accordingly, God relents of the promised judgment. What does this back and forth reveal about Amos?

5. The Second Vision (8:1–14). List some of the specific ways in which the wealthy in Amos's day were taking advantage of the poor and weak. Where do you see similar practices occurring in the church today?

6. How are these abuses of the poor and needy a violation of the Sabbath and the new moon festivals?

7. Read 9:1–10. Israel believed that, since they were God's chosen people, they would forever remain under his divine protection, regardless of how they lived: "Disaster shall not overtake or meet us" (v. 10). In reality, their status as God's chosen people resulted in a greater accountability and higher standard for them (vv. 7–10). How do we presume upon God today? How do God's people today act as if "Disaster shall not overtake or meet us"?

Lesson 6

Two Brothers (Obadiah)

Background

In the book of Obadiah, God promises through his prophet to bring judgment upon Edom. When Babylon invaded Israel and carried off God's people into exile, not only did Edom fail to help Israel—she helped Babylon instead. Moreover, Edom seemed to revel in the destruction of Israel. Therefore, God is bringing judgment against Edom, and that judgment in the book of Obadiah comes with a promise of final restoration for God's people, when a Savior will ultimately deliver and rule over them.

Obadiah anticipates the kingdom of the Lord by proclaiming judgment against Edom and the eventual salvation and restoration of Israel.

1. Edom was located in a mountainous region, making it difficult for foreign armies to invade and thus giving Edom a sense of invincibility, of security and safety. How is this sense of security exaggerated in the first few verses of Obadiah (vv. 3–4)?

2. Despite Edom's perception of safety, God is bringing destruction upon the nation. What is the reason for this judgment against Edom? What has Edom done to Israel?

3. How do thieves and grape-gatherers provide a picture of Edom's total destruction? How is this a fitting punishment for Edom?

4. From where will this punishment on Edom come (v. 1)? How will God bring his judgment against Edom?

5. Read Revelation chapter 21. How does the hope of [Obadiah 19-21](#) translate to believers after the first coming of Christ?

6. How does [Obadiah 21](#) point to Jesus?

Lesson 7

Patience/Pouting (Jonah 1-4)

The Big Picture

The book of Jonah opens with God calling the prophet to go and proclaim judgment against the enemies of Israel in the city of Nineveh; instead of following God's call, however, Jonah hops a boat going in the opposite direction from Nineveh. A violent storm threatens to overthrow the boat and take the life of everyone on it, but Jonah confesses his running from God and is thrown overboard, and the storm subsides. God sends a great fish to swallow Jonah, and while in the fish's belly the prophet offers up a prayer of thanksgiving for being rescued from death. After three days, the fish spits Jonah back onto dry land, preparing him for another opportunity to obey the Lord. Sometimes God uses terrifying situations so that we might learn to fear the Lord rightly.

Jonah begins our study with what seems to be a simple word of judgment against the Assyrian city of Nineveh. However, as we look more closely at the book, it becomes clear that this judgment is directed not just at Israel's enemies but actually against the people of Israel themselves. In their time of military expansion, wealth, and peace, Israel has become arrogant and self-focused, delighting in God's steadfast love toward them but wanting to keep that love for themselves.

1. In the time of Jonah, the Assyrian Empire had not yet achieved the size and power that it would display several decades later. Nevertheless, the empire was dominant, and Assyrian kings were known for their violence and savagery, notably demonstrated in their torture of prisoners. Nineveh was one of Assyria's large and important cities, located more than 500 miles away from Jonah. What initial reasons might Jonah have for not wanting to go to Nineveh and "call out against it"?
2. Pronouncements of judgment in the Bible often serve as a warning and a call to repentance for the people against whom judgment has been pronounced, and Jonah runs away from proclaiming judgment against Nineveh because he understands the message to be an opportunity for Nineveh to repent (see 4:2). Why do you think Jonah does not want the Ninevites to repent and turn to God?
3. Read [Psalm 139:7–12](#). Twice in [Jonah 1](#), the text says that Jonah is trying to get away "from the presence of the Lord." In light of [Psalm 139](#), what do you think it means to flee from the presence of God? How do we try to do so today?

4. Although Jonah tried to flee from the Lord, God used the storm, the sailors, and the great fish to bring Jonah back to trusting in and following him. How, then, is the story of Jonah a comfort to God's people?

5. Read Jonah's prayer in 2:1–9, paying special attention to images he uses to describe his distress. How desperate is Jonah's situation? Note some of the ways in which he describes his desperation.

6. [Jonah 3:3](#) notes that Jonah finally obeys the word of the Lord, going to Nineveh to pronounce God's judgment upon the city. How is Jonah's response to this second call of God related to what Jonah experienced through the storm and the fish in chapter 1? In other words, why does Jonah obey God this time instead of running away?

7. The Stubbornness of Jonah (4:1–11). Jonah is angry over God's relenting of the disaster he announced against Nineveh. In fact, the Hebrew text of 4:1 says that, to Jonah, this relenting was "exceedingly evil". Why is Jonah so angry?

8. Three times in the book of Jonah, "pagans" express care for those who are perishing (1:6, 14; 3:9). However, Jonah, the representative of God's people, seems to care only for himself and the "perishing" of a plant from which he personally benefits (4:10). Do you today see nonbelievers leading in the care for others who may be perishing rather than the church of Jesus Christ leading in that care? Where has the church become more concerned over her own well-being than over the well-being of others?

9. The concluding of Jonah with an open-ended question invites us to view ourselves as addressees of the same question. Indeed, it is easy to assume that God is on our side—with "us" and opposed to "them." This assumption is often made in war, politics, and even interpersonal conflicts. Where, then, are we like Jonah? Where do we expect God to take our side and to be against our "enemies" or opponents? Where are we offended or even angry at God's character because God's compassion is not limited to "us" but available also to "them"?

Lesson 8

Judgment/The Kingdom (Micah 1-7)

Background

The book of Micah opens with God summoning the people of the earth to come and witness his judgment against Israel. Both northern Israel, represented by the city of Samaria, and the southern kingdom of Judah, represented by the city of Jerusalem, are under divine condemnation.

The Lord Almighty, before whom creation itself quakes, will come to judge his people for their sin.

1. Read Micah 1:1–7. In [Leviticus 18:24–30](#), the Lord explains to Israel that the land of Canaan, of which they were about to take possession, “vomited out its inhabitants” because the Canaanites had become unclean and had defiled the land. That judgment against the Canaanites stood as an example to Israel of what would happen to them if they took up the practices of the Canaanites and also became unclean. As we begin the book of Micah, we see God calling all the inhabitants of the earth to come and witness his judgment against his own people, Israel. In light of [Leviticus 18:24–30](#), why does God summon the nations to witness the judgment against Israel?
2. Read Micah 1:8-9 what is the object lesson?
3. Abusing God’s Word (2:1–11; 3:1–8) Read 1 Kings 21:1–16. Even though the events of 1 Kings 21 occurred many years before the ministry of Micah, they paint a picture of the kinds of abuses taking place among the powerful in Micah’s day. These abuses are described using the image of cannibalism at the beginning of [Micah 3](#). Why are such abuses so heinous to God (2:1–2)?
4. How are the people responding to or abusing the Word of God (2:6, 11; 3:5, 11)?

5. In Hebrew, the phrase “when they have something to eat” (3:5) is literally “who bite with their teeth.” This phrase uses a word that occurs 11 other times in the Old Testament, with 10 of those 11 times relating to snakes (e.g., the fiery serpents biting the people in [Num. 21:6](#)). In the one other occurrence of the word, it refers to lending money with interest; high interest rates were one more means of oppressing those who fell on hard times ([Deut. 23:19–20](#)). How does this expression help paint a picture of the destruction these prophets’ false proclamations were bringing upon God’s people?

6. What are the specific punishments God will bring upon the people for their rejection of his Word ([Mic. 3:4–7](#))?

7. Despite the judgment on Israel, especially Israel’s leaders, these chapters are not without hope. What are the two images used in [Micah 2:12–13](#), and how do they offer hope to Israel?

Lesson 9

The City (Nahum)

Background

The book is named after its author, the prophet Nahum of Elkosh. His name means “comfort.” The message given to him by God, that Nineveh would be destroyed, brings comfort to Judah. The location of Elkosh is uncertain, although the date (see below) and the address to Judah ([Nah. 1:15](#)) make it likely that Nahum was from Judah.

Nahum was God’s messenger to announce the fall of Nineveh and the complete overthrow of Assyria. This coming judgment from the Lord was certain and irrevocable, as was Obadiah’s message concerning Edom.

Nahum’s book is a sequel to, and a dramatic contrast with, the book of Jonah. Jonah’s mission to Nineveh was probably sometime in the first half of the eighth century B.C. He was to warn that large city of God’s impending judgment because of Nineveh’s wickedness. To Jonah’s dismay, the Ninevites heeded his message, repented, and were spared God’s judgment.

This repentance, however, did not last beyond 745 B.C., when Tiglath-pileser III (745–728/727) made his people the leading military power in the Near East. The vast Assyrian Empire was established by bloodshed and massacre, cruelty and torture, destruction, plundering, and exiling such as has seldom been seen in history. After several campaigns, Tiglath-pileser greatly enlarged the territory paying him homage with annexed land and vassal kingdoms, including the northern kingdom of Israel (reduced in size by the Assyrians) and the southern kingdom of Judah. Succeeding rulers maintained and expanded this empire. In 722 B.C. the Assyrians brought to an end the northern kingdom of Israel.

Sennacherib (reigned 704–681 B.C.) made Nineveh the capital of his kingdom (c. 700). His energetic building program included a splendid palace, water-supply and water-control projects, and a massive wall to surround the expanded city. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., never to be restored, marking the end of Assyria. A small remnant of Assyrians did escape the city, fleeing to Haran and making Ashur-uballit II “king of Assyria.” In 610 B.C., though, Haran fell to the Babylonians and their allies. Ashur-uballit retreated, but in 609 B.C., with Egyptian help, he tried to recapture Haran. That attempt failed, and Ashur-uballit and the Assyrians disappeared from history. *Taken from the [ESV® Study Bible](#) (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright ©2008 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved*

1. The Lord Is a Warrior (1:1–8) Nahum opens with a psalm of praise to the Lord. What do we learn about God in verses 2–8?

2. The Assyrians completed their destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. This means they have been oppressing the southern kingdom for more than 60 years (see the “Introduction to Nahum”). As God’s people cry out to him for deliverance, it may feel like God is slow to act. How do these verses address that slowness?

3. Read 2 Peter 3:1–13. How does that passage and [Nahum 1:2–8](#) inform our understanding of God’s apparent slowness in keeping his promises of judgment against the wicked?

4. Amid these verses describing the power, vengeance, and wrath of God, Nahum jarringly turns to exclaim, “The Lord is good” (v. 7). Why do you think the goodness of the Lord is mentioned here?

5. What does it mean that God is a “stronghold” and “refuge”? What does it mean that he “knows” those who take refuge in him (v. 7)? See also [Psalm 27](#).

6. The Defeat of Nineveh (1:9–15). The Assyrian Empire was likely at the height of its power, with a massive army and seemingly endless resources for conquest, during the ministry of Nahum (see v. 12). How do the images of Nineveh’s destruction in verse 10 emphasize the power and might of Israel’s God?

Lesson 10

The Prophet (Habakkuk) Part 1

Background

Habakkuk is unusual as a prophetic book in that it never addresses the people of Judah directly but rather is a dialogue between the prophet and God. The first two chapters are organized around Habakkuk's prayers (or, more correctly, complaints) and the Lord's replies. Habakkuk saw the rapid progress of Judah's moral and spiritual deterioration and this deeply troubled him. Yet God's response puzzled him even more, for "how could a good and just God use a more wicked nation to punish a less wicked one?" God makes it clear that both nations are to be judged and appropriately punished for their evil acts. Although Habakkuk may not fully understand, he has learned to rely totally on the wisdom and justice of God to bring about the proper resolution in ways he could never have imagined. This God is certainly worthy of Habakkuk's praise and worship, which is how the book ends.

The words of this prophet would surely have resonated with many of the righteous in Judah, who wondered what God was doing and struggled with the same issues that Habakkuk struggled with. God's words reassured them that he was in control and would take appropriate measures to deal with the nations. This book continued to have relevance to its readers, as evidenced by a commentary on the first two chapters discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

1. Habakkuk's First Lament (1:2-4) Why does Habakkuk cry out to the Lord? What is his complaint?
2. Habakkuk uses God's covenant name, "the Lord." What significance does this have, and why would the prophet address the Lord as such?
3. 2. God's Response (1:5-11) What does it mean for the Chaldeans' (another name for the Babylonians) "justice and dignity [to] go forth from themselves" (v. 7)?
4. What imagery does the Lord use to describe the power of the coming forces? How does this compare to the Lord's own power?

5. In what did the Babylonians trust (v. 11)? They have been raised up by the Lord to judge his people, but he will still deal with them for their own transgressions. How does the Babylonians' trust foreshadow their future (v. 10; compare [Psalm 2](#))? Does their future look similar to that of the wicked rulers of Judah itself?

Lesson 11

The Prophet (Habakkuk) Part 2

Background

Having learned of God's plan to use the Babylonians to bring justice to Judah, Habakkuk struggles to understand how God could use a wicked nation to judge a nation that is seemingly less wicked. The Lord's righteousness is vindicated as he punishes the wicked and justifies the one who lives by faith.

While it appears that evil is going unpunished, in his time the Lord brings justice to all by sparing the ones who live by faith in him.

1. Habakkuk's Second Lament (1:12–2:1) What does Habakkuk's second complaint disclose about his knowledge of God's character (vv. 12–13)?
2. Why is Habakkuk troubled by the Lord's decision to use Babylon to bring judgment on Judah (vv. 15–17)?
3. Where has Habakkuk stationed himself in 2:1? What is he doing, and what does this indicate about his hope and expectations?
4. 2. God's Response (2:2–20) What does the Lord's response beginning in verse 2 indicate about his intended audience? To whom is he speaking, ultimately?
5. What does it mean for the righteous to "live by his faith" (2:4; see also [Rom. 1:17](#); [Gal. 3:11](#); [Heb. 10:38](#))? In what do the wicked ultimately trust (v. 18)?
6. Why does Babylon deserve its coming punishment (vv. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19)?

7. Compare 3:16 with 1:2. How has Habakkuk been changed by the Lord's responses to his cries for help? Does Habakkuk's joy stem from his immediate circumstances (vv. 17–19)? What is the source of his joy?

Lesson 12

Glory (Zephaniah)

Background

Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah and likely the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah. His name means “he whom Yahweh hides” or “hidden of Yahweh,” which perhaps references the Lord’s sheltering his people from his wrath. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (640–609 BC). Under Manasseh, Josiah’s grandfather, Judah had fallen into heinous sin. Yet under Josiah they rediscovered the Book of the Law in 622 BC, and the king brought reform as a result. Most likely, Zephaniah prophesied after this discovery, bringing the message that the Lord was coming in cosmic judgment against the sins of his covenant people as well as against those of the world at large.

On the day of the Lord, God will come in judgment on both his covenant people and the entire world for their sins.

1. Judgment Coming against Judah (1:1–6). The Lord is coming in judgment against all living beings (vv. 2–3) as well as against his covenant people (vv. 4–6). What have they done (vv. 4–6, 12), and what does God’s response indicate about His character?
2. The Day of the Lord Is Near (1:7–18). How many times does Zephaniah use the phrase “the day of the Lord” or similar phrases in this chapter? When will the day of the Lord come (v. 14)? How should the people respond to this prophecy?
3. Repentance Is Still Possible (2:1–3). God is bringing judgment against the proud people of the nations, yet there is still time for Judah to repent. Whom, specifically, does the Lord address in verse 3?
4. The Nations Are Warned (2:4–15). What specific sins does Zephaniah mention for each nation? What do these sins indicate about a proper approach to God?

5. Judgment and Conversion (3:1–13). How is the city of Jerusalem described? What has become of her rulers, prophets, and priests (vv. 3–4)? What does God call the city to do (vv. 7–8)? What must be done for Judah to return to the Lord (vv. 11–13)?

6. Israel's Joy and Restoration (3:14–20). What does it mean for Judah to have the king in her midst (v. 15)? The Lord is the ultimate singer of this prophecy (v. 17). How is this related to the joy of God's people?

Lesson 13

Stirring up Things/The Work (Haggai)

Background

In the year 538 BC, a remnant of God's people returned from Babylon to the Promised Land with the intention of rebuilding the temple and reinstating worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem. Yet, 18 years later, the temple still lies in ruins, the people are barely surviving on meager crops and insufficient water, and a general discouragement has set in among the postexilic community in Jerusalem. Into this context of discouragement and spiritual disorientation, the word of the Lord comes to his people through his prophet Haggai, transforming Jerusalem. In this opening oracle Haggai offers a powerful challenge to the spiritual lethargy of God's people, identifying the secret idols of their hearts and calling them to renewed faith and obedience.

God confronts his people's idolatries and misplaced priorities, calling them to renewed faith, repentance, and the fruit of that repentance—exhibited in their faithfulness in rebuilding the temple.

The historical background of Haggai and Zechariah is recorded for us in the book of Ezra. Take some time to read [Ezra 1–6](#) and write down observations about key figures of the period as well as the circumstances surrounding the rebuilding of the temple.

1. The Lord Has a Complaint (1:2–11). In verse 2, the Lord issues his indictment: “These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.” Although reasons are not given for why the people believe “the time has not yet come,” we can imagine a number of excuses they might make. From what you know about the conditions of postexilic Jerusalem, what might they point to as justification for delaying the rebuilding of the temple? How do we make similar excuses for neglecting God's calling on our own lives?
2. In verse 6, God describes the frustrations Israel has experienced because of its sin: “You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.” What insight does this give us into the nature of idolatry?
3. Between the two announcements of covenant curses ([Hag. 1:6](#) and vv. 9–11) comes the heart of the prophet's message: “Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house,

that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord” (v. 8). How will the temple bring glory to God?

4. The People’s (Surprising) Response (1:12–15a). Israel’s response is a wonderful picture of true repentance. What elements of repentance do you see in the people’s response to the word of God?

5. The second temple was approximately the same size as the first and furnished in much the same way. In what sense, then, does the second temple lack its former glory (compare [Ex. 40:34](#); 1 Kings 8:10–11)? What is God’s purpose for his people in giving them a less than glorious temple?

6. What two promises does God give the postexilic community to strengthen them in the difficult task of rebuilding the temple ([Hag. 2:4–9](#))?

7. Prior to rebuilding the temple, what problems did Israel experience on account of their ritual impurity (2:14–17)? How does the temple rectify this predicament (vv. 18–19)?

Lesson 14

God and His People (Zechariah 1-6) Part 1

Background

After delivering an introductory oracle warning the postexilic community against repeating the sins of their forefathers ([Zech. 1:1–6](#)), the prophet Zechariah receives a series of eight night visions (1:7–6:8). These visions are God’s answer to the obstacles the Jews have faced in rebuilding the temple, such as discouragement, oppression, spiritual lethargy, and doubt about the Lord’s commitment to his people. The visions have a dreamlike quality, featuring fantastic and bizarre figures, images, and scenes characteristic of apocalyptic literature. They serve as a window into the spiritual forces at work behind the mundane realities of the physical world. Although sometimes the details of the visions are obscure, the overall message is clear: God will triumph over the evil forces of this world and lead his people into a glorious future.

God responds to the sufferings of his people by announcing that very soon he will overthrow their oppressors and establish his eternal, universal kingdom in righteousness.

1. Vision one: the Lord’s hidden horsemen ([Zech. 1:7–17](#))

- a. The Persian Empire was known for its skilled horsemanship. Persia used horses in battle and to maintain their elaborate network of communications by which the emperor could keep watch on even the farthest reaches of his vast empire. In the first night vision, Zechariah sees that the Persian emperor is not the only one whose spies range throughout the world. The Lord has sent out his own horsemen to spy and to report (1:10). What does this teach us about God’s knowledge? How would this be an encouragement to the postexilic community?

2. Vision two: Judah’s oppressors oppressed ([Zech. 1:18–21](#))

- a. Throughout Scripture, a horn serves as a symbol for military strength and power (e.g., [Deut. 33:17](#); [Ps. 75:4](#); [Dan. 7:19–22](#)). In [Zechariah 1:18](#), the prophet sees four horns. The type of horn is uncertain; some have suggested that Zechariah sees the horns of a helmet, an altar, or an animal. What (or whom) do these horns represent? How does their fate fulfill the Abrahamic promise (see [Gen. 12:3](#))?

3. Vision three: A City without Walls ([Zech. 2:1–13](#))

- a. The third night vision (2:1–13) is essentially the flip side of the second vision. Not only will God reverse the fortunes of Israel’s enemies who are at rest in their rebellion and pride (1:18–21); he will also reverse the fortunes of his own people and prosper them beyond anything they could ask or imagine. According to [Zechariah 2:1–4](#), in what ways does God promise to bless Israel in the future?

4. Vision four: The Reclothing of Joshua ([Zech. 3:1–10](#))

- a. The third night vision opens with a courtroom scene. Joshua the high priest stands as the accused, Satan stands as the prosecutor, and the angel of the Lord (a manifestation of God himself) sits in judgment (v. 1). The courtroom drama begins in verse 2. Describe the dramatic action that ensues.
- b. The Lord refers to Joshua as a “brand plucked from the fire” (v. 2). To what does this refer?

5. Vision five: the olive trees and the lampstand ([Zech. 4:1–14](#))

- a. While a golden lampstand (or *menorah*) would be reminiscent of the traditional temple furnishing, this lampstand would seem highly unusual to Zechariah. What is distinctive about the lampstand the prophet sees in his vision (compare [Ex. 25:31–40](#); 2 Chron. 4:7, 20)?

6. Vision six: the flying scroll—wickedness judged ([Zech. 5:1–4](#))

- a. In [Zechariah 5:1–2](#), the prophet sees a vision of a highly unusual scroll. The strange features of this scroll contain a message for God’s people. What is the significance of the scroll’s location, motion, size, and contents?

7. Vision seven: Vision of a Woman in a Basket ([Zech. 5:5–11](#))

1. At the instruction of the interpreting angel, the prophet beholds a basket going out, and he is told that the basket is “their iniquity in all the land” (v. 6). What does this imply about the present condition of God’s people?

8. Vision eight: the Lord’s army on the move ([Zech. 6:1–8](#))

- a. How does the eighth vision (6:1–8) build on the message of the first (1:7–17)? What is similar about the characters of these two visions and their actions? What is different?

Lesson 15

Promise and Restoration (Zechariah 7-14) Part 2

Background

Although the Jews have been released from their Babylonian captivity, a remnant has returned to the Land of Promise, and the temple is being rebuilt, there nevertheless remains for God's people a real sense that they are living in exile. They are subject to the Persian Empire and lack a Davidic king on the throne. They continue to experience the painful consequences of their own sin. Israel longs for a final deliverance from difficulties from within and without. In [Zechariah 7–8](#), an envoy from Bethel comes to Jerusalem to inquire about the end of Israel's exile and the rituals that characterize it. As is often the case when questioning God, his people get more than they bargain for. God challenges his people's religiosity and calls them to express true repentance by their care for the poor and needy and vulnerable in their midst. Such challenging words are followed by one of the most glorious depictions of the new heavens and the new earth in the Old Testament. In this, God announces his unwavering commitment to transform Israel's present exilic experience of fasting into a joyful homecoming feast.

1. “When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?” ([Zech. 7:5–6](#)). With these rhetorical questions, God gets to the real issue facing the postexilic community. What do God's questions reveal about Israel's expressions of repentance and sorrow?
2. Ritual actions such as fasting and mourning are not wrong in and of themselves (e.g., [Ex. 34:28](#); [Est. 4:16](#)), but without true faith and heartfelt obedience, such actions are displeasing to God. According to [Zechariah 7:9–10](#) (compare 8:16–17), what should true sorrow for sin and heartfelt repentance look like?
3. In [Zechariah 8:4–8](#), the prophet envisions an idyllic future for Jerusalem. What are the characteristics of this renewed Jerusalem? In what ways is it different from the Jerusalem of Zechariah's day?

4. According to [Zechariah 9:10–17](#), what will the Messiah accomplish when he comes?

5. Read Zech. 12:10–13:9. “When they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him” ([Zech. 12:10](#)). How may Israel be said to have pierced the Lord in Zechariah’s day? How is this fulfilled in Jesus (see [John 19:37](#))?

6. Read Zech 14. In Zechariah’s day, the designation “Holy to the Lord” was reserved for a few items of elevated holiness, used only in the holiest of places ([Ex. 28:36–38](#)). However, when the prophet envisions the new heavens and new earth, he sees that such a designation will be placed upon even the most mundane objects used in the most common of places ([Zech. 14:20](#)). What does this teach us about the symbolic function of the temple in Zechariah’s day? What does it teach us about the character of the new heavens and the new earth?

Lesson 16

Sins of the People (Malachi) Part 1

Background

Although the exact dates of his prophetic ministry are unknown, Malachi's oracles clearly address the postexilic community sometime after the rebuilding of the temple in 515 BC. Malachi, whose name means "my servant," speaks to a people who have forgotten the love of God and whose hearts have consequently begun to grow cold in worship and obedience. The book of Malachi consists of a series of prophetic disputations in which the Lord reveals various sins that are spiritually crippling his people, such as halfhearted worship and the fear of man rather than of God. With tremendous rhetorical force, Malachi calls for heartfelt repentance and worship born of a deep and living faith, reminding Israel of the divine promise, "Return to me, and I will return to you" (Mal. 3:7).

Malachi conveys the disastrous consequences of forgetting the love of God, which he has revealed in his sovereign election of a sinful people.

1. Although God declares his love for Israel, Israel doubts that God has in fact loved them, at least lately (v. 2). What in Israel's past or present might lead them to question God's love? How do we let experiences and circumstances dictate how we view God's favor toward us?
2. Faithless Priests, Faithful God (1:6–14) What is the Lord's complaint against Israel's priests (1:6–8), and what does he point to as evidence against them? Consider verses 6 and 8. What do these human relationships (i.e., father/son, master/servant, governor/citizens) reveal about the depths of the priests' sin? How might we make similar comparisons in our own lives?
3. What do the priests' offerings reveal about their hearts? How might these halfhearted expressions of worship be related to Israel's doubting of God's love (vv. 2–5)? How does Malachi's oracle challenge our approach to worship?

4. “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain!” ([Mal. 1:10](#)). How would a complete closure of the temple and a cessation of worship be better than Israel’s persistence in halfhearted worship?

5. Even though Israel fails to honor God in its worship, God’s plan to create worshipers for himself is not thwarted. In [Malachi 1:11](#) the Lord declares, “From the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.” How is this a further indictment of Israel? How is this promise fulfilled in the New Testament?

6. My Covenant with Levi (2:1–9) Read [Numbers 6:22–27](#). What does the Lord mean when he says to the priests, “I will curse your blessings” (Mal. 2:2)? How does the Lord’s treatment of the unfaithful priests reflect their treatment of him?

7. According to Malachi, what does the ideal priest look like? How have the priests in Malachi’s day corrupted this ideal? What do their abuses of office reveal about what they truly value?

8. Defiled Marriages, Defiled Worship (2:10–16) Israel was forbidden to marry certain foreigners ([Deut. 7:1–5](#)). Yet, judging from Ezra and Nehemiah ([Ezra 9](#); [Neh. 13:23–27](#)), this practice was as widespread after the exile as it was before. How do such intermarriages disrupt the spiritual life of God’s people (v. 13)? The Lord indicts Israel for a second and corresponding sin: divorcing the wives of their youth (2:14). According to Malachi, what role does God play in marriage covenants? According to [Malachi 2:15–16](#), what are God’s purposes for godly marriages (compare [Eph. 5:22–33](#))?

Lesson 17

Sins of the People (Malachi) Part 2

Background

Many—though not all—in the postexilic community have become cynical toward their covenant Lord. Perhaps in response to the trials and struggles of life after the exile, they begin to question God’s justice, his faithfulness to his promises, the benefits of obedience, and the reality of a future judgment. In the final three prophetic disputations, God addresses his people’s cynical hearts and reaffirms the realities they have come to doubt. In so doing, God calls his people to a present faithfulness as they await a future “day of the Lord,” when their faith will become sight.

1. Questioning God’s Justice (2:17–3:5). The fourth disputation begins with the Lord announcing that he has grown weary of his people’s cynical complaints. They say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them”; and they ask, “Where is the God of justice?” (2:17). What about their circumstances might have led Israel to complain in this manner?
2. Questioning God’s Promises (3:6–12) “I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed” ([Mal. 3:6](#)). How does God’s unchangeable character offer Israel solid ground on which their faith and hope can stand?
3. How has Israel “robbed” God? How might their circumstances have tempted them to do so? What does this teach us about how we should view our own wealth and resources?
4. What ironic consequences does Israel receive for withholding their tithes (v. 11), and what does the Lord promise if Israel will return to him in faith and obedience (vv. 8–12)? Does God promise us the same things today?

5. Questioning the Benefits of Obedience (3:13–4:6) “You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape’” ([Mal. 3:14–15](#)). What accusations against God are implied in the people’s complaint? How might their circumstances have led them to conclude that faith and obedience are in vain?

Lesson 18

Summary and Review

1. The Minor Prophets are books on a variety of topics—from running away from God to wrestling with God. Many of them are filled with evidence of God’s sovereignty. As you reflect on these topics, what are some other topics that come to mind as you have studied these books?
2. What surprised you most about Hosea? Joel? Jonah? Nahum? Habakkuk? Malachi or any of the other books you have studied? What, if anything, troubled you?
3. What have you learned from these books that might lead you to praise God, turn away from sin, or trust more firmly in his promises?
4. Were there any particular passages or themes in these books that led you to a fresh understanding and grasp of God’s grace to us through Jesus?
5. Thinking back, what aspects of these book(s) enable you to better understand the Bible as a unified whole?
6. What unique contributions do these books make toward our understanding of who Jesus is and what he accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection?
7. Which book(s) most teach us about the human condition and our need of redemption?