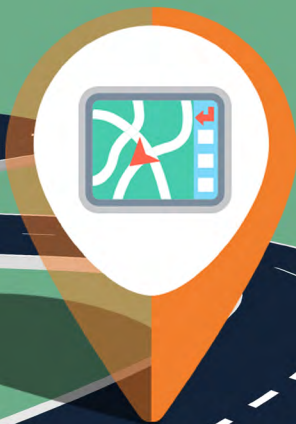


ROAD TRIP 5



The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

RON JONES



The Ultimate
Road Trip Through
the Bible

ROAD TRIP 5
The Minor Prophets

RON JONES





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ROUTE 66: THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP THROUGH THE BIBLE

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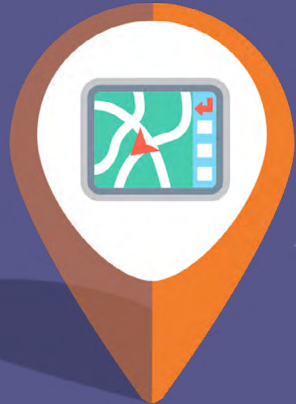
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Introduction

Welcome to the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Whether you are a seasoned student of the Holy Scriptures or picking up the best-selling book of all time for the first time, get ready for the ride of your life. As your driver along the biblical Route 66, I promise to watch my speed and obey most traffic laws. However, on this road trip, be prepared. We will certainly encounter some road construction along the ancient paths.

The Bible is a collection of holy writ and divine books—sixty-six of them! There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. However, the Book of books is one story with one main character, the Christ who was to come in the Old Testament and the Christ who came, Jesus, in the New Testament. Therefore, along Route 66, I will make the Christ connection in each Old Testament book and point you to the Jesus juncture in each New Testament book. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son and our redeemer.

For a book that was written over the span of sixteen hundred years by forty different authors on three continents and in three different languages, the Bible possesses an amazing continuity. It is one of the arguments made for the Bible's divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). The human authors God chose to pen the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments vary significantly in their background, culture, education, occupation, social status, and ability. They were farmers, fishermen, priests, physicians, politicians, kings, and shepherds. God even used a tax collector to write a biography of his Son, Jesus.

If you enjoy literature, you will love the Bible. Holy Scripture contains every form of literature known in academia, including poetry, proverb, history, narrative, law, biography, parable, prophetic,

Introduction

apocalyptic, gospel, and letter. Many colleges and universities offer a literature course on the Bible. What other book on the planet inspires people to study it for its literary genius alone?

God used visions and dreams, angels, clay tablets, burning bushes, face-to-face encounters, the spoken and written word, even the jawbone of a donkey to communicate with those He created in His image. He did so because He loves us and desires a relationship with us.

How does one explain how so many people over a long period of time could write about God, history, religious life, and more, and yet do so in perfect editorial harmony, each adding to the overall story? There is only one plausible explanation. The superintending mind of God inspired the writing of these books across many centuries and pieced them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

A well-respected Bible scholar named Norman Geisler writes, “Note the amazing unity. These sixty-six books unfold one continuous drama of redemption, paradise lost to paradise regained, creation to the consummation of all things. There is one central theme, the person of Jesus Christ. . . . There is one message: Humankind’s problem is sin, and the solution is salvation through Christ.”¹

The Minor Prophets

Our fifth road trip along the biblical Route 66 focuses on the Minor Prophets and their writings: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These books are called “minor” due to their length, compared to the longer writings of the five Major Prophets, which

Introduction

are equally impactful. The Old Testament prophets arose during the ministry of Samuel, who began the first school for prophets (1 Samuel 19:18-24). There were many more prophets who spoke into Israel's national life than the seventeen who contributed to the canon of Scripture.

God sent prophets with messages that called His wayward bride to repentance. The Old Testament prophets ministered before, during, and after Israel's Babylonian exile. Of the Minor Prophets, God sent three to the Northern Kingdom, Israel (Jonah, Amos, and Hosea). Six of the Minor Prophets served the Southern Kingdom, Judah, before and during the Babylonian exile (Obadiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah), and three prophesied after the captivity (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). Prophets called by God delivered both forthtelling and foretelling messages. The prophetic office is still active in the church today in a forthtelling manner (Ephesians 4:11).

As useful as this travel guide might be, my words are no replacement for reading the Bible itself. My prayer is that you will fall in love with the Bible as much as I have. More so, I pray that you will deeply desire a relationship with its Author. He wrote you a love letter with more than six hundred thousand words because He loves you more than you can imagine.

Will you continue traveling on Route 66? Climb in, buckle up, and enjoy the next ride on the ultimate road trip through the Bible.

DR. RON JONES

Virginia Beach, Virginia

November 2021

Hosea

GOD'S LOYAL LOVE

I often hear people say that Christianity is not a religion but a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. While that is true, I believe it still undersells what the Bible invites us to experience. The God of the Bible is the most romantic Being in the universe. By nature, He is love (1 John 4:7-21). Life, marriage, sex, and romance were His ideas, too.

Thus, the Christian faith is exceedingly more personal than mere religion and far more passionate than a platonic relationship. Christianity invites us to experience a divine romance with our Creator, who made us in His image, male and female (Genesis 1:26). The book of Hosea, our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible, makes this invitation abundantly clear.

In the New Testament, the church that Jesus is building is called the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5). In the Old Testament, Hosea uses that same marriage imagery to describe Israel's relationship with God. However, the story of Hosea and Gomer is no Romeo and Juliet kind of romance.

Hosea is the first among twelve Minor Prophets whose writings appear in the Old Testament. He is one of three prophets God



Hosea

GOD'S LOYAL LOVE

sent to Israel, the Northern Kingdom, which is sometimes called Ephraim after the largest of the ten tribes that followed King Jeroboam into idolatry. Hosea began his ministry to the Northern Kingdom about thirteen years before Isaiah ministered in the Southern Kingdom. Other prophets that God sent to the Northern Kingdom include Jonah and Amos.

Hosea ministered for nearly a half-century, long enough to see the fulfillment of his prophecies come true when the Assyrians took Israel captive. In that way, he is like Jeremiah, who prophesied to Judah during her final years before the Babylonians captured the Southern Kingdom.

The Scandalous Love of God

The prophet's personal love story and family life serve as an illustration of faithless Israel's tragic departure from her covenant relationship with God. No prophet preached a more dramatic and painful sermon than Hosea.

Chapters 1-3 read like a sad Hallmark movie script. God tells Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer, immediately introducing us to a turbulent romance. "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord" (1:2). Some ministry assignments are more difficult than others. Given Gomer's sinful lifestyle, she should have been stoned to death, according to the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 22:22-25). However,

CHRIST CONNECTION

Hosea bought Gomer as an illustration of the way Jesus purchased our redemption on the cross (3:1-5).

BIG IDEA

Spiritual adultery grieves God's heart, but God keeps on loving us.

MEMORY VERSE

And the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins."

HOSEA 3:1

AUTHOR and DATE

Hosea
710 B.C.



Hosea

GOD'S LOYAL LOVE

God preempted His own law for purposes of illustrating His loyal love to Israel.

Respectfully, Hosea obeyed the Lord and married Gomer. Their marriage produced three children, each a further illustration of the way God felt about Israel, who had engaged in spiritual prostitution by falling into idolatry and immorality. Their first child was a son named Jezreel, meaning “God will scatter, God will avenge.” The Lord said, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel” (1:4-5).

Next, Gomer gave birth to a daughter named Lo-ruhamah, which means “no mercy.” God was about to show no mercy to the house of Israel because of its stubborn disobedience. Sadly, Lo-ruhamah would never know her father’s pity. Perhaps her name indicates that she did not know who her father was at all. What a scandal this would have been in Hosea’s household! From God’s perspective, our secret sin is always an open scandal in heaven.

Finally, Gomer gives birth to a third child, a boy named Lo-ammī, which means “not my people.” Through this child’s name, the Lord was saying to Israel, “You are not acting like my child!” What parent has not been tempted to say the same thing to their disobedient children? Even Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil!” (John 8:44). Are you a child of God who is acting like a child of the devil? This grieves the heart of our heavenly Father.

By the way, a person becomes a child of God only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The lie of liberal theology says otherwise; it says that we are all children of God.² However, the Bible clearly says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of



Hosea

GOD'S LOYAL LOVE

blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). In other words, you are not a child of God because you were born to Christian parents or live in a nation founded upon Judea-Christian principles. Nor do we become children of God by human striving or rational decision (Ephesians 2:8-9). Becoming a child of God is entirely the sovereign work of God.

In Hosea, God’s heart is broken over the waywardness of Israel, His bride. Like a jilted lover, the Lord’s emotions vacillate throughout the book. At one moment, the Almighty is angry and ready to hand over Israel to her enemies (2:1-13); in the very same breath, He wants her back if she would only repent (2:14-23). Can you blame Him? Can you identify with His emotions? God has so united His heart with His people that He cannot let them go. For example,

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 Zeboim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. 11:8-9³

As quickly as the Lord’s heart shrank back from the idea of abandoning His beloved bride, He was ready to punish Israel again for her despicable deeds.

The Lord has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds. 12:2

Truth is always stranger than fiction, especially when it comes to romance. Rewind to chapter 3 and read these words: “And the Lord said to me, ‘Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins’” (3:1).

Apparently, Gomer had returned to her immoral life, just as



Israel kept following the Baals. As the Eagles, one of the greatest rock-n-roll groups, sang, “She was headed for the cheatin’ side of town.”⁴ The words “go again” suggest the Lord never gives up on us. Hosea went after his wayward bride again. In love, he “bought her,” a picture of Jesus Christ who would purchase our redemption on the cross. “In the latter days,” Israel will also return, seek the Lord, and fear Him (3:5).

To make the point about how much He loves us, God seems willing to risk traveling into scandalous territory. In Hosea, a story about God’s loyal love for Israel, the Lord instructs His prophet to marry a prostitute, which is scandalous enough. Much later, as the story of redemption unfolds, a virgin girl—the mother of the Messiah—becomes pregnant. Two thousand years ago, a teenage pregnancy was a big deal. How would Joseph, Mary’s betrothed, explain her pregnancy before they wed? Would their story about the Holy Spirit’s involvement convince enough people? God did not seem worried about what people might think. He sent a chorus of angels to announce Messiah’s birth to the shepherds by saying, “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14).

The Purifying Holiness of God

The imagery and language in Hosea are admittedly offensive. The Lord calls Israel a spiritual whore. Hosea 4:12 says of the nation, “For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore.” However, just as the prophet Hosea’s love for his prostitute wife pictures God’s loyal love for Israel and us, Gomer’s adultery illustrates Israel’s need for the purifying holiness of God and ours.

Spiritual adultery was not just Old Testament Israel’s problem centuries ago. In the New Testament, the Bible warns wayward,



Hosea

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unfaithful Christians by saying, “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

In chapters 6 and 7, Hosea reveals Israel’s true character through a series of metaphors and similes. For example, in 6:4, the Lord compares Israel to a morning mist that quickly disappears: “What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.” God is not impressed with passions for Him that come and go so easily.

In 7:4, Hosea compares Israel’s lust for sin to a hot oven. “They are all adulterers; they are like a heated oven whose baker ceases to stir the fire, from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.” While he is near the hot oven, Hosea compares Israel to a half-baked cake. “Israel mixes himself with the peoples; Ephraim is a cake not turned” (7:8). Israel mixed with the pagan nations. After marrying their sons and daughters, they adopted their religious practices. In time, they became a mix of Jewish rituals and pagan idolatry. God wanted to spit their half-baked commitment out of His mouth.

Hosea is not done with his scathing character analysis of God’s people. He goes on to say, “Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria” (7:11). Egypt and Assyria proved to be false allies. How silly of Israel to run for help to the nation that once held them in slavery or to the nation that would one day take them captive. If they had listened to Hosea and the other prophets God sent, they would have known Assyria was coming after them.

Finally, Hosea compares Israel to a treacherous bow. “They return, but not upward; they are like a treacherous bow; their princes shall fall by the sword because of the insolence of their tongue. This



shall be their derision in the land of Egypt” (7:16). Treachery refers to faithlessness and betrayal. Israel was deceptive, untrustworthy, and unreliable. God wanted the nation to be a straight arrow in His quiver. Instead, she was a faulty bow that did not shoot straight with the Lord.

The Magnificent Mercy of God

Despite Israel’s bad character, false repentance, and shallow confessions (6:1-3), the Lord continued to pursue her with His loyal love and magnificent mercy. Yes, His magnificent mercy! Following the pronouncement of judgment on Israel through the children’s names in chapter 1, the Lord’s emotions roll like a coaster at Six Flags Over Texas. The next chapter begins with these words, “Say to your brothers, ‘You are my people,’ and to your sisters, ‘You have received mercy’” (2:1).

Did you catch the play on words? Lo-ruhamah became Ruhamah, and Lo-ammi became Ammi. As quickly as God said, “No mercy,” He shouted, “Mercy!” He was that willing to change the children’s names and, thus, the nation’s destiny if Israel would repent. Likewise, the apostle Peter, a careful student of the Minor Prophets, had Hosea in mind when he wrote, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:10).

Hosea teaches us that spiritual adultery grieves God’s heart, but He never stops loving us or offering His magnificent mercy. Like Israel, are you a spiritual adulterer? Have you become a friend of the world? Are you acting like a child of the devil? Hear the words of Hosea and all the Minor Prophets who call us to repent and return to the Lord Almighty.



Hosea

GOD'S LOYAL LOVE

OUTLINE	1-3	4-14
FOCUS	Hosea and Gomer Faithful Husband, Unfaithful Wife	God and Israel Faithful God, Faithless Nation
KEY VERSE	3:1	8:7



Joel

THE AWESOME DAY OF THE LORD

Every day of life is a special day because the Lord made it (Psalm 118:24). However, some days are more special than others. For example, holidays and holy days are worth the special attention we give them, as are birthdays. In the Jones family, we have a special red dinner plate we use to celebrate birthdays. It reads, “You Are Special Today!”

In America, we celebrate New Year’s Day, President’s Day, Veteran’s Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Independence Day. Father’s Day and Mother’s Day are also important to us, as is Graduation Day. Some families celebrate Gotcha Day, which is the day a child was adopted into the family.

Sunday is the first day of the week. Wednesday is Hump Day because it lands in the middle of the five-day workweek. In Genesis, the creation story reads with rhythmic prose around the word *yom*, the Hebrew word for one twenty-four-hour day.

One other day is worth mentioning and should grab our attention. The Bible calls it “the day of the Lord.” What is the day of the Lord? I am glad you asked. Dr. John Walvoord, past president of Dallas Theological Seminary and Bible prophecy



expert, describes the day of the Lord this way:

The Day of the Lord is a period of time in which God will deal with wicked men directly and dramatically in fearful judgment. Today a man may be a blasphemer of God, an atheist, can denounce God, and teach bad doctrine. Seemingly, God does nothing about it. But the day designated in Scripture as “the day of the Lord” is coming when God will punish sin, and He will deal in wrath and in judgment with a Christ-rejecting world. One thing we are sure of, that God in His own way will bring every soul into judgment.⁵

What a sobering reality! Most of us would rather sing “O Happy Day!” than think about the awesome day of the Lord. But that would mean skipping over the book of Joel, which is not an option on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Route 66 takes us through all sixty-six books of the Bible because all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable (2 Timothy 3:16).

The book of Joel is among the Minor Prophets because it contains only three short chapters. But Joel delivers a major message to the Southern Kingdom about the awesome day of the Lord. Every other reference in the Bible to the day of the Lord relates to the prophecy Joel delivered to Israel around 835 B.C., making Joel one of the earliest prophets. The phrase “the day of the Lord” appears five times in Joel and, from Joel’s perspective, refers to the present, future, and ultimate day of the Lord. In that way, the day of the Lord is both historical and eschatological.⁶

CHRIST CONNECTION

Christ will judge the nations at His Second Coming in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (3:2).

BIG IDEA

There is coming a day when God will judge all unrighteousness.

MEMORY VERSE

“Alas for the day!
For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

JOEL 1:15

AUTHOR AND DATE

Joel
835 B.C.



The Present Day of the Lord

Joel begins with an alarming message designed to awaken the elders of Israel. Something dramatic happened in Joel's time, and he believed every generation should hear about it. In other words, tell your children and your children's children (1:3). The prophet recalls a recent locust invasion that completely devastated the land.

What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. 1:4

Like the surges of a military invasion, locusts swept through the land and destroyed everything in their path. It was one of those generational natural disasters. Think about people in our lifetime still who talk about how Hurricane Katrina devastated the Louisiana coast. The locust invasion was burned into the memory of ancient Israel. Joel used this calamitous event to urge the leaders to return to God. Specifically, listen up (1:2-4), sober up (1:5-7), lament (1:8-12), and repent (1:13-14). In 1:15, Joel writes for the first time about the day of the Lord, "Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes."⁷

This was not the first time the Lord used locusts to get the attention of proud, stubborn, and recalcitrant people. A similar locust invasion was among the ten plagues the Almighty used to try and soften Pharaoh's heart. It did not work. Unsuccessfully, the Lord also used bloody water, frogs, gnats, flies, pestilence, boils, a hailstorm, and three days of darkness to get Pharaoh's attention. Famously, none of the disasters made Pharaoh relent until the tenth and final plague, which was the death of every firstborn child in Egypt, including Pharaoh's son. Only then did Pharaoh free the Hebrew slaves (Exodus 7-12). Joel used the locust invasion in his



time to warn the people of impending judgment unless they humbly returned to God.

I am writing this chapter a few days before the twentieth anniversary of an unprecedented terrorist attack on America. “Where were you on September 11, 2001?” is a common question Americans ask each other. We often talk about our lives before and after 9-11. Shortly after that awful day, people went to church to pray, encourage one another, and find hope. But sadly, our sudden religious fervor died down. God has a way of using natural disasters and other cataclysmic events on planet earth to awaken our dead or sleepy souls. Joel had hoped that the locust invasion in Israel would be enough to jolt the elders back to God.

The Future Day of the Lord

Chapter 2 begins with the sound of a trumpet. “Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near” (2:1). God uses trumpets throughout His word to alert, announce, or warn that something foreboding is about to take place. The trumpet judgments in the book of Revelation are a good example of this (Revelation 8-9). In Joel’s time, the day of the Lord was near—“a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!” (2:2).

It seems best to understand that Joel was anticipating the future invasion of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, a fierce army that would sweep through the nation like a plague of locusts, devastating everything in its path. Joel 2:1-11 describes this future day of the Lord with somber imagery. Verse 11 marks the third time Joel uses the phrase “the day of the Lord.” This time he calls it “great and very awesome” and asks, “Who can endure it?”



Before we get to the ultimate day of the Lord, this is a good time to ask whether you have enough room in your theology for the day of the Lord that delivers dramatic and fearful divine judgment. I fear that most people today have a lopsided view of God that emphasizes His love and grace while minimizing His righteousness and just judgment. The same was true during the Dark Ages prior to the Protestant Reformation. They, too, had a lopsided view of God. With fire and brimstone messages, church leaders emphasized God's righteousness and just judgment but said little about His love and grace. And so, I ask you again, is your view of God biblically thorough enough to include the awesome day of the Lord?

Fortunately, Joel is not all doom and gloom. The day of the Lord is not without hope. As quickly as the trumpet blows a warning about impending judgment, it blows again to call people to repentance and receive God's mercy (2:12-15).

God is always more willing to bless His people than deliver disaster. He is slow to anger and never unhinged when wrathful. The Babylonians would not come, even rise to power, for another two hundred years after Joel's ministry. The Lord gave Israel more time to repent than they deserved. The prophet Joel reminds us that God abounds in loyal love. Remember, it was the prophet Hosea, Joel's contemporary, who showed us in real life what God's loyal love looks like in relationships and romance. I love it when God shows and tells His eternal truth through His prophets.

The most powerful expression of God's willingness to relent over disaster comes a few verses later when He makes a hope-filled promise to Israel: "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you" (2:25). Let that sink deeply into your soul. God's restoration would be as sweeping as the devastation was complete. Eventually, the seventy years of Babylonian captivity



ended, and the Lord's people returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their lives and land. The Lord is still willing and able to restore what the locust has eaten in our lives.

The Ultimate Day of the Lord

The ultimate day of the Lord happens at the end of the age. Beginning in 2:28 and through the end of Joel, imagine as far into the future of Bible prophecy as you can. Joel starts by talking about a day when the Lord will “pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (2:28).

The apostle Peter quoted Joel on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church Jesus promised He would build.⁸ Two thousand years ago, when people in Jerusalem started speaking in tongues, some said they were drunk with alcohol, but Peter corrected them.⁹ “For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:15-16).

Joel's prophecy mentions the day of the Lord for the fourth time, this time calling it “great and awesome” (2:31). On that day, the prophet also said the sun will darken, and the moon will turn to blood. There is no record of this happening on the day of Pentecost or since then. Therefore, aspects of Joel's prophecy must still be in the future. In fact, the ultimate day of the Lord happens at the end of the age before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3 begins with a description of a great battle happening in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (3:1-16). The Lord will gather the nations of the world into the plain in Israel that Napoleon once called the greatest battlefield in the world. Warriors will beat their ploughshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears. This war in Bible prophecy is known as the battle of Armageddon



(Revelation 16:16, 19:11-21). For the fifth and final time, Joel mentions the day of the Lord in 3:14, “Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”

Evangelist Billy Graham named his radio program “The Hour of Decision.” Perhaps he had this prophetic scene in mind as he urged his listeners to place their faith in Jesus Christ. And, when they did, it became a special day to remember as their spiritual birthday. Do you have a spiritual birthday when you were born again into God’s family by faith in Jesus Christ? (John 3).

The good news about the awesome day of the Lord is this: “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (2:32, Romans 10:9-10). In other words, you can escape the judgment of the Lord Almighty by placing your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it is the only way to escape the coming night. And, if you do, you will become His child by faith (John 1:12), enter His glorious kingdom, and enjoy His eternal blessings (3:15-21).

OUTLINE	1:1-20	2:1-27	2:28-3:21
FOCUS	PRESENT Day of the Lord	FUTURE Day of the Lord	ULTIMATE Day of the Lord
THEMES	Listen Up Sober Up Lament Repent	Destruction Contrition Consecration Restoration	Pentecost Second Coming Armageddon Millennial Kingdom
KEY VERSE	1:15	2:13	2:28-29



Amos

SEEK GOD AND LIVE

Wallie Amos Criswell was born on December 19, 1909, in a small Oklahoma town called Eldorado. W.A., as friends called him, grew up in the Texas Panhandle, where his father, a barber, moved the family in 1915. His humble beginnings gave no hint about how God would use him during his lifetime.

At the age of ten, W.A. professed faith in Jesus Christ during a revival meeting held by an evangelist named John Hicks. Two years later, Criswell made a public commitment to serve God in gospel ministry. Later, some people encouraged him to pursue a career in law since he was a good debater in high school, but the call of God was stronger in his heart.

During his college, graduate, and post-graduate studies, W.A. served churches in out-of-the-way Texas towns like Marlow, White Mound, and Pecan Grove. Years later, in 1944, the historic First Baptist Church of Dallas called Dr. W.A. Criswell to serve as their pastor, and he did so faithfully for the next fifty years. He preached more than four thousand expository sermons, was twice elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention, founded a college, and wrote fifty-four books. Not bad for a boy from Eldorado,



Amos

SEEK GOD AND LIVE

Oklahoma.

I could tell a similar story about a young boy who grew up on a dairy farm in North Carolina and later became one of the greatest evangelists of the twentieth century. Perhaps nobody but God saw the ministry potential in Billy Graham while he was milking his father's cows.

Nearly three thousand years ago, a prophet named Amos described himself by saying, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs" (7:14). One of twelve Minor Prophets in the Old Testament, Amos was not a product of the professional schools that trained prophets. Nor was he born into a family of priests like Jeremiah and Ezekiel; ministry was not the family business. On the other hand, Amos took care of sheep and farmed fig trees. And yet, God chose this fig picker from Tekoa—a small village about ten miles south of Jerusalem—to deliver divine messages to the Northern Kingdom.

Amos took aim at the center of idol worship built by Jeroboam in Bethel. His messages were so stern that Amaziah, the high priest, told Jeroboam that Amos had conspired against the king and nation. He then said to the prophet, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom" (7:12-13). Amos responded with a prophecy against Amaziah, saying that his wife would wander into prostitution, and his sons and daughters would die before Israel went into exile (7:16-17).

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus Christ possesses all authority to judge and restore His people (Amos 9:10-15).

BIG IDEA

Seek God and you will live.

MEMORY VERSE

This is what the Lord says to Israel, "Seek me and live."

AMOS 5:4

AUTHOR and DATE

Amos
755 B.C.



Amos ministered “in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel” (1:1).¹⁰ These were politically and economically prosperous times for the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. However, the divided nation was rotting spiritually from the inside out, and the poor were suffering. God sent Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Jonah to the Northern Kingdom with stern, prophetic words. But Israel did not listen. After Amaziah rebuked Amos, the prophet returned to Judah, where he wrote down eight burdens, three sermons, and five visions he received from the Lord about Israel. Let’s take a closer look.

“For Three Transgressions, and for Four”

Amos means “burden or burden bearer.” He carried the heavy burden of God’s message to six nations plus Israel and Judah and recorded them in chapters 1-2. After comparing God’s word to the roar of a lion (1:2), Amos introduces each burden with poetic flare. To Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, the Amorites, and Moab, he writes, “For three transgressions, and for four.” It was the Lord’s way of saying,

- “Your sins are numerous.”
- “You have crossed a line with Me.”
- “Enough is enough!”
- “This is the last straw!”

The Lord judged these nations for their violence and cruelty, especially toward the weak and poor that they sold into slavery. Each nation heard the Lord say, “I will send fire” (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14, 2:2, 5), a symbol of judgment. The Israelites would have shouted a hearty, “Amen!” and “Praise God!” when they heard the Lord’s prophecies against their enemies. However, the Lord’s attention



Amos

SEEK GOD AND LIVE

quickly turned to the injustices of Israel and Judah.

God held His people accountable for their sins. Using the exact same literary phrase about three and four transgressions, Amos made it clear that Israel was no better than the foreign, pagan nations. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, had rejected God's laws and did not keep His holy statutes (2:4-5). Amos delivered a much longer pronouncement against Israel, the Northern Kingdom (2:6-16).

Israel's list of grievances included social injustices, sexual immorality, and idolatry. Specifically, they sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, trampled the head of the poor, and profaned the Lord's name through gross sexual behavior. Clearly, God grieved when His people cared little for the poor and disregarded His holy statutes. Poetic justice always belongs to the Lord.

“Hear This Word”

In chapters 3-6, Amos records three sermons he delivered to Israel, each beginning with the phrase “Hear this word.” It reminds me of the times Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15), or when the Bible says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Furthermore, it reminds me of when the highway trucker asks his fellow trucker, “Do you have your ears on?” or when a wife says to her husband, “Are you listening to me?”

The first sermon (3:1-15) is a general pronouncement against Israel for her sins. In case God's people had any doubts about the Lord's intention to punish her, Amos records seven sarcastic questions, the answers of which are obviously yes. For example, “Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?” and “Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?” In other



Amos

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words, “Do birds have feathers?” Of course, the Lord will hold you accountable for your sins if you do not repent.

Amos begins the second sermon (4:1-13) with words that were probably not received well by the people. His scathing sarcasm continued when the fig-picker from Tekoa called the wealthy women of Samaria “cows of Bashan” because they oppressed the poor and crushed the needy. These “fat cows” were only concerned about what their husbands would bring them to drink. Coming from a southern rustic like Amos, these words landed like a Don Rickles insult in the hearts of the upper-class. However, Amos warns them of a coming day when the Lord will carry them away with fishhooks.

The Lord goes on to review all the times He tried to persuade Israel to return to Him. For example, “I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest” (4:7-8). In other words, the Lord hurt their agricultural economy to urge them to repent. Does God do such things? Will He mess with my personal economy until I get right with Him? Do birds have feathers? Is the sky blue? Please forgive my sarcasm.

All in all, the Lord recalls five specific times the people “did not return to me” after He laid heavy burdens on them like drought, food scarcity, and pestilence (4:6-11). Israel’s stubbornness makes me wonder if America will return to God after the current global pandemic. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, or after Hurricane Katrina, did America return to God? I pray the Lord never says to us, “After all I did to get your attention, you did not return to me!”

The third sermon (5:1-6:14) highlights more sins of the house of Israel. It begins with a funeral lament that predicts Israel will fall, and only ten percent of the people will survive—that’s a ninety percent causality rate! In the middle of this sermon, the Lord pleads to Israel, “Seek me and live!” (5:4-5), which is the major theme of



Amos

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the book. Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba had become places where people sought pleasure, prosperity, and the pagan gods of foreign nations. The Lord repeats, “Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said” (5:14).

Amos 5:14 is not the first time in our study of the prophets that we have come across Yahweh’s invitation to seek Him. For example, the Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah, “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (Jeremiah 29:13-14). The word “seek” speaks of someone who is on a quest. Are you on a quest for God?

Verse 18 begins two “woes” or warnings that Amos delivers to Israel, one having to do with those who “desire the day of the Lord” (5:18-27) and the other with those who enjoy such ease in Zion that they lie on beds of ivory, sing idle songs, and drink wine from bowls, while the poor and needy suffer (6:1-14). Israel failed the test of prosperity and drifted into idolatry. The Lord declared how much He despised their empty religious rituals (5:21-27) and hated the pride of Jacob (6:8).

“What God Showed Me”

A picture is worth a thousand words, and so is a series of visions from the Lord of the coming judgment upon the Northern Kingdom, which follows Amos’s five sermons (7:1-9:10). Amos averted the first two disasters, locusts and fire, by interceding on behalf of Israel, providing us with a compelling lesson in the power of prayer.



Amos

SEEK GOD AND LIVE

The Lord showed Amos a plumb line in the third vision and compared it to Israel, which was clearly crooked (7:7-9). In the fourth vision (8:1-3), the Lord pictured Israel as a basket of summer fruit, suggesting she was ripe for judgment. Finally, Amos saw the Lord standing next to the altar, indicting Israel for her dishonesty and despicable treatment of the poor (9:1-10). Is there any hope for Israel?

Unlike other prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, who weave prophetic promises throughout their writings, Amos waits until the very end of his book to offer Israel a future and a hope, beginning in 9:8 when the Lord says, “I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob.” Yahweh continues by saying, “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” (9:11-12).

Circle the words “repair,” “raise up,” and “rebuild.” They point to a time when the Lord will restore Israel under the rule of a Davidic king in fulfillment of the covenant He made with David (9:11). Restoration will happen despite the ten tribes of Israel who broke away from the Davidic dynasty nearly a century earlier to form the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam’s evil rule and despite the Assyrians who would take Israel captive in the years to come.

This future reunification will happen when Jesus Messiah returns and establishes His Millennial Kingdom. At that time, the Lord will restore the fortunes of Israel and plant them on their land, never to be uprooted again. On that glorious day, “the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it” (9:11-15).

God can and does use unlikely people from out-of-the-way places to accomplish His work. Wallie Amos Criswell from Eldorado, Oklahoma was an example of this. Amos, the fig-picker from Tekoa,



Amos

SEEK GOD AND LIVE

was too. Both men spent their lives pleading with people to seek God and live.

OUTLINE	1-2	3-6	7:1-9:10	9:11-15
FOCUS	8 Burdens	3 Sermons	5 Visions	3 Promises
THEMES	“For three transgressions, even for four”	“Therefore, hear this word”	“This is what the Lord God showed me”	“I will restore the fortunes of my people”
KEY VERSE	1:2	5:4	7:14	9:14



Obadiah

SOVEREIGN JUSTICE

Family Feud is one of the longest-running and most popular game shows on television. Created by Mark Goodson in 1976, the Hollywood hit premiered with legendary host Richard Dawson. While the game show is fun and lighthearted, real family feuds are serious business, especially when the conflict happens between two members of the same family.

In Bible times, a conflict between twin brothers named Esau and Jacob began in their mother's womb (Genesis 25:19-26). Esau (meaning "red") was the firstborn, but Jacob entered this world as the second child born to Isaac and Rebekah while grabbing his older brother's heel with his hand. When the boys were much older, Jacob, the heel-grabber, deceived Esau into giving up his natural birthright and the paternal blessings that came with it. Weary from hunting all day, Esau returned home famished and was willing to trade anything to satisfy his hungry flesh, including his inheritance for a pot of red stew prepared by his brother.¹¹

Isaac favored Esau, his firstborn son, but Rebekah preferred Jacob. However, to everyone's surprise, God had chosen Jacob to inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, although in Judaism, the firstborn son always carried significance (Genesis



Obadiah

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12:1-3, Romans 9:10-12). With this Old Testament story certainly in His memory, Jesus taught about the kingdom of God by saying, “So the last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16). Only a sovereign God could make Jacob first.

Esau and Jacob spent most of their lives not speaking to each other, with only a few exceptions. Esau was red-hot angry at Jacob, and Jacob feared that his brother would seek revenge (Genesis 32-33). The family feud ran so deep that even the twin’s descendants did not get along for centuries afterward.

For example, the Edomites, Esau’s descendants, refused Moses’s request to pass through their land on the way to Canaan, even though Moses appealed to the king as “your brother Israel” (Numbers 20:14-20). Later, the Edomites also opposed Israel’s kings, including Saul (1 Samuel 14:47), Solomon (1 Kings 11:14-25), and Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:22). They took up arms, fought against King David (1 Kings 11:14-17), and rebelled against Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:8). Esau always held his hand against Jacob.

The Rose City

The Edomites settled in a mountainous region south of the Dead Sea called Mount Seir, of which Petra (Sela) was the capital, also known as the “Rose City” for the beautiful red-colored rock from which the builders carved the ancient city.¹² Petra is nearly impregnable by enemy armies because of the single entrance to the city, a narrow crevice called the Siq that meanders for nearly one mile through towering mountain walls.¹³

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus Christ will judge the nations, be a Savior to Israel, and establish His kingdom.

BIG IDEA

Sovereign God will judge those who do violence to Israel.

MEMORY VERSE

“Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall come over you, and you shall be cut off forever.”

OBADIAH 1:10

AUTHOR AND DATE

Obadiah
841 B.C.



Obadiah

SOVEREIGN JUSTICE

About five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the Nabateans, a Bedouin tribe, overtook the Edomites who withdrew to Idumea in southern Palestine. Afterward, Petra grew and became a glorious Arab capital. In time, the Romans overtook the region, followed by the Byzantines.¹⁴ Edom disappeared as a nation around 150 B.C. However, a small number of Esau's descendants remained, including an Edomite who rose to power in 37 B.C. named Herod the Great. The enmity between Esau and Jacob continued when Herod tried to murder Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12).

That background helps us understand the book of Obadiah, which is our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Obadiah is the smallest book in the Old Testament, with only twenty-one verses. However, the prophet Obadiah, which we know little about historically, delivered an important prophecy about the Edomites.¹⁵ He also gave the descendants of Jacob hope that God would eventually pour out His sovereign justice upon any nation that harmed Israel, including the descendants of Esau, Jacob's older brother.

Edom's Pride

Obadiah begins with these stunning words: "The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: 'Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!'" (1:1). In the verses that follow (1:2-9), the Lord takes direct aim at Edom's pride.

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, in your lofty dwelling, 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, from there I will bring you down, declares the Lord. 1:2-4



Obadiah

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The certainty of Edom's doom is stated very clearly in 1:2-4. Edom's pride soared as high as eagles fly because they lived in a lofty place, "in the clefts of the rock," in a place they thought was fortified against their enemies. Esau's descendants believed they were incapable of being conquered. Their national slogan could have been, "We are strong! We are invincible! We are Edom! However, they met their match in the Lord, who despises pride and brings low those who think too highly of themselves. First Corinthians 10:12 warns, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

Through Obadiah, the Lord continues to describe Edom's sure fate.

If thieves came to you, if plunderers came by night—how you have been destroyed!—would they not steal only enough for themselves? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out! All your allies have driven you to your border; those at peace with you have deceived you; they have prevailed against you; those who eat your bread have set a trap beneath you—you have no understanding. Will I not on that day, declares 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. 1:5-9

Unlike other prophets, Obadiah offers no hope for the Edomites. Absent are any pleas to return to God or promises for a faithful remnant. If Edom was in a court of law, this is like the final sentencing after a lengthy trial. But why? Let's read on.

Edom's Violence Against His Brother

Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day



Obadiah

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that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. But do not gloat over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; do not boast in the day of distress. Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity; do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity. Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress. 1:10-14

When other nations attacked Israel, Jacob's brother did nothing! The Edomites stood at a distance and watched as foreigners brought disaster upon God's people and plundered them. By not getting involved and defending their own family, the Edomites "were like one of them," practically gloating over Israel's misfortune. Their smug and malicious satisfaction over Israel's affliction angered the Lord and sealed their fate. Today, a similar attitude toward Israel called antisemitism still angers the Lord.

Obadiah links Edom's pride to the impending day of the Lord, about which most Old Testament prophets speak.

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 on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually; they shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been. 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 for the house of Esau, for the Lord has spoken. 1:15-18

On the day of the Lord, Edom will experience the principle of reciprocity. Obadiah says, "As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head."



Obadiah

SOVEREIGN JUSTICE

In 586 B.C., the Edomites cheered from afar when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Jerusalem and razed the city. Much later, in the first century A.D., the Idumeans participated in the rebellion against Rome. Ironically, their day of the Lord came when Jerusalem fell to Titus in 70 A.D., and Esau's descendants died trying to defend the holy city. Since that time, there has been "no survivor for the house of Esau" (1:18).

Jacob's Victory

The point of Obadiah's prophecy is that God's sovereign justice will ultimately prevail. Israel will get back all that her enemies have stolen from her, including the land God promised. Furthermore, the nations who hate and harm Jacob and his descendants will pay an eternal price. Wiped off the face of the earth, the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, are a poignant example of this.

Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah shall possess the land of the Philistines; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria, and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. The exiles of this host of the people of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negeb. Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's. 1:19-21

In the end, Israel wins, and she will possess all the land God promised her. The last six words of Obadiah's brief prophecy say it all, "The kingdom shall be the Lord's." This will happen at the end of the age when Jesus Messiah returns and establishes His millennial kingdom. In the meantime, He builds His kingdom in the hearts of true believers.

I can think of at least three ways to apply Obadiah's ancient prophecy to our lives today. First, *resolve your family feuds*. It is always



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better to resolve a conflict than dissolve a relationship. Before you decide you will never talk to your brother or sister ever again, take a deep breath and reattempt reconciliation. Be the peacemaker in your family (Matthew 5:9). Before you call a divorce lawyer, think twice about the long-term, generational implications of your decision, and do your part to forgive and reconcile.

The second way to apply Obadiah's prophecy to our lives today is to *love and defend Israel*. Woe to the person or nation that hates and hurts Israel and the Jewish people. Woe to Hitler! Woe to Hamas! Woe to Hezbollah! Woe to any anti-Semite! A sure way to get on my bad side is to do harm to one of my children. Likewise, Obadiah reminds us that anyone will land on God's bad side if we inflict or wish harm on His children of Israel, the chosen descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The third way to apply the book of Obadiah is to understand that *Bible prophecy is one hundred percent trustworthy*. God wiped Esau and his descendants off the face of the earth, as He said He would. The Edomites have been gone since 70 A.D. In case there are any doubts about their final extinction, the Lord made it clear that He would tear down anything they build (Malachi 1:2-4).

OUTLINE	1:1-9	1:10-14	1:15-18	1:19-21
FOCUS	Edom's Pride	Edom's Violence	Edom's Defeat	Israel's Victory
KEY VERSE	1:3	1:10	1:15	1:21



Jonah

THE BIGGEST FISH STORY EVER TOLD

Fishermen are among the greatest storytellers in the world. Did you hear the tale about the big fish that got away? Many fishermen stand next to their catch and snap a photo because we cannot always believe the tales they tell. The photo is proof their fish story is true.

The Bible contains the biggest fish story ever told about a runaway prophet named Jonah who got swallowed by a big fish, perhaps a whale, and lived to talk about it. But is it true? No photos exist of Jonah standing next to the whale that swallowed him or of the whale spitting Jonah out of its mouth. Can we believe Jonah's fish story? If it is true, why does it matter?

For what it's worth, a veteran lobster diver named Michael Packard tells a fish story similar to Jonah's. A little before eight o'clock in the morning on June 11, 2021, Packard recalls swimming with schools of sand lances and strippers about ten feet from the ocean floor off the coast of Massachusetts, an area where humpback whales come to feed. Commercial lobster divers like Packard plunge deep into the ocean off Cape Cod and snatch lobsters off the sandy bottom.

"All of a sudden, I felt this huge shove and the next thing I knew it was completely black," Packard said after his release from



Jonah

THE BIGGEST FISH STORY EVER TOLD

Cape Cod Hospital in Hyannis. “I could sense I was moving, and I could feel the whale squeezing with the muscles in his mouth.”¹⁶ Less than a minute later, Packard saw light again as the whale expelled him from its mouth.

Fact or Fish Story?

Fish stories like Packard’s (there are others) should convince us of the plausibility of Jonah’s experience. However, much skepticism still exists about Jonah’s fish tale.¹⁷

Despite reasonable skepticism and anecdotal evidence, good reasons exist to believe Jonah’s fish tale is fact, not fiction. For example, Jonah was a real person in history, not a make-believe character like Mad Hatter or Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*. The book does not say, “Once upon a time there was a man named Jonah,” as we might expect of a fairytale. Rather, it begins by placing Jonah in historical context (1:1). Second Kings 14:25 also mentions Jonah historically as “the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher,” which was located three miles north of Nazareth in the Galilee region. Jonah lived during the time of King Jeroboam II (782-752 B.C.), who reigned after Elisha’s ministry and before Amos and Hosea.

Furthermore, two respected scholars from the first century named Philo and Josephus wrote about Jonah as though he was a real person who lived in a real place and time. The catacombs of Rome feature Jonah’s story as real and historical. Thus, it should not surprise us that the literary form of the book is historic narrative, not fable or allegory, which is

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jonah’s experience in the fish’s belly is a type of death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:40).

BIG IDEA

God so loved the world.

MEMORY VERSE

“In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.”
JONAH 2:2

AUTHOR AND DATE

Jonah
760 B.C.



Jonah

THE BIGGEST FISH STORY EVER TOLD

significant to consider when interpreting the book of Jonah.

Jesus also affirmed the historicity of Jonah. Surprisingly, He established His credibility and linked His future resurrection to the fish story. In response to the Pharisees who demanded a sign from Him, Jesus said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here” (Matthew 12:39-41).¹⁸

Besides the anecdotal evidence and more, Jonah’s fish tale is believable because the Christian worldview is supernatural; it presupposes divine intervention and miracles. In other words, nothing is impossible for God. However, Jonah’s story still leaves us wondering why this book is among the Old Testament Minor Prophets and how the biggest fish story ever told relates to the Christian faith.

The Call of God

The book begins with Jonah receiving specific instructions from the Lord. “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their evil has come up before me’” (1:1-2).

Jonah is the only Hebrew prophet in the Old Testament sent by God to a Gentile nation. He reminds us that God has a missionary’s heart and a plan for the Gentiles, a lesson the apostle Peter had difficulty learning (Acts 10-11). Jonah is the Old Testament book that reminds us “God so loved the world,” including the Gentiles.

Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian empire, which had a reputation for strength and brutality, though at Jonah’s time



Jonah

THE BIGGEST FISH STORY EVER TOLD

they had not reached the zenith of their power. Still, God calling Jonah to Nineveh was like him telling us to pack our bags, move to Afghanistan, and preach the gospel to the Taliban. No wonder Jonah ran away. The wickedness of the Assyrians had reached the Lord's nostrils and smelled to the high heavens!

Verse 3 says, "But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord." Geographically, Tarshish was west, and Nineveh was northeast, nearly in the exact opposite direction. Jonah ran from God's call and thought he could run from God's presence (Psalm 139:7-12). But he ran into a big storm and paid a huge price for his disobedience. The word "down" appears four times in chapter one to describe Jonah's physical and spiritual decline (1:3, 5).

God planned a perfect storm for the purpose of intercepting the runaway prophet, who was now sleeping in the hull of the ship. It must have been a storm-of-the-century because it frightened the seasoned sailors on board the ship. However, while living completely out of the will of God, Jonah slept peacefully, a sure sign that he was in a dangerous spiritual place. God also appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah as the seasoned sailors tossed him overboard in a superstitious attempt to satisfy Jonah's god and quell the storm (1:4-16).

How to Pray from the Belly of a Fish

Nearly one fourth of the book is a prayer Jonah voiced "from inside the fish" (2:1-10). Jonah cried out from the depths of his despair, and he did so by rejoicing that God heard his prayer. "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and



Jonah

THE BIGGEST FISH STORY EVER TOLD

the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me” (2:2-3).

Let’s give Jonah credit for praying. But too many of us pray only when we find ourselves in trouble like the runaway prophet.

Jonah knew God’s word well enough to fill his prayer with words from Scripture. From memory, he recites phrases from Psalm 18:6, 31:22, and 42:7, demonstrating the power of hiding God’s word deeply in our hearts so that we can retrieve it at the right time (Psalm 119:11). The practice of praying God’s own words back to Him always centers our supplications in the will of God.

Amazingly, Jonah’s prayer shines like a bright light in a dark place—the deep, swampy belly of the fish. The runaway prophet accepts the Lord’s discipline (2:3-6), anticipates the Almighty lifting him out of the pit (2:6), remembers the Lord’s holy temple (2:7), denounces idols (2:8), gives thanks, (2:9), promises to pay his vows (2:9), and acknowledges the Lord’s salvation by saying, “Salvation belongs to the Lord” (2:9). In other words, “Lord, only you can save me from this mess!” This is the prayer of a repentant man who is looking up to heaven from the bottom of the ocean.

Chapter two ends by stirring our imagination with what happened to Jonah next, “And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto the dry land” (2:10).

A Second Chance to Say Yes to God

Chapter 3 begins with these familiar words, “Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.’ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord” (3:1-3). The same call from God came to the same prophet, telling him to go to the same people with the same message. Fortunately, the God of the Bible is all about second chances.

Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*, once described the



Christian life as “a long obedience in the same direction.” Until now, Jonah’s journey was a short disobedience in the wrong direction. But it was not too late for the runaway prophet to change course and do the right thing—run in God’s direction! That meant going straight to Nineveh, which Jonah did.¹⁹

My sanctified imagination runs wild, picturing a wild-eyed prophet entering Nineveh like a street preacher with an urgent message. Jonah is weary from the four-hundred-mile journey that he traveled back toward the capital city. His flesh has bleach marks from the acid wash his body received while inside the belly of the great fish. He stinks like Charlie the Tuna. If Jonah’s smell and appearance did not turn the Ninevites away from him, surely his message would. He delivered eight words laced with fire-breathing judgment, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (3:4).

God gave Nineveh only forty days to turn from their wicked ways. Surprisingly, the Bible says in the next verse, “And the people of Nineveh believed God” (3:5). The Ninevites wasted no time by sitting around and discussing the prophet’s message; instead, they acted upon it immediately. They called a fast and wore sackcloth. Even the king took off his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then, the king issued a royal proclamation, urging man and beast to do the same and “call out mightily to God” (3:8). When God saw how the Ninevite’s responded, He relented of the disaster.

The Pouting Prophet

The Ninevite’s response marked the second of two spiritual awakenings in the book of Jonah. The first great awakening took place among the frightened sailors who turned from their idols to serve the true and living God (1:16). By repenting, the pagan sailors and Ninevites did what the Israelites, God’s chosen people, did not do before calamity fell upon them.



Jonah

THE BIGGEST FISH STORY EVER TOLD

While the Ninevites' response was cause for rejoicing, Jonah was not happy with the positive result of his ministry. In fact, 4:1 says, "It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry." Anger is an odd response, but Jonah's prayer reveals why he was so outraged, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live" (4:2-3).

Instead of rejoicing that the Ninevites turned from their wickedness to God, Jonah engaged in self-pity by pouting. He took more interest in a growing plant that provided shade for his head than the one hundred and twenty thousand people who needed God. The Lord mocked the prophet for pouting, and then God defended His right to pour His gracious pity upon the Ninevites (4:4-11).

The book of Jonah is truly the greatest fish story ever told. From it, we learn that God's call is irrevocable, God's presence is inescapable, and God's grace is irresistible.

OUTLINE	1	2	3	4
FOCUS	God's Call Jonah Runs	God's Presence Jonah Prays	God's Call Jonah Obeys	God's Grace Jonah Pouts
LOCATIONS	Joppa	Tarshish	Nineveh	Nineveh
KEY VERSE	1:17	2:1	3:1	4:10-11



Micah

WHAT THE LORD REQUIRES

Let's play Jeopardy! The category is Roman Mythology for \$100. *She wears a blindfold and holds a set of scales in one hand.* If you answer, "Who is Lady Justice?" you are correct. For centuries, the goddess of justice has been the symbol of due process in democratic societies worldwide. Lady Justice wears a blindfold so that facts and evidence tip the scales of justice instead of bias and personal preference.

Many Old Testament prophets, including Micah, speak against the social and economic injustices laid upon poor and weak people by the powerful rulers in their day. The verse most Bible readers associate with Micah reads, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8).

Today, we hear many cries for social justice. So-called justice warriors talk, protest, and sometimes riot in the streets in the hopes of making massive societal changes that tip the scales more evenly between the rich and poor, the powerful and weak, the advantaged and disadvantaged. Social justice sounds good. Who can argue against it? Even the American way speaks of "justice for all."

But is today's social justice the same cry for justice heard from



Micah

WHAT THE LORD REQUIRES

the Lord's prophets? If the Lord requires us to do justice, how do we achieve that? What are the means and methods of biblical justice? The prophet Micah helps us think through these questions.

Micah of Moresheth

The book begins, "The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem" (1:1). Like Amos, Micah was a country preacher from a small, rural town about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem on the border of Judah and Philistia, near Gath. He is among the Old Testament prophets that we can set within a specific historical context.

Micah, the justice warrior, grew up in a humble place far from the ruling elite. He aimed his ministry toward anybody who might use their social, economic, or political power for personal gain, and in doing so, abuse the poor and weak. He boldly took the Lord's prophetic message to the capital cities of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, Samaria and Jerusalem. Micah held nothing back when targeting the corrupt rulers, false prophets, and immoral priests of his day.

Though considered a minor prophet, Micah's ministry resembles Isaiah's—a major prophet who proclaimed God's word during the same time. They probably knew each other and perhaps compared prophetic notes in Jerusalem, which is why some of their messages sound similar. For example, Micah 4:1-3 is nearly identical to Isaiah 2:1-4.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The prophecy about the birthplace of Messiah, Bethlehem, was made 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ (Micah 5:2).

BIG IDEA

God requires of His people justice, kindness, and humility.

MEMORY VERSE

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

MICAH 6:8

AUTHOR AND DATE

Micah
700 B.C.



Of course, Isaiah's ministry stature was enormous. But one hundred years after Micah's smaller ministry, some of Jerusalem's elders quoted the lesser-known prophet during their defense of Jeremiah after his blistering temple sermon (Jeremiah 26:17-19). Others called for Jeremiah's execution after he was arrested for preaching about the destruction of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 7, 26). The elder's citation of Micah 3:12 worked, sparing Jeremiah's life; it also extended the influence of Micah from Moresheth.

Micah expressed his prophetic call in 3:8, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." Like other men who spoke for God in the Old Testament, Micah weaves the Lord's promises of hope and restoration into his judgment-laced prophecies. Each major section of the seven-chapter book begins with the word "hear," imploring us to listen carefully to the Lord's prophet. Let's take a closer look at what God reveals (1-2), how God rules (3-5), and what God requires (6-7).

What God Reveals

In chapters 1-2, Micah delivers a message "for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel" (1:5). He uses stark imagery to describe the Lord's intended purpose, to "tread upon the high places of the earth," a reference to the Almighty One crushing the idolatrous worship sites with His presence. When the Lord comes out of His place, "the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place" (1:4). Of Samaria, Micah says, "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" (1:7). God does not mess around with idolatry.

In 1:10-16, Micah uses words with similar sounds or closely related meanings. We miss the wordplay in the English translation,



but the prophet's creativity is obvious in the original Hebrew language. Micah mentions ten cities in these verses, all of them are in the Shephelah, a rural region southwest of Jerusalem that surrounds Moresheth, Micah's hometown. In other words, Micah directs his first message to his rural neighbors, a reminder that the mission field begins in our neighborhood, too.

Chapter 2 begins with the word “woe,” signaling a strong warning to the oppressors, “those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds!” (2:1). Micah has in mind, for example, the ruling elite who covet a man's house and then exercise their power to seize his inheritance. Sound familiar? The Lord will not tolerate such injustices, especially when furthered by the leaders themselves. “Therefore thus says the Lord: behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks, and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster” (2:3).

After the Lord's clear warnings, Micah ends his first message with the hope of future restoration. “I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men” (2:12).

How God Rules

The next major section of prophetic messages (3-5) decries Israel's leadership and then points to a future ruler in Israel who will be born in Bethlehem. Can you guess who the ruler “from ancient days” might be? Micah starts by denouncing the faulty political rulers (3:1-4) and then takes aim at the false prophets (3:5-8). He lumps them together as those who “detest justice and make crooked all that is straight” (3:9-13).

Everything rises and falls on leadership. However, it is never easy to find good, faithful, and trustworthy leaders. Nations languish when feckless people who lack integrity and detest justice assume



leadership positions. Thus, in Micah's time, the Lord said Jerusalem "shall become a heap of ruins" if the political rulers and religious leaders did not get their act together (3:13).

Chapter 4 stands at the midpoint of the book and rises like Mount Everest above the rhetorical dark clouds of the previous chapters. It opens by describing a bright and glorious time of future restoration for Yahweh's people happening "in the last days" (4:1). It will be a time of peace when the nations of the world "will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (4:3). A time of peace like this will require new leadership, which brings us to chapter 5 and Micah's famous Christmas prophecy.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. 5:2²⁰

This prophecy refers to a shepherd-ruler (5:4-5) who was born in Bethlehem seven hundred years later. Jesus Christ came first as a suffering servant but will return at the end of the age as a glorious king to establish His peaceful, millennial kingdom on earth. The contrast between the disastrous political and religious leadership of Micah's time and the future Messianic ruler cannot be underestimated.

What God Requires

Like Isaiah 1, the last major section of Micah opens with a lawsuit against Israel, who has broken her covenant with God. This brings us full circle to what the Lord requires of His people.

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord 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?” He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (6:6-8).

In contrast to meaningless religious ritual, God requires justice, kindness, and humility of His people. The word translated “kindness” is that beautiful Hebrew word *hesed*, which speaks of loyal, faithful love. Kindness is rare and underrated. We need more kindness in the world today (Ephesians 4:30). We also need more humility. God rejects the proud of heart and destroys the strongholds they build (Proverbs 18:12; James 4:6).

The words of an athletic legend who played in the National Basketball Association caught my attention this week. Shaquille O’Neal, commonly known as “Shaq,” rejected the proud, celebrity wokeness in Hollywood by saying, “These celebrities are going freaking crazy, and I don’t want to be one. Just because I made it doesn’t mean I’m bigger than you, smarter than you. Just because I have more money doesn’t mean I’m better than you.” Three cheers for the humble Hall of Famer, who led his teams to win four NBA championships!

Finally, God requires justice because injustice is sin. Make no mistake about that. Let’s return to our earlier discussion about the present cry for social justice and tread carefully around the term. Today, social justice does not mean what we think it means. This is no time for freedom-loving people to wear blindfolds.

Social justice, as it is meant today, refers to the state redistribution of wealth, resources, and opportunities for the purpose of achieving equal outcomes for disparate groups. Social justice replaces individual freedoms with group mandates. Today’s social justice warriors want to achieve “equity” (equal outcomes), not equality (equal opportunity).

An equal outcome is the aim of socialism and communism; whereas, free-market capitalism, the American way, offers an equal



Micah

WHAT THE LORD REQUIRES

opportunity for all who desire to work hard and chase their American dream. Various outcomes result from free-market capitalism because people have different skills, abilities, and aspirations. But different economic or education outcomes are not necessarily the result of injustice unless the fight for equality is failing.

However, none of what social justice warriors fight for today has anything to do with biblical justice, which we must contrast with social justice. According to Voddie Baucham—a pastor, theologian, and prophetic voice worth listening to today—biblical justice is the application of God’s righteous standard equally to all people, places, and circumstances.²¹ Reread that last sentence and think about it deeply.

Thus, the unequal application of God’s righteous standard leads to oppression and injustice, which is why Christians, like Micah, should be the best and most engaged justice warriors. But today, God’s people must do so with discernment, steering clear of those who use the cry for social justice as a Trojan Horse to introduce Marxism, which has a long, terrible history of destroying human lives and stealing individual freedoms.

Let’s play Double Jeopardy! This time, the category is Prophets for \$1000. *He was a justice warrior from a small town who told us what the Lord requires.* If you answer, “Who is Micah of Moresheth?” you are incorrect. If you answer, “Who is Jesus of Bethlehem?” you are listening carefully to the prophetic voices of the Old Testament Minor Prophets.

OUTLINE	1:1-20	2:1-27	2:28-3:21
AIM	What God Reveals Judgment	How God Rules Messiah	What God Requires Justice
KEY VERSE	3:8	5:2	6:8



Nahum

SLOW TO ANGER

The wrath of God is one of those subjects that preachers frequently avoid. Understandably, most people would rather hear about God's love, grace, and mercy—and most preachers want to be liked by their congregation. Therefore, a steady diet of feel-good messages fills many pulpits today. Plus, sermons that empower us to reach our full destiny in Christ are never in short supply. However, advertise a Sunday sermon titled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” and see how many people choose a day at the beach.

Respected theologian J.I. Packer says, “The church mumbles on about God's kindness but says virtually nothing about his judgment.”²² Is that because God's wrath suggests He is cruel and lacking in self-control? If God is wrathful, does He need to attend an anger management class? On the contrary, the wrath of God speaks of the just and righteous consequences laid upon unbelievers who ultimately reject God's offer of love, grace, and mercy. The first expression of divine wrath was when God expelled Adam from paradise after he had chosen to disobey God and hid in the bushes (Genesis 3).

The prophet Nahum delivered another expression of God's wrath in the Bible.²³ In three chapters, he proclaimed the divine verdict



Nahum

SLOW TO ANGER

upon the evil Ninevites, to whom Jonah preached more than one hundred years earlier. Begrudgingly, Jonah witnessed a great spiritual awakening among the Ninevites.²⁴ However, the Assyrians' repentance was short-lived. They quickly returned to their pagan gods and cruelty. Thus, the Lord sent Nahum with a seething oracle that prophesied their eventual doom.

God's Wrath

Nahum's brief proclamation is about one subject—the destruction of Nineveh, the mighty metropolis of the awesome Assyrian empire (1:1). Long before the apostle Paul asked us to consider the “goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22), God sent two prophets to Nineveh. From Jonah, the Ninevites learned about Yahweh's goodness and grace (Jonah 4:2); however, Nahum warned subsequent Ninevite generations about God's impending severity after they returned to the evil ways of their forefathers.

Both Jonah and Nahum mention that God is “slow to anger.” But more than a century after Jonah, Nahum adds, “The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. ... and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty” (1:2-3a). As disturbing as this sounds, a complete understanding of God's character must include His jealousy, vengeance, and wrath.

However, the Lord's jealousy, unlike ours, is never petty. On Mount Sinai, Yahweh established His prohibition about worshipping other gods, “for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity

CHRIST CONNECTION

As described in 1:2-8, Christ is the Judge of the nations at His Second Coming.

BIG IDEA

Though God is slow to anger, His divine wrath will ultimately fall upon evildoers who reject Him.

MEMORY VERSE

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

NAHUM 1:3

AUTHOR AND DATE

Nahum
663-612 B.C.



Nahum

SLOW TO ANGER

of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:5-6). The Lord is jealous for His holy name; He protects it like a corporation guards its brand.

Also, keep in mind that “vengeance belongs to the Lord” (Romans 12:19). Unlike us, when the Lord avenges His holy name, He does so without spite. He is not unpredictable, nor does He erupt like Mount Vesuvius. Instead, He patiently administers absolute justice while in full control, in His own way, and at the right time. By no means will He acquit the guilty. Make no mistake about that. However, His first desire is to show mercy, extend grace, and forgive our iniquity. The Lord is truly slow to anger, but when sinners continue in their stubborn defiance of the Almighty, beware of His wrath.

Nineveh’s Doom

Using vivid imagery from nature, Nahum continues to describe the Lord’s wrath and Nineveh’s doom in 1:3-8. His description reminds me of the warning in Hebrews 12:29, which reads, “For our God is a consuming fire.” For sure, Nineveh was doomed. This time, God’s prophet offered no hope for a repentant remnant. Nahum teaches that though God is slow to anger, His righteous wrath will ultimately fall upon His enemies, which deserves sober consideration by proud people and arrogant nations.

Does God have enemies? If He does, who are His enemies? An enemy of God is one who opposes the presence and purposes of God in this world.²⁵ Psalm 92:9 says, “For behold, your enemies, O Lord, for behold, your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered.” Nahum says the Lord “will pursue his enemies into darkness” and “make a complete end of his adversaries” (1:8). This reality should make each of us carefully examine ourselves.

Jesus called His disciples “my friends” (John 15:15). We were



Nahum

SLOW TO ANGER

God's enemies before we became His children and friends by faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:10; John 1:12). However, the Bible warns believers, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Are you acting like God's friend or enemy?

Throughout his brief book, Nahum describes the future desolation of Nineveh with vivid literary eloquence. In chapter 2, he pictures an army, which he calls "the scatterer," coming against Nineveh with red shields and scarlet uniforms. Their chariots "race madly through the streets" of the city, and their spears glitter in the sun, appearing like flashes of lightning. A flood overruns the city, washing away the wall and aiding the entrance of Nineveh's enemy.

God says He will personally dig Nineveh's grave (1:14). No wonder "hearts melt and knees tremble; anguish is in all loins; all faces grow pale!" (2:10). All who hear about Nineveh's destruction "clap their hands" because they have all received her cruelty (3:19).

Through Nahum, the Lord holds nothing back when He says to the Assyrians, "Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions. I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall no longer be heard" (2:13). The Lord says to the Ninevites, "I am against you," a second time in 3:5.

Historians tell us that Jonathan Edwards employed vivid imagery in his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," to describe God's power and wrath, the horrors of hell, and the helplessness of humans. For example, he pictured God dangling humans like spiders over a fire. People wept during the sermon, and God used the fire and brimstone message to spark a great spiritual awakening in New England.

The destruction of Nineveh, God's ancient enemy, was no small thing. When the Babylonians fell upon Nineveh in 612 B.C., Nineveh was a vast capital city, and the Assyrians had reached the peak of their power and prosperity. According to Jonah, the city was "exceedingly



Nahum

SLOW TO ANGER

great” and took three days to cross (Jonah 3:3). Archeologists believe the city was nearly three hundred and fifty square miles—the size of a modern metropolis like Dallas or London! The walls of the city reached one hundred feet into the sky and were broad enough at the top for three chariots to ride side-by-side. Fifteen hundred towers fortified the city walls, each two hundred feet tall.²⁶

Nineveh was also vile and notoriously brutal. For example, Nahum compared the evil empire to a lion that tears apart its prey and feeds his lionesses (2:11-12). Nineveh was truly an awesome spectacle. Nobody in the ancient world thought the great city would ever fall.

The Tower of Babel reminds us that evil accelerates when fallen humanity gathers in large numbers in a single location (Genesis 11). That was certainly true of the Assyrian capital. Jonah mentions one hundred and twenty thousand people in Nineveh who could not discern between their left and right hand, probably a reference to the number of infants (Jonah 4:16). Conservatively, imagine Nineveh with a total population of nearly one million people at the time of Jonah and more during Nahum’s ministry a century later.

Nineveh is an archetype of all proud cities and nations who reject God. Think of this: God chose small, insignificant, underserving Israel to showcase His love and grace; He chose wicked, deserving Nineveh to demonstrate His righteous wrath.

The extent of Nineveh’s downfall was swift and breathtaking. Not until 1845 did archeologists even find a trace of the ancient Ninevites. So complete was her destruction that for centuries many scholars believed Nineveh was like Wonderland, Neverland, or mythical Atlantis. Bible critics used stories about Nineveh to fuel their unbelief. In time, archeology caught up to what God already knew, validating the prophecies of Jonah and Nahum.



Nahum

SLOW TO ANGER

Nahum's Comfort

Nahum offered no hope or comfort to the Ninevites. This was the Lord's final verdict on the ancient city. A final verdict also awaits all the enemies of God at the end of the age when the dead, great and small, stand before the Great White Throne. At that time, the Bible says, "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15). Is your name written in the book of life?

However, Nahum's name means "comfort," opening the door for Judah's consolation and ours. Amid Nahum's opening rant about the wrath of God, he inserts these words, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him" (1:7). The goodness of God shines like a brilliant diamond against the black backdrop of divine wrath. To those who take refuge in God, He is good all the time (Romans 8:28).

Considering Nahum's stirring prophecy about the wrath of God, now is the time to place your faith in Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead—"Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The good news of the gospel is that believers are saved from God's wrath through faith in the atoning provision of Jesus Christ's death upon the cross. God loves us so much that He "sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10; Hebrews 2:17).²⁷

Has justice eluded you? Have evildoers gotten the upper hand? The psalmist Asaph expressed similar concerns when he "saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3). The ancient worship leader's perspective changed when he entered the sanctuary of God and "discerned their end" (Psalm 73:17). Likewise, knowing that God will deliver ultimate justice upon evil people provides believers with some measure of comfort.

Also, in contrast to the words "I am against you," which God spoke twice to the Ninevites, believers in Jesus Christ can take comfort



Nahum

SLOW TO ANGER

in these truthful words found in the New Testament, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Finally, how the Lord was “slow to anger” with the Ninevites reminds me of these words found in the New Testament, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20).

OUTLINE	1	2	3
FOCUS	Decree of God's Wrath	Destruction of Nineveh	Divine Verdict Upon Nineveh
KEY VERSE	1:3	2:13	3:19



Habakkuk

WHY, GOD?

A Danish philosopher named Soren Kierkegaard believed we should define life backward while living it forward. That sounds like something a philosopher would say, but it leaves me wondering how. Perhaps if life was like the game show Jeopardy, it might be a lot easier to live. In Jeopardy, the host gives the answer; in response, the contestants must state the question. Unfortunately, life is not like Jeopardy. Instead, we search for answers to our burning questions about life, much like an Old Testament Minor Prophet named Habakkuk.

Habakkuk is a prophet of a different kind. He spoke to God for the people instead of preaching to the people for God. Also, Habakkuk dared to question God about the many injustices of life. Essentially, he put God on trial. Like a prosecuting attorney, the ancient prophet cross-examined the God of Israel, searching for answers to the questions that caused God's people to doubt their faith. He examined the violence, evil, and injustice in the world and simply asked, "Why, God?" For that reason, I call him "the question mark prophet."

We know little about Habakkuk personally. Mystery shrouds his life and ministry. We know that he was an official member of



Habakkuk

WHY, GOD?

the religious community. The musical notes found in chapter three suggest that he might have also been a worship leader. We know from 1:1 that many questions burden Habakkuk's heart. "The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw" could also be translated "the burden which Habakkuk the prophet saw." One Bible commentary describes Habakkuk this way:

*Habakkuk was a person of great faith and great courage who dared to take the theological teaching of his day and test it against the experiences of his own personal life and of the nation. ... He refused to have simply a faith of the fathers that he received without reflection. ... He stands in a long line of godly people who dared to question God.*²⁸

Are you standing in that same line? Are you burdened by questions that cause your faith to falter? If you are, Habakkuk will encourage you to cling firmly to God and embrace Him by faith, even when life does not make sense. Habakkuk's strange Hebrew name, derived from the verb *habaq*, means "one who embraces." At the end of the book, the prophet embraces his refreshed faith in God, even though God answered his questions in an unexpected and mysterious manner.

Questioning the Almighty

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife

CHRIST CONNECTION

Christ is the one who will come and "fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the earth" (Habakkuk 2:14).

BIG IDEA

Faith triumphs over troubles.

MEMORY VERSE

The righteous shall live by his faith.

HABAKKUK 2:4

AUTHOR AND DATE

Habakkuk
520 B.C.



Habakkuk

WHY, GOD?

and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted 1:2-4

In his first complaint, Habakkuk asks God three basic questions, which I summarize as follows:

- Why is God silent?
- Why does God tolerate evil?
- Why does God allow injustice?

These are bold questions from an honest heart. Habakkuk looked around his world and saw nothing but violence and injustice, and then he took his complaint to God. The word translated “violence” in 1:2 is the Hebrew word *hamas*. Today, it is the name chosen by a brutal Middle East terrorist organization.²⁹ The word *hamas* occurs six times in the short book of Habakkuk. God responded to Habakkuk’s questions with a surprising answer.

Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own. 1:5-6

The Babylonians are coming!³⁰ The Babylonians are coming! Nothing could have shocked Habakkuk’s soul more than this news. The Lord goes on to describe how “dreaded and fearsome” the Babylonians are and how “they all come for violence.” He compares the Babylonian machinery to three incredible creatures from nature. They were as fast as leopards, as fearless as wolves, and as fierce as eagles swooping down on their prey (1:7-11). This raised more questions in Habakkuk’s heart.

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



Habakkuk

WHY, GOD?

when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he? 1:12-13

This time Habakkuk appeals to the Lord's holy character. He believes the Lord's eyes are too pure to look upon evil. Therefore, how could God use a wicked nation like the Babylonians for His righteous purposes? Why does God look the other way when evil things happen to good people? Why will God not use His power to stop all the violence? The prophet has a difficult time reconciling what he knows to be true about God with what the Almighty is about to do. Furthermore, how is he going to explain this to God's people?

Like a scene from "Deadliest Catch" on The Discovery Channel, Habakkuk goes on to describe how the Israelites are defenseless fish caught on a hook or trapped in a net by their more powerful and predatory enemies, the Chaldeans (1:14-17). This does not seem fair to the prophet. Chapter 1 ends with Habakkuk's second complaint and no answer from God.

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

Chapter 2 begins with Habakkuk assuming his position as a watchman on the wall. He watches and waits for God to answer his complaint (2:1). Watchmen held a serious responsibility in ancient cities. Perched high and stationed in a place where they could see far distances, they warned the people of approaching danger. If the watchman failed in his duty, harm could come to the inhabitants of the city, and the watchman would be blamed.

God answered Habakkuk's second complaint with a vision of tomorrow.

And the Lord answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith." 2:2-4



Habakkuk

WHY, GOD?

God tells the prophet to record the vision so that others can run with it like a herald. Make it plain and wait for it to happen. What is the Lord's vision that He wants Habakkuk to see, record, and relay to the people? *The righteous shall live by his faith.* The necessity of faith is a powerful and transformational theme in Habakkuk and throughout the Bible (Hebrews 11:6).

In other words, the Lord tells the prophet to walk by faith, not by sight, trusting God even when His plan does not make sense. Isaiah 55:8-9 comes to mind. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

The phrase "the righteous shall live by his faith" appears first in 2:4 and then echoes three more times on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul emphasizes "the righteous" in Romans 1:16-17 and "shall live" in Galatians 3:11. Then, Hebrews 10:38 emphasizes "by faith."

In church history, the same phrase also sparked the Protestant Reformation. In 1510, a Catholic priest named Martin Luther made the long journey from his home to Rome, where he visited the church of St. John Lateran. While there, he climbed the steps of the Scala Sancta ("Holy Stairs") on his knees as an act of ritualistic penance.³¹ As Luther reached the top of the twenty-eight white marble steps, the phrase "the righteous shall live by faith" struck his heart like a thunderbolt. He walked down the steps, hastened to Wittenberg, and nailed his famous ninety-five thesis to the door of the church. Both Luther and the church he loved went through a substantial reformation.

Chapter 2 ends with five "woes" aimed against the Chaldeans (2:6-20). For example, "Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own ... Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you." The Lord plunders the plunderers! As an act of divine sovereignty, the God of Israel not only uses the



Habakkuk

WHY, GOD?

Babylonians to discipline His chosen people, but He then holds the brutal nation accountable for their cruelty.³²

Hinds Feet for High Places

In chapter 3, Habakkuk's faith turns a corner; he experiences a breakthrough. The dark clouds of doubt and despair begin lifting. He prays with a sense of expectation that God will do something incredible in his day, turning his prayer into a song.³³

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth. Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy. 3:1-2 NIV

Habakkuk stands in awe of what the Lord is about to do with the Babylonians. However, he also remembers what the Lord has done in the past and asks Him to do it again. In that way, he reminds me of Chicago Cubs baseball fans before 2016, who remember when the Cubs won the World Series one hundred years ago and want them to repeat the glorious win.

Though Habakkuk has a better understanding of God's ultimate plan, he appeals to God for a revival "in our time." Then, the prophet glories in the Lord's past triumphs on behalf of His chosen people, from the time of the Exodus forward (3:3-15). He remembers how the Lord delivered them from Egyptian slavery. Then, he recalls the miraculous Red Sea crossing, the time the sun stood still, so Joshua had more daylight to win the battle, and more. This trip down biblical memory lane also anticipates the Lord's ultimate triumph over His enemies at the end of the age.

Finally, the book climaxes with the prophet's faith soaring to new heights. Habakkuk's heart trembles, and his lips quiver at the thought of the imminent Chaldean attack. However, he rests in the sovereign Lord, waiting for the day when He will judge the invading enemy. Then, he records some of the most triumphant words of faith you



Habakkuk

WHY, GOD?

will read in the Bible.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. 3:17-19

Habakkuk faced troubled times, and so do we. The prophet learned that even though his experience did not live up to his expectation, he could still trust in the Lord and find joy.

Has life disappointed you? Have your expectations gone unmet? Do you have questions you cannot resolve? Are you trying to define life backward while living it forward? Rather than despairing, learn from the prophet who embraced God amid his troubles. Find your strength in the sovereign Lord, and He will make you like a fleet-footed deer, giving you hinds feet so you can climb to high places.

OUTLINE	1	2	3
FOCUS	COMPLAINT Confused Faith	VISION Waiting Faith	SONG Triumphant Faith
KEY VERSE	1:2	2:4	3:19



Zephaniah

WRATH AND BLESSING

Karl Menninger graduated from Harvard Medical School with academic distinction (*cum laude*). A few years later, Dr. Menninger founded the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, where he practiced psychiatry, founded a sanitarium, established a foundation, and gained worldwide fame. Menninger refused to divorce his understanding of the human mind from human will and good psychiatry from sound theology. He wrote several books during his successful career, notably a bestseller titled, *Whatever Became of Sin?*

I seriously doubt that any book with the word “sin” in the title would sell in today’s publishing marketplace. One hundred years after Menninger graduated from an elite medical school, we rarely talk about sin or acknowledge it as the source of pain and anguish in the world. One well-known preacher of positive, self-esteem-boosting sermons admits that even he avoids talking about sin because it is negative and shaming. For that reason, his pew-packed church has probably never heard a sermon from the Old Testament book of Zephaniah.

Like the prophet Joel, Zephaniah’s theme is the awesome day of the Lord. Around 625 B.C., he made it crystal clear why God’s judgment was near for Judah, “because they have sinned against



Zephaniah

WRATH AND BLESSING

the Lord” (1:17). The Minor Prophet’s diagnosis of Israel’s condition was correct, but the prognosis was not good. Like shock therapy for the soul, God’s righteous and just judgment was the prescription, followed by the promise of restoration for a repentant remnant. Healing, not harm, is always God’s desired end.

Two words summarize the book of Zephaniah: Wrath and blessing. These twin ideas serve as bookends and cannot be separated from the character of God. The Lord begins with a warning for Judah, “I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth” (1:2), and He concludes with reference to the future Millennial Kingdom, “At that time I will bring you in ... and restore your fortunes before your eyes” (3:20). What Zephaniah says between the bookends is a worthwhile study and should make us wonder what becomes of sin at the end of the age.

Zephaniah begins with a strong historical reference in 1:1, “The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.”³⁴

From this opening, we learn that Zephaniah was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah, making him the only prophet of royal lineage. Perhaps this gave him greater access to Judah’s political leadership as he ministered “in the days of Josiah,” a good king who introduced many reforms that led to a revival among God’s people (2 Chronicles 34-35). It is possible that Zephaniah helped Judah prepare for Josiah’s reforms and perhaps contributed to them.

Zephaniah grew up during the reign of Josiah’s

CHRIST CONNECTION

The Day of the Lord in 1:7-2:3 is associated with Christ’s return.

BIG IDEA

Wrath and blessing cannot be separated from the character of God or the Day of the Lord.

MEMORY VERSE

The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil.

ZEPHANIAH 3:15

AUTHOR AND DATE

Zephaniah
625 B.C.



Zephaniah

WRATH AND BLESSING

evil predecessors, King Manasseh (Josiah's grandfather) and Manasseh's son. Zephaniah's faith in God is noteworthy given the idolatry, unjust killings, and child sacrifice that surrounded him as a youth.

The Day of the Lord

The description of judgment in 1:2-6 is not for the fainthearted and required reverential silence. After sweeping away beasts, birds, and fishes of the sea, the Lord declares, "I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth." A wordplay exists in the Hebrew language that hints further at creation. "I will cut off *adam* from the face of the *adamah*." In other words, I will reverse creation, reducing Adam to the dust from which he came.

Then, the Lord pinpoints his fury against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. They are idolaters "who have turned back from following the Lord, who do not seek the Lord or inquire of him." This serves as another reminder from the prophets that judgment always begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:7).

Zephaniah quickly returns to a common theme among the Minor Prophets, the awesome day of the Lord (1:7-2:3), which might have inspired the great medieval hymn *Dies irae* ("Day of Wrath"), ascribed to Thomas of Celano in 1256 A.D.³⁶ The day of the Lord is hardly a slap on the hand for a few disobedient children. Rather, the Lord's day of wrath is a swift, sweeping, and devastating destruction brought upon evildoers. On the day of the Lord, nobody is exempt from punishment, including "the officials and the king's son and all who array themselves in foreign attire" (1:8). Zephaniah, a child of royal descent, does not even acquit the elite.

In Bible prophecy, the day of the Lord is near and far, immediate and ultimate, historical and eschatological. To his immediate audience, Zephaniah says, "The day of the Lord is near" (1:7). No doubt, this was in reference to the Babylonians who invaded Jerusalem



Zephaniah

WRATH AND BLESSING

in three sieges, beginning in 605 B.C. The Lord says, “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.’” The prophet leaves no doubt as to what will happen to those who remain indifferent to the Lord’s warnings.

A few verses later, Zephaniah refers to the day of the Lord a second time, using the superlative “great.”

The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. 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, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. ... Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord. 1:14-15, 18

As quickly as chapter 1 closes with “a full and sudden end” of Jerusalem, chapter 2 begins with a generous call to repentance, a pattern we have seen with other prophetic writings.

Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, before the decree takes effect—before the day passes away like chaff—before there comes upon you the burning anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the Lord. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord. 2:1-3

Zephaniah writes with urgency, telling God’s people to seek the Lord “before the decree takes effect.” Approximately twenty years passed before the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem, an example of the Lord’s long-suffering.



Zephaniah

WRATH AND BLESSING

Judgment on the Judah's Enemies

For the remainder of chapter 2, Zephaniah turns his prophetic attention to the surrounding nations, Judah's enemies. First, he pronounces judgment against Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron. Then, the Lord warns the inhabitants of the seacoast—the Cherethites, who were elite mercenaries employed by King David from among the Philistines. The entire coastal area “shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah” (2:7).

Furthermore, the Lord will make Moab “like Sodom and Gomorrah” for taunting His people, and “he will make Nineveh a desolation” (2:13). God will reduce the secure, haughty Assyrians to nothing, making their glorious capital city a place where “everyone who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist” (2:15). This is a strong warning from the Lord. What man pridefully builds, God will quickly destroy.

Chapter 3 continues with warnings to both Jerusalem and the nations (3:1-8). “Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city!” God sets His eyes on cities, seeing those who are “eager to make all their deeds corrupt.” Moreover, the Lord is decisive and proactive, acting in His own way and time. “For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed” (3:8). The day of the Lord is truly a day to fear.

Restoration and the Millennial Kingdom

Zephaniah ends on a high note, full of hope and blessing for both the nations of the world and Israel (3:9-20). Twice, the courageous prophet reuses the phrase “on that day,” this time in reference to the ultimate, eschatological day of the Lord (3:11, 16), which happens when Jesus Christ returns to defeat His enemies at the Battle of



Zephaniah

WRATH AND BLESSING

Armageddon. After pouring out His wrath upon the nations, the Lord will bless the regathered, redeemed, restored, and rejoicing remnant who believe, Jew and Gentile. Read these words and rejoice with 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 your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave in your midst 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 injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.” 3:11-13

Under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ, Israel will inherit all the covenant blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As promised, Christ will sit on King David’s throne in Jerusalem, ushering in Israel’s future golden age for one thousand years, known as the Millennial Kingdom. With hope-filled euphoria, Zephaniah continues and concludes.

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you



Zephaniah

WRATH AND BLESSING

together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the Lord. 3:14-20

Whatever became of sin? On the one hand, the day of the Lord is a reminder that the righteous God of heaven never winks at sin, nor does He pass it off as a mere sickness that requires man’s self-help medication. Sin is a serious offense to a holy God and must be judged by Him. The preacher who never talks about sin because it is too negative is like an oncologist who never diagnoses cancer because the thought of it is too painful for his patients. Clergy malpractice is just as bad as medical malpractice.

On the other hand, for those who repent, seek the Lord, and walk humbly before Him, the day of the Lord is a reminder that God forgives and is willing to bless us immeasurably. Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come through His death upon the cross (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Also, the promises of God are yes and amen! One day, Christ will return to judge evildoers and then welcome His repentant children into His kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10), and ultimately into His eternal dwelling.

OUTLINE	1:1 - 2:3	2:4-15	3:1-8	3:9-20
FOCUS	Judgment on Judah + Day of the Lord	Judgment on Judah’s Enemies	Judgment on Jerusalem and the Nations	Restoration + Millennial Kingdom
KEY VERSE	1:14	2:4	3:8	3:15



Haggai

TIME TO BUILD FOR GOD'S GLORY

As the best-selling author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *First Things First*, Steven Covey knows how to set priorities. He said, “You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage—pleasantly, smilingly, unapologetically—to say no to other things. And the way you do that is by having a bigger yes burning inside. The enemy of the best is often the good.”³⁶

Long before Covey introduced his time-tested leadership principles to the world, Jesus said in His famous Sermon on the Mount, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). Even Joshua said to the children of Israel, who had taken possession of the Promised Land, “Choose this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Without apology, Joshua’s burning yes was to serve the Lord!

What are your priorities in life? If you don’t mind my meddling, I’d like to peek inside your finances to find the answer to my question. Yes, your finances! Nothing exposes our true priorities like the way we spend our money. I know that because misplaced financial priorities lay at the heart of a series of sermonettes delivered by an Old Testament Minor Prophet named Haggai, which is our next stop



Haggai

TIME TO BUILD FOR GOD'S GLORY

on the ultimate road trip through the Bible.

In you think Haggai is a real downer because he aimed at people's financial priorities, remember this: His name means "festive." Based on that, I would like to suggest that you can enjoy "festive finances" if you put God first in your money decisions. The truth is, Haggai probably received his name because he was born on the day of a major Jewish festival.

Haggai was a post-exilic prophet, along with Zechariah. Haggai was probably much older than his fellow prophet, which provides a beautiful picture of how multiple generations can work together to accomplish God's work. The many date references in Haggai indicate that the prophet delivered four sermons over a period of four months. This, too, provides an encouraging example. Haggai's most significant ministry was short in duration and happened during his elderly years.

Misplaced Priorities

Haggai 1:1 sets the prophet's ministry in historical context. "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest."

Darius was a Persian king, which means Haggai's prophetic ministry happened after Judah's Babylonian exile. In 538 B.C., Cyrus of Persia issued a decree allowing the Jewish exiles to return to their land and rebuild their temple (2 Chronicles 36:22-23). Two years later, fewer than fifty thousand people returned

CHRIST CONNECTION

Zerubbabel is an Old Testament type of Christ whom God chose to seal both branches of the Messianic line (2:23).

BIG IDEA

Obey and glorify God by putting Him first in your finances.

MEMORY VERSE

"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts." HAGGAI 2:8

AUTHOR AND DATE

Haggai
520 B.C.



Haggai

TIME TO BUILD FOR GOD'S GLORY

to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel's leadership. They faced many hardships, including poor work conditions.

It took two years to lay the foundation for the new temple, after which they stopped building due to strong opposition from the Samaritans (Ezra 4-6). Additionally, some of the older Jews who had seen Solomon's temple wept when they learned that Zerubbabel's rebuilt temple would be smaller (Ezra 3:12). Fourteen years later, the temple project was still unfinished. In the meantime, the people got busy building their own beautiful houses in the hills. Candidly, they grew spiritually lazy, and their personal affairs took priority over God's. Sixteen years after the building project began and stalled, God sent Haggai with a strong message about their misplaced priorities. It was time to build for God's glory.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.” Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: 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 does so to put them into a bag with holes. 1:2-6

Not much has changed among God's people since Haggai's time. As a pastor, I have heard my fair share of excuses as to why people give sparingly to support the Lord's work or not at all. For example, a former member of my ministry staff once boasted that she and her husband could not give money to the church because they were saving to buy a second home in Palm Beach, Florida. I am not making this up! Did I say she was a former member of my staff?

More than two thousand years ago, the Jews had convinced themselves that it was not the right time to rebuild the Lord's house, but it was certainly time to build their own fancy houses in the hills. The Lord's prophet called them out and told them to “consider your



ways.” Their personal economy was failing precisely because the Lord was not first in their money decisions. Make no mistake about it; God cannot be first in your life if He is last in your budget.

May I meddle more? Have you bought a house, traveled on vacation, or purchased a car instead of giving to the Lord? There is nothing wrong with enjoying what money can buy. But which comes first in your finances, the Lord’s work or your personal wants? Proverbs 3:9 says, “Honor the Lord with your wealth, and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” The opposite is true, too. Dishonor the Lord with your wealth, prioritize other things ahead of Him, and He will put a hole in your pocket! God will make sure that money slips through your hands as quickly as you make it.

Does the Lord mess with our personal economy if we have misplaced financial priorities? Do birds have wings? Do bees buzz? Through Haggai, the Lord said to ancient Israel,

You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. 1:9-10

I am impressed when I read 1:12-15 and learn how the people responded to the Lord’s financial rebuke. To their credit, Zerubbabel, the governor, Joshua, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people swiftly obeyed God and resumed work on the temple.

Latter Glory

A few months after the construction of the temple resumed, Haggai delivered his second sermon (2:1-9). According to Ezra 4-6, opposing forces continued to nag the Jews, making matters difficult.



Haggai

TIME TO BUILD FOR GOD'S GLORY

For sure, the memory of those who voiced their disappointment in Zerubbabel's temple, believing Solomon's was more glorious, did not help. Thus, the Lord spoke an encouraging word through His prophet, Haggai, "Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not" (2:4-5). The people might have had fewer resources to build, but God was with them and could multiply their efforts.

The Lord went on to declare how He will "shake the nations" in such a way that their treasures will come in and "fill this house with glory." He goes on to say, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts" (2:8). God never has a money problem. As someone once said, "All money is tainted. 'Taint yours and it taint mine! It belongs to the Lord, and He has more than enough." Furthermore, the Lord said, "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former" (2:9). In other words, the best days for Israel are in the future, not the past. The same is true for us. Are you believing in God for greater things in your life?

The writer of Hebrews had Haggai in mind when he said, "At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain" (Hebrews 12:26-27). Do you need God to shake things up in your life and ministry?

Haggai's reference to the latter glory also winks at our bodies becoming the temple of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost (Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 6:19). In the Old Testament, God dwelled in a temple built by man's hands. But in the New Testament, the Spirit of God resides in all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and nothing could be more glorious. Finally, the latter glory points to the glorious Jewish temple, which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., being rebuilt



at the end of the age.

Personal Cleansing

Haggai's third sermon challenges the people to pursue personal purity (2:10-19). He reaches into the law of Moses for a lesson in what defiles a person. "If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered and said, 'It does become unclean.' Then Haggai answered and said, 'So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean'" (2:13-14).

Since the former exiles had returned to Jerusalem sixteen years earlier, they had drifted back into immorality and idolatry, which contributed to their neglect of God's house. Apparently, they had not learned their lesson after seventy years of Babylonian captivity. Thus, Haggai delivered a reminder from God's law.

Though God was ready and willing to bless the Jews after they reprioritized their finances and completed the temple, He tells them the olive tree would not yield its fruit if they continued living unholy lives. In essence, Haggai tells them not to put their hands to the Lord's work and expect His blessing if other areas of their life are unclean. This sermon might seem out of place in the larger context of Haggai. However, if your finances are not right with God, it might be an indication that other areas of your life are not aligned with Him.

The Chosen Signet of God

Haggai concludes with a sermon directed to Zerubbabel, the leader of the returned exiles (2:20-23). God would make Zerubbabel "like a signet ring." In ancient times, a signet ring was the sign



Haggai

TIME TO BUILD FOR GOD'S GLORY

of a king's authority. Zerubbabel was God's chosen servant, the representative of the Davidic line, and a picture of the future Christ. God also refers to the day when He will shake the earth with His chosen signet, the Christ, whom Zerubbabel foreshadows.

When Jesus Christ returns to this earth, He will shake the nations. Then, He will rule and reign from David's throne in Jerusalem with absolute authority over the earth for one thousand years. Until then, what is the bigger yes burning inside of you? Put God first in your finances, obey God speedily, believe God for greater things, and purify yourself. The time is now to do what God tells you to do.

OUTLINE	1:1-15	2:1-9	2:10-19	2:20-23
FOCUS	Construction, Misplaced Priorities	Courage, Latter Glory	Cleansing, Defiled Worship	Commander, Chosen Servant
TIMELINE	August 29	October 17	December 18	December 18
KEY VERSE	1:2	5:4	7:14	9:14



Zechariah

YAHWEH REMEMBERS

What motivates you to make it through the tough times, perform at a high level, or keep your commitments? In general, externally motivated people do something because they want to receive a reward or commendation; internally motivated people perform for their own reasons and personal rewards.

God is not beyond using various people and methods, including rewards, to motivate us to serve and obey Him. In the Old Testament, when God's people failed to follow Him with their whole hearts, God sent prophets to motivate them with the promise of blessing for obedience. Sometimes a prophet's fiery brand of ministry worked; sometimes, it did not.

The post-exilic prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—illustrate the many ways God motivates us to obey Him. For example, Haggai took direct aim at the people's misplaced financial priorities and rebuked them for having left the temple reconstruction project incomplete after sixteen years.

Zechariah, on the other hand, took a different approach to solve the same problem. Through a series of eight visions, four sermons, and two oracles, the prophetic priest inspired God's people with Messiah's promised arrival. Messianic glory would inhabit



Zechariah

YAHWEH REMEMBERS

the worship facility. However, God's blessing was contingent upon their obedience. This should have provided enough motivation for them to reprioritize their lives in a Godward direction and complete the temple.

Zechariah's writing style was much more poetic than Haggai's, and his content was mostly prophetic. He foretells the story of Messiah's coming more than any other prophet except Isaiah. For example, in Zechariah, Christ is the Branch (3:8), the Good Shepherd (9:16, 11:11), the Stricken Shepherd (13:7), and the One who enters Jerusalem "humble and mounted on a colt" (9:9). Zechariah also envisioned Christ's betrayal for thirty pieces of silver (11:12-13) and the time He splits the Mount of Olives when He returns at the end of the age (14:3-8).

The Lord sent Zechariah to the Jewish remnant that returned to Jerusalem to repopulate the city and rebuild the temple after seventy years of Babylonian captivity. The once-powerful nation was now back in the land God promised to them, albeit by permission of a foreign ruler. Zechariah's name means "God remembers," indicating that the Lord, who is "very jealous for Zion" (1:14, 8:2), will remember the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David.

Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was from a priestly family (1:1, 7). His grandfather, Iddo, was part of the remnant that returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest. Born in Babylon, Zechariah served the Lord at a young age, being influenced by his father, Barachiah, a priest (2:4). Jewish tradition says that Zechariah was among

CHRIST CONNECTION

Many Messianic passages portray Christ in His first and second advents, as Suffering Servant and King.

BIG IDEA

The Lord is jealous for Israel and will remember the covenant He made with them.

MEMORY VERSE

"Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts."

ZECHARIAH 1:3

AUTHOR AND DATE

Zechariah
520-518 B.C.



Zechariah

YAHWEH REMEMBERS

the scholars of the Great Synagogue who collected and preserved holy Scripture. According to Jesus, Zechariah's life ended tragically, as he was "murdered between the sanctuary and the altar" (Matthew 23:35).

Israel's Immediate Future and Fortune

Returning to the Lord is a common theme throughout the Minor Prophets. The Lord sets forth this idea at the beginning of Zechariah's ministry by saying, "The Lord was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, Thus declares the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts" (1:2-3). Zechariah implores this present generation not to disappoint the Lord as their forefathers did.

Eight visions follow the Lord's initial call to repentance (1:7-6:15). These visions remind me of Hebrews 1:1-2, which reads, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."³⁷

Let's take a closer. The eight visions Zechariah received from the Lord develop the call to repentance more fully; they also speak of God's plan for Israel. The first vision was of a horseman among the myrtle trees, who was riding on a red horse (1:7-17). He and others had been patrolling the earth, which they found at peace. An angel tells Zechariah that God is "exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion" and will restore Jerusalem. "My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem" (1:17).

The second vision was of four horns and four craftsmen (1:18-21). The angel tells Zechariah that the four horns are the four kingdoms that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem—meaning Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and Medo-Persia. The four craftsmen are



Zechariah

YAHWEH REMEMBERS

coming to “cast down the horns.” In other words, God will defend His people and defeat their enemies.

The third vision was of a man with a measuring line, a surveyor, who comes to measure the city of Jerusalem (2:1-13). God promises that Jerusalem will become a city without walls to encompass her large number of inhabitants, including people from many nations. “Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,” declares the Lord. “Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people” (2:10-11).

The fourth vision was of Joshua, the high priest (3:1-10). Zechariah saw Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord in filthy clothing; Satan, the accuser, was standing next to him. The Lord rebukes Satan. Then, He gives Joshua clean clothes as a symbol of his righteous standing before God after an encouragement to remain obedient. Ultimately, this vision is symbolic of the Branch who is to come, the Messiah, who is also the all-seeing Stone.

The fifth vision was of a golden lampstand and two olive trees (4:1-14). This time the angel of the Lord awakens Zechariah from sleeping. The prophet immediately sees two olive trees feeding oil to a golden lampstand. The olive trees are symbolic of Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest. The golden lampstand represented God’s work inside the temple. The point of the vision is how the Lord, by His Spirit, will use these men to rebuild the temple and continue the Lord’s work. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts” (4:6).

The sixth vision was of a flying scroll, which symbolized God’s judgment upon those who broke His commandments, especially those who steal (5:1-4). The seventh vision was of a woman in a basket (5:5-11). The angel of the Lord opens a basket, about the size of a bushel, for Zechariah to see a woman inside. The angel says to the prophet, “This is wickedness,” and then closes the lid. Then, two women with stork-like wings pick up the basket and take it to Shinar, the location of the Tower of Babel or Babylon. This vision pictures



Zechariah

YAHWEH REMEMBERS

the removal of wickedness before Babylon returns at the end of the age (Revelation 17).

Finally, Zechariah saw four horses pulling four chariots (6:1-8). The four colored horses—black, red, white, and dappled—are strong and patrol the earth. The Lord’s Spirit is at rest after the horses return from delivering judgment. The apostle John describes a similar scene in Revelation 6:1-8 known as the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

This section closes with a symbolic crowning of Joshua, the high priest, combining the offices of priest and king (6:9-11). This act pictures Christ the King, who sits on His glorious throne as high priest when He returns to earth to establish His millennial kingdom.

Seasons of Joy and Gladness

Chapter 7 begins two years later with a committee of men from Bethel inquiring of the priests about continuing the practice of fasting. Zechariah records four messages in response to their inquiry.

The first message (7:4-7) rebukes the people for their selfish motives when fasting. The Lord says through Zechariah, “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?” Henrietta Mears says wisely, “Fasting is only profitable as an outward sign of an inward confession of sin. Merely refraining from eating will never bring a blessing. God wants a humble and contrite heart.”³⁸

The second message (7:8-14) reminds Judah of her past disobedience and the consequences of her unwillingness to obey the Lord, including unanswered prayer. “‘As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear,’ says the Lord of hosts” (7:13).

The third message (8:1-17) predicts the coming peace and prosperity of Zion. Despite Judah’s stubborn rebellion, the Lord has



Zechariah

YAHWEH REMEMBERS

mixed feelings about her. “Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath” (8:2). What parents cannot identify with the Lord’s vacillating emotions when a child they love behaves poorly?

However, the Lord goes on to picture a day when old men and women will inhabit Jerusalem, and boys and girls will play in the streets. Soon, happy days are here again! “For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things” (8:12).

The fourth message (8:18-23) envisions the recovery of joy in the kingdom of God, turning solemn fasts into “seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts” (8:19). The joy in people’s hearts became the catalyst for inviting friends and neighbors to the holy city to seek the Lord and entreat His favor.

Messiah’s Ultimate Return and Reign

In the final section of the book, Zechariah envisions the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel and the worldwide kingdom His Messiah will establish. Two oracles appear in chapters 9-14, anticipating the first and second advents of Messiah. It should not surprise us that Zechariah skips right over the present church age, as the ecclesia was kept a mystery until Jesus revealed it to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16).

In the first oracle, the Lord judges Israel’s enemies (9:1-8). Messiah arrives “humble and mounted on a donkey” to save His people (9:9-17), and He whistles to regather His people (10:8-9). Yes, the Lord whistles! The shepherd allegory of 11:4-17 is one of the most puzzling passages in the book, although it yields the prophecy about “thirty pieces of silver” linked to Jesus’s betrayal by Judas (Matthew 26:14-16).

The second oracle begins in 12:1 and concludes in chapter 14



Zechariah

YAHWEH REMEMBERS

with Messiah’s glorious return at the end of the age, followed by His millennial reign. The chapter begins with a gripping description of a time when the nations will gather against Jerusalem to battle God’s people. This is the war of wars known as the Battle of Armageddon (14:1-15). According to Zechariah, half of the Jewish citizens will flee the devastation, but the other half will remain in the holy city.³⁹

Stunningly, Christ will return to the Mount of Olives, a hill east of Jerusalem, with “all the holy ones with him.”⁴⁰ His feet will make the mountain “split in two from east to west,” perhaps the result of a massive earthquake that happens at the exact moment of His return, creating a huge valley.⁴¹ The Day of the Lord, which the prophets foretell in unison, will unfold, Christ will defeat Israel’s enemies, and then He will sit gloriously on King David’s throne in Jerusalem. “And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, ‘Holy to the Lord’” (14:20).

So, what motivates you to serve and obey the Lord? Zechariah’s prophecies should provide us with enough reasons to pray, “Even so come, Lord Jesus,” and to serve Him faithfully until then.

OUTLINE	1-6	7-8	9-14
FOCUS	8 Visions, Israel’s Immediate Future and Fortune	4 Messages, Seasons of Joy and Gladness	2 Oracles, Messiah’s Ultimate Return and Reign
KEY VERSE	1:3	7:13	13:9
TIMELINE	Temple Construction Resumes		Temple Constructed



Malachi

MAKING GREAT THE LORD'S NAME

Last words are important words. They can linger in our hearts for a long time, especially when they come from a good friend or loved one. Sometimes we must hear their last words and wishes in a written document known as their last will and testament.

During the long time between the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, the people of God heard no word from heaven—nothing but divine silence! The last message they heard came from a prophet named Malachi. Four hundred years later, a baptizer appeared as one crying in the wilderness and broke the silence by serving as Messiah's messenger. John the Baptist's arrival fulfilled Old Testament prophecies made by Malachi and Isaiah (3:1; Isaiah 40:3-5). "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," John said while pointing his disciples to Jesus (John 1:29).

Malachi's words lingered in the hearts of the Jewish people for four centuries. His emphasis was to make great the Lord's name. "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts" (1:11).

Malachi gets right to the point and avoids introducing himself



Malachi

MAKING GREAT THE LORD'S NAME

or linking his ministry to a particular king (1:1). For that reason, we know little about this Minor Prophet. However, we can use internal evidence to approximate the date of his ministry (435 B.C.) and create a vague personal profile.

Malachi's name means "Messenger of Yahweh." Jewish tradition says he was a member of the Great Synagogue, which help preserve the Holy Scriptures. He used a unique question-and-answer method, where Yahweh engaged in disputes with the Jewish community that returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. Those disputes raised issues with how the ancient Jews doubted God's love (1:1-5), dishonored God's name (1:6-2:9), broke God's covenant (2:10-16), questioned God's justice (2:17-3:5), and robbed God's tithe (3:6-12). At the end of the book of Malachi, Malachi looked ahead prophetically and urged them to remember God's plan (3:13-4:6). Let's take a closer look.

Doubting God's Love

Judah's situation had deteriorated so much that they began doubting God's love (1:1-5). Can you blame them for how they felt? The Babylonian exile plus their current weakness and poverty under Persian domination was enough to make them believe that Yahweh had deserted them. However, God reassured them of His love for Israel with a stunning statement about Isaac's twin boys, "Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert" (1:2-3).

How quickly they forgot that the Lord's prophet,

CHRIST CONNECTION

Malachi predicts the messenger who will come and prepare the way of the Lord (Malachi 3:1).

BIG IDEA

Our purpose is to make great the Lord's name on this earth.

MEMORY VERSE

"For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts."

MALACHI 1:11

AUTHOR AND DATE

Malachi
435 B.C.



Malachi

MAKING GREAT THE LORD'S NAME

Obadiah, predicted Edom's doom. At the same time, the Lord returned the descendants of Jacob to Jerusalem after the exile, a sure sign of His loyal love for Israel.⁴² Have difficult circumstances made you doubt God's love for you? Remember this: No truth is more established in the Bible than God's love for us (John 3:16).

Dishonoring God's Name

God loves Israel and us, but He expects His people to honor His name (1:6-2:9). However, worshippers in post-exilic Jerusalem did the opposite; they dishonored God's name. The Lord begins the dispute in 1:6 by saying, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name."

Instead of giving their best to the Lord, the corrupt priests offered diseased and disfigured animals for sacrifice at the temple, and then they complained about their worship experience. Picture a sacrificial lamb named Lucky with a patch over his eye and a hitch in his get-a-long. "Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts" (1:8).

That reminds me of a story I heard about a woman who was getting ready to prepare a Thanksgiving dinner for her family. She noticed a Butterball turkey at the bottom of her freezer and pulled it out. She was shocked when she realized it had been sitting there for fifty years. Hesitant to thaw the turkey, cook it, and feed it to her family, she decided to call the company's hotline and ask for their advice. The hotline operator had never received such an inquiry and put the woman on hold. A few minutes later, the operator returned and said, "I spoke to my supervisor. She said it would be okay to serve the turkey as long as you prepared it according to the instructions on the label. However, we cannot guarantee the taste." The woman thought for a moment and then replied, "Okay, that's kind of what



I thought, I'll just donate the turkey to my church." Now you know why I am not a big fan of church potluck dinners.

Having no pleasure in the worship led by the remnant that returned to Jerusalem, the Lord threatened to shut the doors of the temple, "for my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts" (1:10-11). Furthermore, the priests who led the remnant favored ritualism over real, authentic worship, which became the precursor to legalistic Judaism developed by the Pharisees during the intertestamental period, whom Jesus rebuked vigorously.

Breaking God's Covenant

The third dispute the Lord had with the Jewish remnant was in direct relation to the covenant they made with God and the human relationships they formed (2:10-16). Those who had returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity began to marry people who worshiped foreign gods, which was strictly forbidden by the Mosaic covenant. Even the New Testament instructs us not to be "unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

More so, divorce had become as common as a wildflower in the fields of the Negev. Because the Lord created marriage as a covenant, not a civil contract that one can easily dispose of, He expressed strong words toward those who divorced, associating their actions with violence. The New American Standard translation of the Bible renders 2:16 this way, "'For I hate divorce,' says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'and him who covers his garment with violence,' says the Lord of armies. 'So be careful about your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.'"

Questioning God's Justice

The fourth dispute begins in 2:17, "You have wearied the Lord



with your words. But 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?” Can you hear the echo of Isaiah’s woe years earlier? “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20). The Lord does not change.

Yahweh promises to send His messenger to “prepare the way before me” (3:1-4). Yes, justice is coming! “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” Like a refiner of fire and a purifier of soap and silver, the Lord will cleanse the worship practices of His people. Furthermore, His justice will fall upon those who oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, workers, and more (3:5).

Robbing God’s Tithe

The Lord’s aimed His fifth dispute with the Jewish remnant at their giving practices (3:6-12). Through Malachi, the Lord rebuked them for following in the footsteps of their disobedient forefathers and implored His people to return to Him. “But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions” (3:7-8). The Lord said the whole nation was cursed, not blessed, because they had withheld the tithe. The prophet Haggai rebuked them with a similar message about their misplaced financial priorities. Then the Lord said pointedly through Malachi,

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. 3:10

The Lord told the Israelites to put Him to the test financially! In



Malachi

MAKING GREAT THE LORD'S NAME

other words, if you cannot trust God with your money, test Him by giving ten percent of your next paycheck, and then see what He does. God promised to not only pour out a blessing from the windows of heaven until He meets your need, but also “rebuke the devourer for you” (3:11).⁴³

Much debate exists about whether tithing—the practice of giving at least ten percent of the money you earn to the Lord—is for today’s believers in Jesus Christ. My personal study of the Bible on financial stewardship has led me to the conviction that tithing is the biblical starting point in our giving. We are also encouraged to give free will offerings in addition to the tithe (2 Chronicles 29, 2 Corinthians 8-9). Nobody in the Bible was ever considered generous who gave less than ten percent, and many gave more, including the widow and Barnabas (Mark 12:41-44; Acts 4:36-37).

Tithing was a lifestyle practiced by Abraham four hundred and thirty years before Moses introduced the Sinai law, which included tithing and expanded it as a way of funding the theocracy the Lord established for His people.⁴⁴ As New Testament believers and disciples of Jesus Christ, we do not tithe because we are under the law of Moses, any more than Abraham did for that same reason; rather, tithing is an act of worship. By tithing, we walk by faith, honor the Lord with our wealth (Proverbs 3:9), and acknowledge that all we possess belongs to Him (Psalm 24:1).⁴⁵

Remembering God’s Plan

Malachi completes his ministry, ends the time of the prophets, and closes the Old Testament Christian canon by encouraging the Jewish remnant to compile a book of remembrance (3:13-18). He does this in response to their complaint that “it is vain to serve God.” The Lord said otherwise by showing them “the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.”



Malachi

MAKING GREAT THE LORD'S NAME

Through His prophet, the Lord goes on to talk about a day when arrogant evildoers will “burn like an oven” before the Lord and become “stubble” (4:1). On the same day, He says, “You who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” (4:2). In other words, serving the Lord is not vain but valuable. Big, bold, and bright will be the blessing of the Lord on those who fear Him.

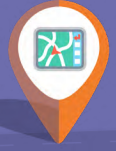
After a final encouragement to obey the Mosaic law, Malachi closes with an enigmatic reference to the prophet Elijah appearing “before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes” (4:5). Is this a reference to John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah and one of two witnesses who appear at the end of the age? (Matthew 17:12-13, Revelation 11:3-12).

This last word from Malachi would linger in the hearts of the Jews for at least the next four centuries. With or without them and us, God will make His name great on this earth.

OUTLINE	1:1-5	1:6 -2:9	2:10-16	2:17 -3:5	3:6-12	3:13 -4:6
FOCUS	Doubting God's Love	Dishonoring God's Name	Breaking God's Covenant	Questioning God's Justice	Robbing God's Tithe	Remember God's Plan
KEY VERSE	1:3	1:11	2:16	2:17	3:10	4:6



Small Group Discussion Questions



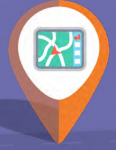
Hosea

1. What makes Hosea such a unique Old Testament book?
 2. How does the story of Hosea and Gomer illustrate God's love for us?
 3. If you were Hosea, could you fulfill God's call upon your life?
 4. Describe the meaning and significance of the names of Hosea and Gomer's children.
 5. How does the book of Hosea point us to Christ?
-

JOEL

1. What is the theme of the book of Joel and why?
2. What did the day of the Lord mean to the ancient Israelites in their time?
3. What do the day of Pentecost and the birth of the church in Acts 2 have to do with Joel and the day of the Lord?
4. What does Peter model for us when he quotes Joel's prophecy?
5. What is the ultimate day of the Lord? How should we respond to its awesome reality?

Small Group Discussion Questions



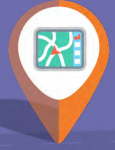
AMOS

1. What is the big idea of the book of Amos? What application would you make to your life from it?
 2. Why was Amos an unlikely prophet to serve the Lord in the Northern Kingdom, Israel? How does Amos encourage you to receive and fulfill the ministry God gives to you?
 3. Read Amos 7:10-17. How did Amos show strength when the religious elite challenged his calling?
 4. Read Amos 9:11-15. How did Amos point ancient Israel to their future and hope?
 5. What is your biggest takeaway from Amos and his prophetic ministry?
-

OBADIAH

1. What is the purpose of Obadiah's prophecy?
2. What does the doom of the Edomites say about how we should treat Israel, God's chosen people?
3. Read Matthew 2:1-12). How did Herod the Great continue the conflict between Esau and Jacob?
4. Consider the end of the Edomites in 70 A.D. What does this tell you about Bible prophecy?
5. Is your family in conflict? If yes, how will you resolve the family feud?

Small Group Discussion Questions



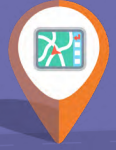
JONAH

1. What did God ask Jonah to do? Discuss the call of God on your life.
 2. Why did Jonah run from God? Read Psalm 139:7-12 and discuss what we know about God's presence?
 3. What does the book of Jonah tell us about God's love for people and His heart for cities?
 4. What is the Christ connection in Jonah? Hint: Read Matthew 12:39-41.
 5. What is your biggest takeaway from the book of Jonah?
-

MICAH

1. Read Micah 3:8 and describe Micah's call to ministry. How does this impact you?
2. Read Micah 5:2. To whom does this prophecy refer? Describe how Micah and the people in his time received this prophecy?
3. Read Micah 6:8. What does the Lord require of His people, and in contrast to what?
4. What is biblical justice and how is it different or the same as social justice?
5. How will you do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly today?

Small Group Discussion Questions



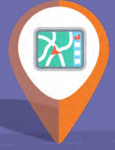
NAHUM

1. How does the book of Nahum relate to the book of Jonah?
 2. What is Nahum's big idea?
 3. Define the wrath of God and describe your feelings about it.
 4. How does biblical archeology validate Nahum's prophecy?
 5. In what way does Nahum provide comfort to Judah and to us?
-

HABAKKUK

1. What big idea comes from the book of Habakkuk?
2. Read Habakkuk 1:1-4. Why was Habakkuk troubled? Describe his burden.
3. Read Habakkuk 2:1-4. What is the relationship between faith and the Lord's vision?
4. God told Habakkuk that He would use the wicked Babylonians for His divine purpose. How does that make you feel?
5. How does Habakkuk resolve his confused faith in chapter 3?

Small Group Discussion Questions

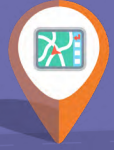


ZEPHANIAH

1. What is Zephaniah's major theme?
 2. Read Zephaniah 1:1. How did God prepare Zephaniah to serve Him?
 3. How do the twin ideas of wrath and blessing interplay in Zephaniah?
 4. What does it mean to sin against the Lord? Why is sin so grievous to God?
 5. Read Zephaniah 3:11-20. What hope does this give you? How best can we prepare for the ultimate day of the Lord?
-

HAGGAI

1. What is the big idea of Haggai?
2. Why had the remnant that returned to Jerusalem neglected the house of the Lord?
3. In what ways would the latter glory of the temple be greater than the former glory?
4. Examine your own financial priorities. Are they aligned with God's purposes?
5. What area of your life besides finances have you withheld from the Lordship of Jesus Christ?



ZECHARIAH

1. What does Zechariah's name mean? How does it reflect on the book's big idea?
2. How did Zechariah motivate the Jewish remnant to complete the temple? In what way was his method different than Haggai's?
3. Which of Zechariah's prophecies point to Christ?
4. How does the fact that God remembers His promises to Israel encourage you?
5. Read Zechariah 1:3. In what ways do you need to return to the Lord?

MALACHI

1. What is Malachi's big idea? How did Malachi encourage the Jewish remnant to make great the Lord's name?
2. How did the Jewish remnant dishonor the Lord's name?
3. What is a biblical covenant, and how does it relate to marriage?
4. Read Malachi 3:6-12. What did Malachi mean by robbing God? How does it challenge you to practice biblical financial stewardship?
5. Read Malachi 4:5-6 and Matthew 17:12-13. Was John the Baptist Elijah? Then, Read Revelation 11:3-12. Who are the two witnesses who appear at the end of the age?

- ¹ Norman Geisler, *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pg. 94.

- ² In a general sense, we are all created by the same God, who presents Himself in Scripture as Father (Malachi 2:10). But as a matter of soteriology, we are born into God's forever family and become His children by faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:14, John 8:44).

- ³ Admah and Zeboim were two cities of the plain that were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deuteronomy 29:23). The Lord could not imagine treating His chosen people the same way.

- ⁴ This lyric comes from a song written by the Eagles titled, "Lyn' Eyes," found on their album, *One of These Nights*.

- ⁵ John Walvoord, "The Day of the Lord," accessed on August 30, 2021, <https://bible.org/seriespage/5-day-lord>

- ⁶ Bible prophecy must first be understood contextually. What did it mean to the people living at the time the prophet lived? Then, how does the prophecy point to the future? Bible experts refer to this as the "now but not yet" aspects of prophecy.

- ⁷ The word translated "alas" is a word of warning.

- ⁸ Compare Joel 2:28-32 with Acts 2:17-21 and Matthew 16:13-20.

- ⁹ On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the early believers in Jesus began speaking in tongues, meaning they were able to communicate in the native language of the foreigners who were in Jerusalem, even when they had no training in that language. It was a sign miracle that announced the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church, fulfilling Joel's prophecy.

- ¹⁰ Kings Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel reigned from 783-742 B.C. and 786-746 B.C., respectively.

- ¹¹ Esau is an example of someone who walked by the flesh not by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

- ¹² Petra, also called Sela in the Bible, is Bozrah in the Hebrew language. Bozrah is located about 150 miles south.

- ¹³ The film *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* features the Siq and Petra's treasury building. *Smithsonian Magazine* lists Petra—one of the “Seven Wonders of the World”—as one of twenty-eight places you should visit before you die.
- ¹⁴ In 1812, a Swiss explorer named Johann Ludwig Burckhardt rediscovered the beautiful red-rock city and introduced it to the world.
- ¹⁵ When Obadiah lived and ministered as a prophet to Judah is debated. It depends on which battle against Jerusalem to which he is referring in 1:11-14.
- ¹⁶ 'I was completely inside': Lobster diver swallowed by humpback whale off Provincetown, Doug Fraser, *Cape Cod Times*, June 11, 2021, accessed on September 21, 2021, <https://www.capecodtimes.com/story/news/2021/06/11/humpback-whale-catches-michael-packard-lobster-driver-mouth-provincetown-cape-cod/7653838002/>
- ¹⁷ Henry Morris, a respected creation scientist with a Ph.D., was the founder of the Institute for Creation Research. After much scientific inquiry, he believed the creation account in the Bible was true; he also believed Jonah's story was both believable and plausible. However, in his book *The Remarkable Journey of Jonah*, Morris admits, “The account of Jonah and the whale stands out as one of the most difficult stories to believe in the Bible. It has been the subject of extensive ridicule, the source of Hollywood caricature, and the brunt of many jokes. Skeptics focus their deepest criticism at the very concept that a man could be swallowed by a whale and live to tell about it” (p. 7).
- ¹⁸ The Pharisees also challenged Jesus about His Galilee roots, saying, “No prophet comes from Galilee” (John 7:52). However, they were wrong. Jonah came from Galilee.
- ¹⁹ God instructed Jonah a second time to take His message to the people of a great city, a reminder that the Lord is the “God of the City.”
- ²⁰ “Ephrathah” designates this Bethlehem from two other nearby towns also called Bethlehem. King David was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, thus connecting the future Messianic ruler with the Davidic covenant.

- ²¹ Biblical Justice vs. Social Justice: A Panel with Voddie Baucham, Charlie Kirk, and Eric Metaxas. “The Eric Metaxas Show,” accessed on September 28, 2021, <https://metaxastalk.com/video/biblical-justice-vs-social-justice-a-panel-with-voddie-baucham-charlie-kirk-eric-metaxas/>
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- ²² J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 148.
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- ²³ Nahum’s ministry happened between 663 and 612 B.C. We know this because he refers to the fall of Thebes (3:8) as something that happened in the past (663 B.C.) and the fall of the *Ninevites* as prophetic future. Historically, we know that the Babylonians destroyed Nineveh in 612 B.C.
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- ²⁴ Nineveh was the capital city of the rising Assyrian empire during the ministries of Jonah and Nahum.
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- ²⁵ Got Questions, “What does it mean to be an enemy of God,” accessed on October 7, 2021, <https://www.gotquestions.org/enemy-of-God.html>
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- ²⁶ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, Vol. 4, Ezekiel to Malachi, p. 200.
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- ²⁷ The word “propitiation” refers to the act of appeasing or gaining favor, especially of a deity. In Christianity, Jesus Christ’s death upon the cross is the propitiation for our sins, satisfying the righteous wrath of God.
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- ²⁸ *The New American Commentary*, p. 254, 277
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- ²⁹ If Habakkuk were living today, he might ask the Lord, “Why do you allow the Taliban, ISIS, Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas to terrorize the world?”
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- ³⁰ The Babylonians were also known as the Chaldeans.
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- ³¹ According to Roman Catholic tradition, the Scala Sancta were the steps that Jesus walked on the way to His trial before Pilate at the praetorium in Jerusalem. St. Helena moved the “Holy Stairs” to Rome in the fourth century.
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- ³² Long ago, the enemies of Israel included the Edomites, Assyrians, and Babylonians. God sent three prophets to pronounce the doom of these regimes. Obadiah prophesied the doom of Edomites, Nahum the Assyrians, and Habakkuk the Babylonians.

- ³³ The word “shigionoth” (3:1) might be a musical notation, indicating that Habakkuk was possibly a worship leader.
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- ³⁴ The reference to Zephaniah being “the son of Cushi” could refer to (1) his Cushite ethnicity, (2) his dark skin, (3), his place of birth, or (4) the name given to his father in honor of the Cushites. The geopolitical struggle between the Assyrians and Cushites, rulers of Egypt, provides much of the background in Zephaniah 2:1-3:13.
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- ³⁵ Britannica, *Book of Zephaniah*, accessed on October 22, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Book-of-Zephaniah>
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- ³⁶ “Steven Covey: 10 Quotes that Can Change Your Life,” Forbes.com, accessed on October 26, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2012/07/16/the-7-habits/?sh=79281f2539c6>
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- ³⁷ The primary way God speaks to us today is through His written word and the Living Word, who is Jesus Christ.
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- ³⁸ *What the Bible Is All About*, Henrietta Mears, p. 325.
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- ³⁹ One third of the Jewish population will still be alive in Jerusalem after the Tribulation (Revelation 13:8). On the awesome Day of the Lord, half will flee the city, but the other half will stay.
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- ⁴⁰ Christ will return at the end of the age with His “holy ones,” the church, which He raptures out of this world seven years earlier and before great tribulation falls upon the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). He returns to the same place from which He ascended after His first advent, according to the angels (Acts 1:9-11).
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- ⁴¹ This is perhaps a reference to the same earthquake the apostle John foresaw in the Revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:11-21).
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- ⁴² The descendants of Esau were the Edomites. The apostle Paul quotes Malachi 1:2-3 in Romans 9:13 to show that not all of Abraham’s physical descendants are part of the true Israel, which is something to consider when examining the conflicts in the Middle East today.

⁴³ The devil will mess with your finances until he has you in financial bondage. However, tithing puts you on a God's pathway to financial freedom I believe the Bible defines financial freedom this way: Free of debt (Proverbs 22:7), free from the love of money (Hebrews 13:5), free to give generously (2 Corinthians 8-9), and free to have fun.

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⁴⁴ Abraham gave ten percent of the spoils of war to King Melchizedek of Salem, which became Jerusalem (Genesis 14:20). According to the writer of Hebrews, King Melchizedek was an Old Testament type of Christ (Hebrews 7).

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⁴⁵ We are stewards of the Lord's wealth, not owners. I view tithing as a floor, not a ceiling, for New Testament believers who are always encouraged to grow in the grace of giving.

About the Author



RON JONES is a pastor, author, discipleship coach, and radio Bible teacher. For more than two decades, he has devoted his life to leading and preaching in the local church. He currently serves as lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he delivers his Bible teaching for everyday life.

Ron's ministry extends beyond the local church he serves through a daily radio broadcast heard around the world called Something Good with Dr. Ron Jones. Something Good Radio and Television exists to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and strengthen the body of Christ through life-changing Bible teaching.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR) and multiple eBooks.

Through Something Good Travel, Ron and his wife Cathryn lead spiritual tours to biblical sites in Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. They have been married for 26 years and live five minutes from their happy place, the beach. They have two adult children.

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Road Trip 8: The General Epistles and Revelation

Ron Jones is the lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia and Bible teacher on Something Good Radio and Television. A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia Beach with his wife Cathryn. They have two adult children.

