

Sovereign HOPE a study of the MINOR PROPHETS

LEADER'S GUIDE AND ANSWER KEY

Before you begin . . .

Take a quick look through the book to see where we're headed. If you're doing this study on your own, work through each lesson carefully, then let this guide add additional insight to what you've already learned or help you through any sticky spots.

If you're leading others through this study, this guide will help you prepare, but it's not meant to be a substitute for your own study. Motivate the other women to read the Scriptures and answer the questions on their own before your group gathering. That's when they'll learn the most.

There's no need to present a lecture or cover every question in detail. Encourage discussion, providing opportunities for even the quietest ones in your class to contribute if they want to. Make practical applications as the Lord leads you. Watch the time and keep the lessons flowing.

Try not to get bogged down in the details of the Minor Prophets. The goal of this study is not to examine and interpret every word or place every event on a timeline, but to get to know the God who was present and active in the centuries when these prophets preached.

We who live in an age of grace are more familiar with the loving Father, gentle Son, and comforting Holy Spirit of the Gospels than the fierce God of the prophets, but He has always been the same—a holy God who must judge sin. As you encounter Him in the Minor Prophets, you'll come to appreciate even more the mercy and forgiveness our holy God offers repentant sinners through the cross.

Study God's Word, saturate your study in prayer, and His truth will change you.

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. (John 17:17)

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JONAH AND NAHUM

Page 9

Read God's description of Nineveh in Nahum 3:1–4. What were these people like?

The Ninevites were known as lying, violent, cruel, bloodthirsty people. The sounds of war were heard in Nineveh—the crack of whips, clatter of chariots, and hoofbeats of horses. Soldiers with swords and spears charged through city streets filled with piles of corpses. Like an enticing harlot or witch, Nineveh caused others to fall prey to her snares.

What did Jonah explain to God in Jonah 4:2–3?

Jonah knew God was “a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.” He enjoyed God's mercy and forgiveness but was angry and resentful that God would offer the same kindness to the Ninevites (Jonah 4:1). He'd rather die than be known as a prophet of judgment that never came.

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In these passages, what elements of creation did God control?

Jonah 1:4—He sent a strong wind and fierce storm on the sea.

Jonah 1:15—He calmed the stormy sea.

Jonah 4:6–8—He caused a vine of gourds to grow quickly to shade Jonah, then sent a worm to destroy it.

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How do we know they were pagans (Jonah 1:5)?

Every sailor cried out to his own god.

What's ironic about his description of himself in Jonah 1:9?

Jonah boldly proclaimed faith in a God he hadn't obeyed.

What did these heathen sailors do that showed they now feared God more than Jonah did (Jonah 1:14, 16)?

They prayed to Jehovah, Jonah's God. They acknowledged His sovereignty, feared Him greatly, offered Him sacrifices, and made vows to Him.

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What did he cry out as he walked through the city (Jonah 3:4)?

“Forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

What happened (Jonah 3:5–10)?

The people of Nineveh believed Jonah’s prophecy and to show their repentance, fasted and wore sackcloth. The king took the lead, decreeing that neither people nor animals should eat or drink but instead cry out for mercy in the hope that God would change His mind about their destruction.

When “God saw their works,” what did He do (Jonah 3:10)?

He relented and did not destroy Nineveh.

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But how did Jonah respond (Jonah 4:1)?

Jonah was angry and displeased with God.

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On the road to Emmaus when Jesus taught the two disciples about Himself, what Old Testament Scriptures did He use (Luke 24:27)?

The books of Moses (the five books called the Law) and the Prophets. These are two sections of the Old Testament. In Luke 24:44, Jesus includes the Psalms in the Scriptures where He is revealed.

In what way was Jonah a “type”—a prophetic illustration—of the Messiah who had come (Matt. 12:40)?

Jonah was buried alive three days and nights in the fish’s belly. Jesus was buried three days and nights in the earth.

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Nahum gave his message two labels in Nahum 1:1.

It was his heavy burden to deliver a prediction of catastrophe. But knowing that the message had come to him as a vision (revelation) from God gave him courage to proclaim it.

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List the facts you learn about Jehovah in Nahum 1:1–8. What is He like? What does He do? What powers does He have? How does nature respond to Him?

God is jealous, but not in a negative way. He is intensely interested in our welfare and longs for our loyalty. Though He is slow to get angry, He has great power and will take vengeance on His enemies. He is in control of nature and people. When He acts in judgment, no place or person can stand against Him. Because He is good, He knows and protects all who trust in Him.

Page 17

Which nation still appears on world maps—Assyria or Israel? What does this say about Bible prophecy?

God's prophecy that Assyria would exist no more has come true, but as prophesied, Israel has been preserved through many dangers.

Is judgment postponed the same as judgment forgotten? Can anyone ultimately get away with sin?

Proverbs 15:3, Romans 2:3–6, and Revelation 20:12 make this clear: all sin is noticed by God, and unrepentant sin will be judged, either in this world or in the next.

Of what do we build our national and personal strongholds? But what is the only safe place?

We trust in physical strength, wealth, status, laws, and armies, but God is our only sure defense (Ps. 18:46–48.)

Who are the only people who don't need to fear God's judgment?

The Father's wrath toward sin was satisfied at the cross, so anyone who is "in Christ"—redeemed by His blood from the penalty for sin—has no need to fear His judgment.

3

AMOS

Page 19

What were his two jobs (Amos 1:1; 7:14–15)?

Amos was a herdsman—a shepherd and perhaps a breeder of sheep. He was also a gatherer of wild sycamore fruit, a small but sweet fruit like a fig.

While Amos was gathering fruit and tending sheep, what happened (Amos 7:15)?

God took him away from his usual occupations to prophesy to Israel.

Why do you think God delights in using *nobodies* (1 Cor. 1:18–2:1–5; 2 Cor. 4:7)?

When God uses someone without much natural ability, it's obvious He is the one doing the work. It's not human wisdom but His power on display, so He receives glory. That isn't selfish of God, for He alone deserves honor. We are just tools in His hand and should quickly acknowledge that all our ability comes from Him.

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What was Amos's most often used title for Jehovah (Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:14–16, 27; 6:8, 14; 9:5)?

The Lord [Jehovah] God [Elohim] of hosts

Who are the hosts God rules (Gen. 32:1–2; Ps. 103:20–21; Luke 2:13)?

They are the good angels, also called God's ministers (servants) who do His will.

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By using that name and that title what was Amos saying to those who heard his prophecy?

Enemy armies may threaten Israel, but God's army of angels stands ready to defend His people.

What would the voice of an angry God sound like? What happens when God speaks in judgment (Amos 1:2; Joel 3:16)?

His angry voice roars, and when it does, heavens and earth shake.

What had Damascus (Syria) done?

They had dragged threshing sleds over the conquered people of Gilead (a region of Israel).

Where is cruelty toward enemies happening today?

In spite of agreements, treaties, and international pressure, enemies are still being mistreated and tortured, especially in prisons and war zones in the Middle East, Africa, Central America, and Asia. Many who are persecuted and martyred are Christians, who are cruelly treated not for what they have done but for what they believe.

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For what crime did God say He would judge the Philistines (Amos 1:6)?

They took the entire population captive.

Why was their crime worse? What had they forgotten (Amos 1:9)?

They had forgotten a covenant made between Phoenicia and Israel. These two nations had never fought each other, and the Phoenicians had even helped build the temple (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:1–12, 9:11–14). Hiram was the king of Tyre, a city in Phoenicia.

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What did one branch of the family do to the other (Amos 1:11)?

Edom chased Israel with a sword and showed no pity. Their exceedingly fierce, tearing anger went on “perpetually.”

What was their horrible crime? What motivated it (Amos 1:13)?

For selfish reasons they ripped open the wombs of pregnant women in Gilead (a region of Israel). This awful crime also took place in other times and places (2 Kings 8:12; 15:16; Hos 13:16).

What had the Moabites done?

In an act of hatred and contempt, they had burned to ashes the body of the king of Edom. They may have dug up his bones to do this. They were barbarous in their treatment of other people. Full of hatred for their enemies, they were greedy, cruel, and unrestrained by the law of God.

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Did you notice a phrase repeated at the beginning of each announcement of judgment? Find the phrase in Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6.

“Thus saith the Lord [Jehovah]”

Page 25

Why was He going to punish them? What is the difference between *disobeying* and *despising* God’s Word?

Disobedience may be slight, inadvertent, or due to lack of knowledge. Despising a command is a deliberate rejection that shows disdain or abhorrence toward the one giving the command.

Why would they, Israel, want to do that? How does the media respond when someone who claims to live a Christian life is caught in sin? Why?

Unbelievers are quick to spot imperfections and hypocrisy in the lives of Christians. When someone who claims to walk in the light is shown to be secretly walking in darkness, the Word of God is blasphemed (Titus 2:5), and the enemies of the gospel find excuses to deny truth. Their consciences are eased, and they find fresh ammunition to attack all believers. The media exploits these stories because they're often full of juicy, scandalous details.

It's always tempting to take pleasure when someone we disagree with is exposed as a hypocrite. But when secret sin is exposed, both the guilty and the innocent who love them are humiliated. This is a good time for Christians to show godly compassion and to pray that public shame and private sorrow will cause these folks to seek the Savior. Remember the world is watching us (Matt. 5:16 and 1 Peter 2:12).

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In chapters 3–5 of Amos we see three sermons preached by Amos. Look at the first verse of each chapter. What three-word phrase begins each message?

“Hear this word.”

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What kind of people were these women? What was their destiny?

“Kine” is an old word for female cows. These Samaritan women lived lazy, self-indulgent lives. They pressured their masters (probably their husbands) to provide them with luxuries, including wine-drinking parties, at the expense of the poor. These proud women were like cattle being fattened in a feed yard, oblivious to their imminent slaughter. They were going to be led away with fishhooks in their noses to be slaves of their captors.

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How did God label these sins (Amos 5:12)?

These transgressions were great and numerous.

What do many think social justice is? How has its definition changed with the times? How does God define social justice?

Today social justice is often defined as equality for all. That lofty goal sounds good but has been distorted into a rationale for the redistribution of wealth and property, which is the philosophical basis of socialism and communism. It's also an excuse for legalizing sin. For example, in the name of social justice, same-sex partners have been given the right to marry. Unscriptural social and political agendas have been promoted in the name of social justice.

Our just God tells us to provide for the needy in Deuteronomy 15:7, 11, Psalm 41:1, Proverbs 28:27, and James 2:15–16. But those instructions are given to individuals and the church, not civil government.

God doesn't want us to discriminate on the basis of color, national origin, age, or gender. We're to treat others as equals—even as better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3). But standing for righteousness means that we must stand against evil. Though we love individuals, we cannot approve of their sin, even in the name of social justice. What is just is what is right, and what is right is what the Bible says is right.

How did God respond to their empty rituals (Amos 5:21–23)?

He despised their observances of feasts. He refused to smell the sweet odor of their offerings and wouldn't look at or receive their sacrifices. He wouldn't even hear their worship songs. God refuses any religious performance that doesn't come from a genuinely repentant heart or is done for the praise of men. He wants holiness, not ritual. God isn't neutral toward hypocritical worship; He hates it.

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Describe people who are “at ease in Zion.” What do they ignore? What will happen to them (Amos 6:1–7)?

They bring their sin close and think their punishment is far away (v. 3).

They take their ease in luxury and eat choice food (v. 4).

They pursue the enjoyment of music and invention of new instruments, not for the praise of God, but for personal pleasure (v. 5).

They drink wine from ornate vessels and use expensive ointments and perfumes while ignoring the distresses in their country. (In Genesis 37:22–24, Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit and then sat down to eat.) These people enjoyed themselves as if nothing bad was happening in their land (v. 6).

The party would end, and Israel would be taken captive first, before Judah (v. 7).

Today people who are “at ease in Zion” indulge themselves in luxuries and pleasure without regard for God or concern for their coming judgment.

What did He show him in Amos 7:1–3?

God showed Amos swarms of grasshoppers (locusts) eating the second harvest of grass (hay).

What did He show him in Amos 7:4–6?

He showed Amos a raging fire that consumed the land.

Page 30

Why don't people want to hear God's Word (John 3:20)?

Anyone who loves darkness hates light. Anyone who loves lies hates truth. Anyone who enjoys sin will run from the words that condemn it. Others are so caught up in the world's values that they see the Bible as outdated or irrelevant.

4

HOSEA

Page 32

Who gave the words recorded in this book?

The Lord (Jehovah)

Who received them?

Hosea, the son of Beeri

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What child is about to be born?

Jesus

What do we learn about Gomer, Hosea's wife, in Hosea 1:2–3?

She was to be a harlot and a mother of children born through harlotry.

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What was going to happen to Jehu's descendants (his "house")? Where would this take place (Hos. 1:4–5)?

God was going to punish them in the valley of Jezreel, because that's where Jehu killed Ahab's family.

What was God saying to the people through Lo-Ruhamah's name? Whom would He no longer pity (Hos. 1:6)?

He would no longer treat the house (tribes) of Israel with special mercy.

But who would still receive His mercy (Hos. 1:7)?

The house (tribes) of Judah

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What words does God love to hear from us (Hos. 2:23)?

You are our God!

What odd and challenging thing did God ask Hosea to do (Hos. 1:2)?

God asked Hosea to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him.

Page 37

What does the Old Testament say about this (Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18:20)?

God commands us not to have sexual relations with someone we are not married to.

What does the New Testament say (1 Cor. 6:15–20; Heb. 13:4)?

We should run from sexual immorality. Fornication is a sin against the body, which belongs to God rather than us. A sexual relationship within marriage is honorable, but anyone who commits adultery or fornication will be judged for those sins.

What had “the land,” or the nation of Israel, done (Hos. 1:2)?

By departing from the Lord, they had committed spiritual adultery.

What did Gomer plan to do (Hos. 2:5)?

She was going to pursue lovers outside her marriage.

And Gomer did leave. She left Hosea for another man—or a series of lovers. Why? What was she hoping for (Hos. 2:5)?

She went after them for what they could give her: necessities (bread, water, wool, linen) and luxuries (scented oils, other drinks).

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What was she ignoring about her husband (Hos. 2:8)?

He provided all she needed.

What happens to a woman who chooses sin for the material benefits it promises? Where does that path lead (Prov. 23:5; 28:20–22; Luke 12:16–21; 1 Tim. 6:9)?

Riches have wings. As soon as she has what she wants, those possessions will fly away. A faithful (hard-working, diligent) person will be blessed, but someone who tries to get rich in a hurry is likely to do something that deserves punishment. It’s foolish to store up wealth on earth, where it’ll all be left behind when we die. People who are motivated by trying to get rich are subject to temptations and traps. They do foolish things and end up ruined and destroyed.

What happened to Gomer? What were the painful consequences of her sin (Hos. 2:6, 9–12)?

She was walled in with thorns and couldn’t find her way out. She lost both necessities and luxuries, her wickedness was exposed to her lovers, and no one could rescue her. She had no more joys.

Then what did she decide to do? Why (Hos. 2:7)?

She returned to Hosea, because life was better before she left him.

What is that attitude (Hos. 2:13)?

They had forgotten God. If they thought of Him at all, they thought of Him as someone who didn't matter.

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How much did it cost Hosea to redeem her (Hos. 3:2)?

Fifteen pieces (shekels) of silver and one and a half homers (twelve to thirteen bushels) of barley

Gomer's sin was physical adultery. What was Israel's sin (Hos. 3:1)?

They loved gods other than Jehovah and enjoyed the drunken feasts that were part of idol worship.

Circle the three verbs in this verse that tell what the Israelites will do. "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." (Hos. 3:5)

They shall return, seek the Lord their God, and fear the Lord and His goodness.

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What sins were they soon indulging in and enslaved by (Hos. 4:11, 13–14)?

Harlotry and drunkenness

What sorts of self-focused and nature-based worship do you see in our society? What can you expect to happen next?

Any religion that promises salvation through human efforts or self-reformation is a false religion. The worship of nature is idol worship. Any spiritual practice not directed toward God and based on His Word opens its followers to demonic influence. Any religion that rejects or diminishes the importance of the Bible in favor of its own scriptures and doctrines leads its followers astray, often into indulgence of the flesh.

Page 42

What sins (and sinners) does God hate (Prov. 6:16–19)?

Pride, lying, killing the innocent, hearts that make wicked plans, feet that run quickly to do wrong, a false witness who speaks lies, and anyone who creates discord among brothers

Page 43

What does God want to hear from His people (Hos. 14:2–3)?

Take away our sin; receive us by Your grace, and we'll praise You with our lips. (Heb. 13:15). We will turn away from all other gods, for You are the Father who shows mercy.

What blessings does He promise (Hos. 14:4–7)?

He will heal our backsliding; He will love us freely; He will turn His anger away from us. He will bless us as the dew; we will grow and send down deep roots. Our branches will spread, and we will be revived. We will look and smell beautiful.

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What was that later event? Who also came “out of Egypt”?

Joseph took Mary and Jesus into Egypt to escape the murderous Herod. After Herod died, the family came back “out of Egypt.”

5

MICAH

Page 47

What was Hezekiah's reign like (2 Kings 18:3–8)?

King Hezekiah did what was right in God's eyes. He got rid of idols and the high places and groves where they were worshiped. He even destroyed the brass serpent made by Moses, which the Israelites had made into an idol. He trusted and obeyed God so completely that no king was ever his equal.

What did Hezekiah do with that letter? What did he ask God to do? For what purpose (2 Kings 19:14–19)?

Hezekiah spread out the letter before the Lord. He asked God to see what was happening, hear the threats of the idolatrous Sennacherib, and save His people so that the whole world would know that Jehovah alone was God.

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Who will come down? From where? To where?

The Lord; from His place in heaven to the high places of idol worship

When He arrives, what will happen?

The mountains and valleys will melt and pour like wax down steep slopes. Samaria will be demolished with its stones poured into the valley, its foundation exposed, and its site left like a bare field ready for planting. All carved idols will be beaten into pieces. The wealth Samaria gained from spiritual harlotry will be burned up.

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How were they getting rich?

At night they dreamed of ways to take other people's wealth. Through violence they seized the houses and fields they had coveted, which were the inheritance of the poor.

How low had the standards for being a prophet fallen (Mic. 2:11)?

The people would accept any prophet who promised them the indulgences they craved, even if those prophets were liars.

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What will happen to them? What creatures does God compare them to? Who will be their leader (Mic. 2:12–13)?

They would be like a flock of sheep gathered and led by the Lord Himself.

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Officers of the law are supposed to protect good folks from evil ones (Rom. 13:3–4). But what did Judah's judges do (Mic. 3:2)?

They did the opposite. They hated what was good and loved what was evil.

Judges are also expected to guard the innocent from their abusers. But what did they do (Mic. 3:2–3)?

They abused the innocent. They stripped skin and flesh from their bones, flayed and chopped their bodies, then cooked and ate them. Though this is probably symbolic, it's a sickening picture of the inhumanity of these wicked judges.

How will God respond to judges like that (Mic. 3:4)?

He will not hear their prayers. Because they have done evil, He will hide His face from them.

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Where do we see this today?

There are preachers on TV, radio, and in print—even some pastors—whose prime motivation is personal profit and fame. They will say whatever people want to hear, even distorting Bible truth to make themselves more popular.

They use tactics like these:

- Promising that God will send a material blessing to anyone who sends them money
- Ignoring parts of Scripture that confront sin (which might make them lose their audience)
- Claiming they have discovered some never-before-revealed truth which makes them unique and the only ministry worth supporting

They were trying to establish their own personal political empires through fraud, but what was going to happen in their city instead (Mic. 3:12)?

Zion would be plowed under like a field; Jerusalem would be reduced to piles of ruins; the mountain where the temple stood would be bare of buildings, covered with wild growth like a forest.

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What will He do there (Mic. 4:2–3)?

He'll teach many nations His ways. His law and His Word will go forth from His throne in Jerusalem. He'll judge many and rebuke powerful nations.

Who else will come to this mountain? Why (Mic. 4:2)?

Many nations, including Gentiles, will come to learn His ways so they can obey them.

What are the results (Mic. 4:3–4)?

All wars will stop. There will be no more weapons of war. Since there will be perfect, uninterrupted peace, there will be no fear, only prosperity and plenty.

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Who's missing for a thousand years (Rev. 20:2)?

Satan (the dragon, the serpent, the Devil)

Where will He be born (Mic. 5:2–5)?

Bethlehem [house of bread] Ephratah [fruitful]

Why is this significant (Luke 1:32)?

Jesus' earthly ancestor David was from Bethlehem. In the Millennium, Jesus will reign on the throne of David.

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What are the three things God wants from men (Mic. 6:8)?

God wants us to do what is just (right), love mercy, and walk humbly with Him.

What does it mean to *do justice*? Why do we sometimes fail at this? How can we decide the just thing to do?

Doing justice means doing right. We know what is right by looking in the Bible. If we do what we want to do rather than what God wants us to do, we fail at doing justice.

What's the difference between *showing mercy* and *loving mercy*?

We can be kind just because we know we're supposed to or because others are watching. Loving mercy means that we delight to offer it.

How does God respond to the proud—and to the humble (James 4:6)?

God resists (opposes) the proud but gives His grace to the humble. He makes life difficult for the proud but gives the humble supernatural ability to do right.

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He searched the earth for good and faithful people, but what did he find instead (Mic. 7:1–4)?

He found no upright people on the earth. People were bloodthirsty schemers who eagerly did what was wrong. Princes and judges sought bribes. Even the best men were like a prickly plant or thorn hedge.

But rather than despairing, what did Micah do (Mic. 7:7)?

He looked to Jehovah and waited with confidence that He would hear.

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Where was Christ before His birth in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; John 1:1–2, 14; 1 John 1:1–2)?

Jesus existed from eternity past with His Father God. At His incarnation, He was manifested (shown) to us.

What was His main purpose for coming to earth (Matt.1:21)?

He came to save us from our sins.

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Who will He be to us in the future (Mic. 5:2, 4; Isa. 9:6–7)?

He will rule in Israel and be great over all the earth. He will be our Prince of Peace, and His kingdom of perfect justice will never end.

6

ZEPHANIAH

Page 61

Under which king did Zephaniah receive his prophecy (Zeph. 1:1)?

Josiah, the son of Amon, the king of Judah

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What happened next (2 Kings 23:1–7)?

King Josiah brought to the temple the elders of Judah, the priests and prophets, and all people small and great. He read to them the words of God's book, then stood by a pillar of the temple and covenanted with God to follow Him and obey His commandments, testimonies, and statutes with all his heart and soul. The people agreed with the king's covenant. King Josiah ordered the priests and doorkeepers of the temple to burn the paraphernalia of idol worship and removed the priests who offered incense to nature and false gods. At the Brook Kidron he burned a wooden image that had been in the temple and ground its ashes into a powder which he scattered onto graves. He tore down booths built within the temple where hangings for idol worship were woven and where sexual sins, especially homosexual acts, were performed as part of perverted worship. Josiah did a thorough moral housecleaning.

What was their attitude (Zeph. 1:12)?

They were complacent, believing God wasn't going to either bless or punish them. They thought He didn't notice or care about what they did.

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Which is easier to recognize? Is one worse than the other?

Rebellion is easier to see because it's outward. Complacency is an inward attitude, so it's harder to recognize. Rebellion is open disobedience to God; complacency is quiet disregard of Him. Both displease God.

When are we most tempted to be complacent? How does God respond to that attitude (Deut. 8:10–20; Rev. 3:15–19)?

When we're prosperous and everything's going well, it's easy to feel proud, focus on all our great stuff, and forget how much we need God. We forget the One who has brought us out of trouble and given

us our blessings. When we don't need any more material things, we may think we no longer need God—but we're wrong. God will rebuke, chasten, and call us to repentance.

What was coming (Zeph. 1:14)?

A great day of the Lord when men would cry bitterly

What will it be like (Zeph. 1:15–16)?

It will be a day of God's anger, a day of trouble and anguish. There will be destruction and devastation. It will be a day of gloom and heavy darkness. Trumpets of alarm will sound from the battlements of strong cities.

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How will people suffer? Why (Zeph. 1:17–18)?

They'll be distressed to the point of blindness. Their bodies and blood will be like garbage. Their wealth will not deliver them from God's judgment. In His fiery zeal against sin, He will devour and destroy all who live in the land. Because we're used to hearing stories of Jesus' love and compassion, it's hard to imagine God showing this much anger, but God has always hated sin and will always judge it. That's one of the primary messages in the Minor Prophets. Though on the cross the Son willingly endured the wrath of the Father toward every sin of every person, only those who accept Him as their substitute and apply the blood of His sacrifice to themselves will escape the judgment of God.

What other worldwide event does Zephaniah's Day of the Lord remind you of (Gen. 6:7; 7:21–23)?

The worldwide flood

In what ways will this day be even worse?

In the ark God saved alive eight people and some sets of animals. Some sea creatures also survived in the flood waters. But in this later Day of the Lord, all people and creatures will die.

If it hasn't happened in the past and isn't happening now, what does that mean?

It's certain to happen in the future.

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What should those who want to escape His wrath do to be "hid in the day of the Lord's anger" (Zeph. 2:3)?

They should seek God and His righteousness and be humble.

What has God said will happen to anyone who shows contempt for Israel (Gen. 12:3)? Today, who threatens and would like to destroy Israel?

God will treat nations the way they treat Israel—blessing those who bless Israel and cursing those who curse them. To curse Abraham's descendants is to show contempt for them or try to destroy them. The list of Israel's enemies shifts with the politics of the Middle East, but Arab nations and Islamic

extremists around the world are opposed to the existence of the Jewish state of Israel. Anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic movements exist in many forms in many places and anti-Jewish feelings live in many hearts.

What did God say would happen to that city (Zeph. 2:13–15)?

Nineveh will be destroyed by the hand of God and become as dry and desolate as a wilderness. Beasts, rather than people, will live in the middle of the city. Birds will make their homes on the pillars and in the windows of palaces. The cedar paneling on walls and roofs will be torn off, leaving the buildings open to wind and rain. People passing by will shake their fists and scornfully hiss at the city. This is the destiny of a city that once felt carelessly secure.

Page 66

What were they like (Zeph. 3:1–2)?

They were still rebellious, filthy, and defiled. They didn't obey God or accept His correction. They didn't trust in Jehovah or draw close to Him.

What four groups of leaders were behaving badly (Zeph. 3:3–4)?

Princes, judges, prophets, and priests—political and spiritual leaders

Page 67

Who and what will God take away? Who and what will He bring back (Zeph. 3:8–13)?

He will devour (consume) wicked nations and kingdoms with the fire of His jealous anger. He will bring back to His people a pure language of worship with praise, prayer, and sacrificial offerings. He will take away the proud and haughty and replace them with lowly and humble people who trust Him. He will take away all lying tongues. The remnant of Israel will speak truth, feed their flocks, and rest without fear. In summary, God will take away evil, fear, rebellion, pride, and lying from the earth and replace it with true worship, humility, prosperity, and peace.

Find the six "I wills" in Zephaniah 3:18–20.

- I will gather those who sorrow because they cannot celebrate the feasts while in exile.
- I will undo (deal with) those who afflict you.
- I will save the lame (the helpless) and gather those who were carried away captive.
- I will give praise and fame to those who have been in lands where they were put to shame.
- I will bring you back—regather you.
- I will give you fame and honor all over the earth by openly bringing you back from captivity.

These promises are for God's chosen people, the Jews.

7

HABAKKUK

Page 72

What did Job, Jeremiah, and David have in common?

They all went through severe trials that caused them to question God. Though pointed and agonizing, their questions came from hearts that sincerely trusted God and needed to hear from Him.

Page 73

What was happening in Judah (Hab. 1:3–4)?

There was plundering and violence, strife and contention. The law seemed ineffectual and there was no justice. The righteous were surrounded by the wicked and judgment was perverted.

Whom was He preparing as His tool to punish the rebellious people (Hab. 1:6)?

The Chaldeans

What were they like (Hab. 1:6–11)?

They were a bitter, dreaded nation who marched quickly across the earth occupying the territory of others. Their horses were faster than leopards and fiercer than wolves in the night. Their cavalry rushed like eagles toward their prey. Their goal was violence and their faces were set like a steady wind from the east. They gathered prisoners like grains of sand. They didn't fear kings, and they scorned princes and mocked cities' strongholds by heaping up mounds of dirt to cross over defenses. They were proud but also credited idols for their victories.

What attribute did he bring up in Habakkuk 1:12?

God is eternal.

Page 75

What was God's ultimate goal (Rom. 9:17)?

God wanted to reveal His power so all the earth would know His name (know what He is like). Then He would be glorified.

Page 76

How does he feel? What two requests does he make (Hab. 3:2)?

Habakkuk was afraid. He asked God to revive His work and even while angry, to remember to show mercy.

Page 77

What was his first reaction (Hab. 3:16)?

Fear! His body trembled, his lips trembled, and decay entered his bones (his steps became wobbly).

Page 78

Rewrite Habakkuk 3:17–19 to fit your own circumstances.

These prompts will help:

Even if . . .

Still I will . . .

Because I know this about my God . . .

Page 79

Who redeemed us from that curse? How did He do that? How do we access our redemption?

Jesus Christ redeemed us (bought, ransomed, rescued us) from the curse (the punishment of death we deserve for breaking God's law) by taking it on Himself on the cross. Though perfectly innocent, He died as our substitute, freeing us from sin's curse. We can access our redemption by believing in faith that when He died, He died for us.

8

OBADIAH

Page 81

What did He tell her (Gen. 25:22–23)?

The Lord told her that the children in her womb would be the roots (the ancestors, the fathers) of two nations. These sons would not only be separated from her womb, but also from each other. From the time of their birth, the twins would be very different, and one would be stronger than the other. The usual custom was for the oldest son in a family to receive a double portion of his father's inheritance and eventually serve as the spiritual head of the family, but in this case, God determined that the older son, Esau, would serve the younger son, Jacob.

How did this contrast affect their relationships with their parents (Gen. 25:24–28)?

Isaac loved Esau more, because Isaac enjoyed eating game from Esau's skillful hunting. Rebekah preferred Jacob because he enjoyed indoor pursuits.

What was Esau's attitude toward his birthright (Gen. 25:29–34)?

He had so much disdain for it that he traded it for a pot of soup.

Page 82

According to Hebrews 12:15–17, what does this story reveal about Esau's character?

Esau was immoral and as godless as a heathen. He didn't care about the spiritual blessing and leadership that came along with the birthright. He wanted only its material benefits. Though he later wished he hadn't traded away the privileges of the elder son, he never repented of his disdain for God's design. Esau's continued stubbornness so hardened his heart that God gave him no more opportunities to repent. His tears before Isaac in Genesis 27:30–40 didn't show sorrow for sin, just regret for its consequences.

God gave Jacob a new name, one that means "prince." What is it (Gen. 32:28)?

Israel

Page 83

How did God say the Israelites should treat the Edomites (Deut. 2: 4–5)?

They should be careful not to stir up strife with the Edomites.

How would Israel get food and water (Deut. 2:6)?

The Israelites should buy food and water from the Edomites.

What did messengers remind the king of Edom about Israel's past and the Edomite's relationship with that nation (Num. 20:14–16)?

The messengers reminded the king that the Israelites were once slaves in Egypt but God delivered them from that bondage.

What did they ask from the king (Num. 20:17, 19)?

The Israelites asked to pass through the Edomites' country. They would travel straight down the King's Highway so they wouldn't ruin fields or vineyards and would pay for any water they took from Edomite wells.

How did the king of Edom respond (Num. 20:18, 20)?

He refused their request and sent out a troop of mighty men to turn Israel away.

Why didn't Israel fight Edom as they had fought other enemies (Deut. 2:5)?

Because God had told them not to (Deut. 23:7)

Page 85

Where did he Satan say he would dwell? But where did he end up instead?

Satan said he would ascend above the clouds to heaven and exalt his throne above the stars of God. He planned to sit on the mount of the congregation (Mt. Zion, or more specifically Mt. Moriah, where the temple stood). Instead Satan was brought down to the deepest places in hell (Sheol, the place of the dead).

What fortresses do women build around themselves? Who and what do we trust to keep us safe?

We surround ourselves with symbols of human security. But even if we find ourselves alone, bereaved, sick, disabled, poor, or old, we are still safe, because God is our safety and strength.

Page 86

How can you know if you are trusting in *your place* in life rather than in God?

If an emotional or material loss leaves you feeling deeply anxious, your trust may be in humans and earthly possessions rather than in God. If illness or aging makes you fear the future, you may be trusting in your own strength rather than His. Our reactions to life's inevitable losses and changes reveal what we are relying on to keep us safe.

Page 87

How were these robberies different from ordinary theft (Obad. 1:5–6)?

Harvesters in a vineyard, even those who stole from it, left some gleanings behind. But in this case, nothing at all remained. Even hidden treasures were discovered and taken away.

Who would the thieves be (Obad. 1:7)?

They were men who had made a covenant of peace with Edom. They were people who, as friends, had shared meals with the Edomites.

Why is it futile to depend on wealth? What can riches *not* do for us?

Proverbs 23:5—Riches fly away like eagles. They don't last, but God does, for He is eternal.

1 Timothy 6:17—Riches are uncertain, rather than unchanging like God.

1 Peter 1:18—Wealth is corruptible; it decays.

Matthew 13:22—Money is deceitful, since it promises what it cannot give. Wealth can choke out the truth of the Word of God so that you become unfruitful in your Christian life.

Page 88

Ecclesiastes 5:10—If you love money, you'll never be satisfied. Because the more you get, the more you'll want, you'll never be content.

How do you know if you are trusting in your *wealth* rather than in God?

If a loss of income, a drop in the stock market, or a decline in the value of your retirement fund occupies your thoughts and steals your peace, that's a clue to what you ultimately trust. No matter what happens, Philippians 4:19 is always true.

How can we judge whether someone is truly wise or has genuine knowledge (Prov. 9:10)?

Knowing and fearing God are the foundations of wisdom and understanding.

What was going to happen to these folks and their "wisdom" (Obad. 1:8)?

Both they and their knowledge would be destroyed.

Page 89

How can you know if you are relying on your own *abilities* rather than in God's wisdom?

What's the first thing you do when you have a decision to make? Ask other people's opinions? Do research on the internet? Make a list of pros and cons? Or do you look in God's Word for guiding principles and ask Him for wisdom? What do you do first when you face a challenging time at school or work? If your first instinct is to look for help from people or books or just work a little harder, you may be placing your primary reliance on humans (including yourself) rather than on the upholding power of God.

What did the enemies of Jacob (the children of Judah) do to them and their city Jerusalem (Obad. 1:11–14)?

They carried away captives and gambled away the city. The city was destroyed and plundered.

While others attacked their relatives, what did the Edomites do? What did they *not* do (Obad. 1:11–14)?

They stood and watched as though they were one of the enemy. They gloated and rejoiced over Israel's destruction and helped themselves to plunder. Edomites stood in the passes where Jews were trying to escape and sent them back to be cut down by the enemy. They also gave up any Jews they found hiding among them. The Edomites did nothing to protect their relatives.

Page 90

What signs of *indifference* to the suffering of others do you see in your life?

There was a time when people knew only about local sorrows, ones they often could help alleviate. But now through the media we know about tragedies all over the globe and can even watch them unfold in color on a big screen. This can lead to such daily emotional overload that we may become numb to others' pain. We hear a tragic story, think, "That's awful," then move on with life without doing anything to help. And the truth is that often there's very little we could do.

We have also become so accustomed to the fictional crises of television, where conflicts arise and are resolved in one or two hours, that real-life long-term suffering has lost its edge.

It could also be true that when we know people are suffering because of bad choices they've made our compassion is diminished. Believing that they deserve their pain, we criticize rather than help. It's a challenge to avoid seeing ourselves as better than others. Everyone suffers some pain sometime, and the gospel offers grace for everyone, whether near or far away, whether it's deserved or not.

Page 91

Why wouldn't they need to fear Edom anymore (Obad. 1:18)?

Edom will be completely destroyed by God, burned to stubble. Not a single survivor will remain to be feared.

What would God give them as their own possession (Obad. 1:19–20)?

Their territory would expand in all directions, just as God promised Jacob in Genesis 28:14.

Page 92

What will those days be like (Obad. 1:17, 21)?

There will be safety and perfect holiness. The house of Jacob (two tribes) who survived the Babylonian captivity will be back in the land. The city and temple will be rebuilt. There people will worship and obey God perfectly under the leadership of Christ and His delegated leaders. His people will finally receive all their promised inheritance.

Who is Lord on that eternal throne (Luke 1:31–33 and Heb. 1:8)?

Jesus, who has been given the throne of David, will be Lord. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and ever, without end. His throne will be eternal, and from that throne He will rule with a scepter (a symbol of royalty) of righteousness.

9

HAGGAI

Page 95

What did Cyrus allow the Israelite captives to do (Ezra 1:2–3)?

To go to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of God, the temple

How could they afford this (Ezra 1:4–11)?

Cyrus commanded his subjects to give the returnees gold, silver, and other precious things, along with livestock and other property. They willingly did so. He also returned to the Jews the treasures Nebuchadnezzar had stolen from the earlier temple when he took Israel captive: platters, knives, basins, and thousands of other articles.

What was remarkable about this diverse group (Ezra 3:1)?

They were unified.

What did they do first (Ezra 3:2–6)?

They re-established God's system of worship. They built an altar and brought the regular burnt offerings the Law required. They began to keep the set feasts and brought freewill offerings.

What was their next priority (Ezra 3:7)?

They hired workmen and traded goods with Lebanon for building materials for the temple.

Page 96

Why do you think these old folks wept while younger people rejoiced?

Since the first temple had been destroyed about fifty years earlier, the people who remembered it well would have been close to sixty years old. The young folks, especially those born in captivity, didn't remember it at all, so they were content with what they saw before them. But the older folks wept as they compared what they saw with what they remembered. The original temple was huge and spectacular; this one was smaller and simpler. The earlier temple had held the Ark of the Covenant, which had long since disappeared, and the Shekinah glory of God, which didn't fill this temple.

Page 99

What happened after these two preached? Who led the work? Who helped (Ezra 5:2)?

The building got underway, led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Joshua). The prophets of God came to help.

To whom did Haggai bring “the word of the Lord” (Hag. 1:1)?

Zerubbabel the governor of Judah (civil leader), and Joshua the high priest (religious leader)

Page 100

What had God heard His people saying (Hag.1:2)?

It's not yet time to build the temple.

Instead of investing their time, energy, and wealth in the temple, what had they been doing (Hag. 1:3–4)?

While the temple stood in ruins without walls or roof, they had built and were enjoying their own fine homes.

What kind of homes had the people built for themselves (Hag. 1:4)?

Cieled (paneled or wainscoted) houses

Page 101

Find five contrasts in Haggai 1:6. They did this, and this was the result:

- They planted much but harvested little.
- They ate but were never satisfied.
- They drank but their thirst was not quenched.
- They put on clothes but never felt warm.
- They earned money but it disappeared.

What did He say He had done? Why (Hag. 1:9–11)?

They thought they would get wealthy if they kept their own money rather than giving it to God, but with His breath the Lord scattered their wealth. They didn't gain but lost instead. God sent a drought to their land that prevented the growth of crops and affected their livestock, so their labor came to nothing. This judgment came because the people had neglected building the temple.

Page 102

Where should God and His kingdom be on your priority list? What changes do you need to make?

When we put the Lord's work first, He supplies all our needs and His provisions fill us to overflowing. We can never make ourselves poor by giving generously to God.

Page 103

What was He going to do (Hag. 2:6–7)?

God will rattle the heaven, earth, sea, dry land, and all the nations. The Messiah, the desire of all nations, will arrive, and the nations will come to Him. Then the temple will be filled with the glory of His presence.

Page 104

What will that temple be like (Hag. 2:9)?

The millennial temple will be even greater than Solomon's temple and will be a place of peace.

What's the first question and their answer (Hag. 2:11–12)?

If a priest is carrying in his clothing meat dedicated to God and his garments touch unconsecrated food, will that food become holy? Their answer was no.

What's the second question and their answer (Hag. 2:13)?

If a priest who is ceremonially unclean after touching a dead body touches consecrated meat, is that meat made unclean? The answer was yes.

These folks had had a rough time so far. But if they would transfer their faith from their own religious acts to God Himself, what could they expect (Hag. 2:19)?

God would bless them.

Page 105

List the "I wills" of Haggai 2:20–22.

- I will shake heaven and earth.
- I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms.
- I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen.
- I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them, the horses and their riders, and everyone will die by the sword of his brother.

10

Z E C H A R I A H

Page 108

Who do you think these horses symbolize (Heb. 1:13–14; Ps. 34:7; 91:11–12)?

They are angels, ministers of God who serve believers. Angels encamp around us to defend us and deliver us from danger. They carry us and protect us from hurt as they battle our enemies. The angels always do God's will.

Who else traverses the earth for his own evil purposes (Job 1:6–7)?

Satan

Page 109

What have you learned about your God from this vision?

Our God controls the unseen powers of the universe, for our good.

Who is coming to the rescue? What will they do (Zech. 1:20–21)?

Four craftsmen will arrive to hammer, or overthrow, enemy nations coming from all directions.

Page 110

What have you learned about your God from this vision?

God has promised to protect His people by judging those who attack them.

The angel announced that there would be no city wall. Why (Zech. 2:5)?

God Himself would be a wall of fire around the city and also the glory within it.

Why was He passionate about defending His people (Zech. 2:8)?

We are the "apple of His eye." He sees and cherishes us and is sensitive to our pain.

Page 111

What have you learned about your God from this vision?

No matter who our enemies are or what they try to do to us, God Himself keeps us safe.

Why was Satan there (Zech. 3:1)?

To attack and accuse Joshua

What did God do for His high priest (Zech. 3:4–5)?

God had His attendants exchange Joshua's filthy garments for fresh ones and put a clean turban on his head.

Page 112

What have you learned about your God from this vision?

Despite Satan's accusations, our Father continually sanctifies us on earth and will someday present us in heaven as completely holy.

Page 113

What can you accomplish without God's power? With it, what can you do?

Without Him, you can do nothing. With His strength, you can do anything He wants you to do.

What have you learned about your God from this vision?

His power is essential in my life.

Where—in addition to the written Word—is God's law written today (Rom. 1:18–20, 2:14–16)?

God has revealed Himself to man through creation and conscience.

Page 114

What have you learned about your God from this vision?

God doesn't leave anyone without some knowledge of who He is.

What did she represent? While Zechariah watched, what did the angel do (Zech. 5:7–8)?

She represented wickedness. The angel pushed her down into the basket and sealed it with a lead covering.

What happened next (Zech. 5:9–11)?

Two women with wings like storks lifted up the basket and carried it away to the land of Shinar (an old word for Babylon) where the basket was set on its base.

Page 115

What have you learned about your God from this vision?

God is allowing evil in the world now, but someday He will put an end to it.

What have you learned about your God from this vision?

A final judgment is coming when all will give account to Him. Sin will be put away and God will reign forever.

Page 116

Does that phrase sound familiar? Who spoke those words about Jesus? When (John 19:14)?

Just before the crucifixion, Pilate introduced Jesus to the Jews with these words: “Behold your King!”

What prophecy did they see coming to pass?

The Messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

What did they do? Why do you think they did that (Matt. 21:8 and 2 Kings 9:12–13)?

They spread clothes and branches on the donkey’s path. This was an ancient way of honoring a king. The people watching acknowledged Him as King of the Jews.

Page 117

What title did they give Jesus (Matt. 21:8–10)?

The Son of David

What event in Jesus’ life does this story foreshadow (Matt. 26:14–16, 27:3–8)?

Thirty pieces of silver was the price the chief priests paid Judas for betraying Jesus. When in remorse Judas tried to return this money, the priests refused to accept it, so Judas threw it on the floor of the temple. With that silver the priests bought a piece of ground. Named the potter’s field, it was used as a cemetery.

Page 118

What other Old Testament prophecies about the death of the Messiah were fulfilled at the cross?

Jesus’ hands and feet were pierced by nails. He hung naked on the cross because soldiers gambled away His clothes. People stood and stared as He died.

Why didn’t the soldiers break Jesus’ bones (John 19:31–33)?

Jesus was already dead, so there was no need to hasten His dying.

But there was a far more important reason. Find it in John 19:36–37.

These verses apply in general to those who are righteous, but they are also vividly prophetic of the Messiah’s death. Just as God protected the body of Jesus, He preserves us in danger.

Page 119

What was the rule about the bones of a Passover lamb (Exod. 12:46 and Num. 9:12)?

None of its bones were to be broken.

But how should you expect to be treated? How do you think you will respond when it comes?

Anyone who lives a godly life should expect persecution. We'd all like to believe we'd respond with joy and peace, recognizing that it's a privilege to suffer for His sake, but we're more likely to complain and fear.

Page 120

What did they promise?

That Jesus would come back to earth in the same way He went to heaven

Where did this scene take place?

The mountain called Olivet (the Mount of Olives)

11

JOEL

Page 121

Where did Joel say his message came from (Joel 1:1)?

The message came to Joel as the word of the Lord.

Page 122

Discover the book's theme. It's a five-word phrase repeated in Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14.

The Day of the Lord

In these passages, how does God get people's attention?

Isaiah 13:6–13—The stars, sun, and moon stop shining. The heavens shake and the earth moves out of its orbit.

Ezekiel 13:11–14—He sends flooding rain, great hailstones, and a stormy wind.

Acts 2:19–20—There will be wonders in the sky and miracles in the earth: blood, fire, and smoky vapor. The sun will become dark and the moon will turn the color of blood.

Page 123

2 Peter 3:10—The heavens will vanish with a loud noise; the components (elements) of earth will melt with a fervent heat; the earth and everything in it will be burned up.

Page 124

Putting politics aside, what do you think of those statements? What's a biblical response to them?

It's foolish to pretend to know God's eternal purposes based only on immediate events, especially the politics of the moment. The ways of a sovereign God are far beyond our limited time-based understanding. We should simply trust Him without trying to interpret every move He makes.

At the beginning of his message, Joel told the elders and all the people of the land to do something special. What did he tell them (Joel 1:2–3)?

God asked them to tell their children what He had done among them, have them tell their children, and so on through the generations.

Page 125

Why is it important to tell younger generations, especially our own children and grandchildren, what we have seen God do? What are some ways to do that? Should we tell them only about our spiritual successes, or include our failures as well (Ex. 10:2, 12:25–27; 13:14; Deut. 4:9; Ps. 71:17–18)?

The generations that come after us can learn much about God from hearing how He has worked in our lives. If we share with them our spiritual victories, they will know how to win their own battles. If we tell them about our failures, we can guard them from making the same mistakes. Talk whenever they'll listen—but even better, keep a spiritual journal. Record the story of your walk with God in your own voice, and write down lessons you've learned from life and from God's Word.

Page 126

What other calamities came (Joel 1:10–12, 17–20)?

The field was laid waste, and the land mourned. The grain was ruined, the new wine (fresh grape juice) dried up, and the oil failed. The expected harvest of wheat and barley died. Vines shriveled and fruit trees—fig, pomegranate, palm, and apple—withered. Since these crops and fruits were staples of their diet, the people mourned.

Page 127

How did Joel tell the priests, elders, and people to respond? How would God know they were serious (Joel 1:13–14)?

They were to wail and mourn, wear sackcloth and fast, and assemble in the house of the Lord to cry out to Him.

How were they (and how are we) to fast (Matt. 6:16–18)?

Fast in secret, to be seen only by God. Don't look miserable or complain about being hungry as a way of getting attention and praise for your self-discipline.

How did the locusts look (Joel 2:4)?

They looked and ran like horses.

Page 128

What was the land like before the locusts arrived? What was it like when they left (Joel 2:3)?

It was once like the Garden of Eden, but it became a desolate wilderness.

What other supernatural signs appeared (Joel 2:2–3, 10)?

Daytime became dark, cloudy, and gloomy. Fire burned before and after the locusts. The earth quaked, the heavens trembled, the sun and moon became dark, and the stars dimmed. In other places in Scripture, disruptions in nature have served as signs of God's judgment. This is one way He gets everyone's attention (Ps. 18:7; Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7; Matt. 24:29).

How did the people respond to these horrors (Joel 2:6)?

They had deep anxiety. Their faces were either flushed with fear or pale with horror.

But in the same verse (what a relief!), what else did He promise?

God will drive the army of human invaders away into a wilderness between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. There the enemies will die, and the stench from their rotting bodies will be made even more foul because of their horrible deeds.

Page 129

Why did God tell the people to “rend your heart, and not your garments” (Joel 2:12–13)?

Tearing clothing was a sign of mourning or repentance, but it was possible to do that without real sorrow for sin.

What is the difference between outward contrition and inward repentance? Does changed behavior always reveal a changed heart? How can you tell the difference?

People can say they’re sorry and even change their behavior to avoid unpleasant consequences, while having no change of heart. Real repentance brings lasting inward change. We can’t know for sure whether other people are truly repentant or just pretending, but we and God do know our own hearts.

If the people truly repented, what would God do (Joel 2:18–27)?

He would send enough grain, new wine, and oil to satisfy them. He would restore His people’s reputation and destroy the enemy army. The trees would once more bear fruit as the early and late rains returned. The harvests of wheat, new wine, and oil would overflow their allotted storage areas. God would restore everything the people had lost; then they could eat all they wanted and be satisfied. He would no more put His people to shame.

Page 130

What dramatic events will occur (Joel 2:30–31, 3:15–16)?

More miraculous signs will appear in heaven and earth: blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will become dark, and the moon turn the color of blood. The stars will stop shining, and heaven and earth will shake.

Who will live with Judah there (Joel 3:17, 21)?

God, the Lord Jehovah

12

MALACHI

Page 135

What did God say He had done for them?

He had loved them.

What was their question?

Their question was, “How have You loved us?” It sounded like a sincere question, but it wasn’t.

Page 136

What wrong beliefs about God are at the core of that kind of thinking?

When we question God’s love because we think He has let us down, we believe we are wiser than God and regard Him as sort of a giant-sized servant who should do whatever we ask, not what He knows is best. Trusting God means steadfastly believing that He always does what is good and right. It means relying on His character, not critiquing His performance. We should trust who He is and not question His love when we are disappointed in the circumstances He allows.

Page 137

With what offenses did God charge the priests? What two questions did they ask Him in response (Mal. 1:6–7)?

He was their Father, but they did not treat Him with honor. He was their Master, but they did not reverence Him. They despised (disdained) His name and offered Him polluted (defiled) bread.

What was their sin? Find the answers by comparing Malachi 1:7–8 to Leviticus 22:17–25 and Deuteronomy 17:1.

They had offered polluted bread on the altar and brought blind, lame, or sick animals as sacrifices. God required perfect sacrificial animals and forbade offering those that were blemished or defective.

Page 138

Do we ever show more reverence for humans than for God? In what ways do we give *second best* or *good enough* to God?

We sometimes offer Him the leftovers of our time, energy, and money. Rather than giving the first hour of the day to God, we give it to people or the media. We give entertainment priority over Bible

study. We tithe only on what is left of our income after our bills are paid. We compromise sincerely held convictions to avoid looking different or being judged as “holier than thou.” Even the way we dress can show a greater concern for others’ admiration or current styles than for pleasing God through modesty and femininity.

How did they show a bad attitude toward worship (Mal. 1:12–13)?

By their actions, and likely also their words, they showed that they despised the table (the altar) of the Lord. A portion of the offerings brought by the people was set aside for the priests, but they thought it wasn’t good enough for them. They turned up their noses at it and sneered at God’s provision.

What did God say He would do to those who offered Him less than He asked (Mal. 1:10; 2:2–3)?

He would not accept their offerings. He would give them curses rather than blessings from then on, and the blessings they had already received wouldn’t bring them any joy or profit. Their descendants would be rebuked by God. He would demonstrate how disgracefully they had behaved by throwing into their faces the excrement of animals being prepared for sacrifice—waste that was usually burned as garbage. This humiliation was a symbol of how God felt about their defiling His worship. Just as animal dung was to be thrown away, they would be thrown out of their priestly office. God takes seriously the role of spiritual leadership over His people.

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Is God obligated to accept any sort of worship we decide we want to bring? When does He refuse our worship (Prov. 15:8; 28:9; Matt. 6:1–7, 16–18)?

Since the days of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:3–5), God has made it clear that worship must be done on His terms, not ours. He doesn’t accept worship from a wicked heart. The prayers of anyone who refuses to hear and obey God’s Word are abhorrent to Him. Anyone who gives, prays, or fasts to be praised by people will have no reward from God. Only those who do those acts of worship and service privately will be rewarded.

Whom had they married (Mal. 2:11)?

They had married daughters of idolaters, who likely were also idol worshipers. These women would draw their husbands and children toward false gods.

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What commands had God given about marrying the heathen? Why was this important (Deut. 7:1–4)?

They were not to marry a heathen, because that spouse would turn their children’s hearts to idols.

What are God’s instructions for us about this (2 Cor. 6:14–16)?

A Christian isn’t supposed to be yoked (joined) together with an unbeliever, for Christ has no concord (literally symphony) with Belial (Satan). The temples of the living God, which we are, aren’t compatible with idolatry. A Christian woman married to an unbeliever shouldn’t despair and certainly shouldn’t choose to divorce. She has power in prayer and much reason for hope. God’s guidance and encouragement for her are in 1 Peter 3 and 1 Corinthians 7.

What does God think of divorce (Mal. 2:16)?

He hates it.

What is God's blueprint for marriage? Write Mark 10:6–9 in your own words.

At creation God made male and female. Because of this, a man should leave his parents and be glued to his wife. In marriage husband and wife are united as one body. God has joined them together, so no man should be allowed to separate them.

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Find the phrase used three times in Malachi 2:14–16 that describes what the priests had done when they divorced their wives. What does that phrase mean?

They “dealt treacherously” with their wives. That means to act deceitfully or be unfaithful to promises such as marriage vows.

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What Old Testament principles did Paul apply to the New Testament church (1 Cor. 9:9–14)?

The Old Testament law said that just as oxen used in threshing should be allowed to eat mouthfuls of grain as they worked (Deut. 25:4), so New Testament preachers should be paid for the work they do for the Lord. Also in the Old Testament, part of the meat, grain, and oil brought for sacrifices was given to the priests for personal support so they'd be free to devote themselves fully to serving God (Num. 18:8–20). With God's approval leaders of the New Testament church can be given part of the offerings given to the church as their salary.

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Study these scriptures. What is New Testament giving like?

1 Cor. 16:2—It's planned and regular, set aside on the first day of the week (Sunday), and offered in proportion to how much God has given us.

2 Cor. 8:1–5—We should be willing to give freely even when we are poor. Giving is how we partner with and minister to others. If we and all we have are fully consecrated to God, it's easy to give generously even if we are poor.

2 Cor. 9:5–12—We should be eager to give purposefully and willingly, not grumbling because we're required to give. Giving is sowing, and the more we sow, the more we will reap. God loves those who give with joy. He will shower abundant grace on us so that we have all we need and even more. Then we can give generously. If we give not just to those we know, but to strangers and those abroad, God remembers this righteous behavior and will multiply what we have given. When we give liberally, we are actually made richer, and those who receive our gifts will be grateful to God—so when we give generously, we don't just supply needs; we cause the Lord to receive praise.

What other principles apply?

Luke 16:10–13—Our faithfulness, or lack of it, in handling money reflects our faithfulness or unfaithfulness in other areas. If we aren't faithful with money, we forfeit the true riches: grace on earth and treasures in heaven. If we aren't careful stewards of what God has entrusted us to use, then how can we be trusted with rich rewards for ourselves? Both God and money are masters. We choose which one we will love and serve.

1 Cor. 4:2 (Who is the real owner of all you possess?)—We are only stewards, not owners, of what we possess. It all belongs to God and is entrusted to us to manage for His glory.

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Who is it (Mal. 4:5)?

Elijah

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Who was he? What did he preach (Matt. 3:1–3; Luke 3:2–16)?

He was John the Baptist, who preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand [coming soon]!” He also preached the baptism of repentance for [because of] the remission [forgiveness] of sins. John didn't preach that baptism brought forgiveness from sin. Salvation comes before, not during, baptism (Acts 2:41; Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 3:21). Since it's an outward symbol of what has already taken place in the heart, baptism must follow salvation.

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With what titles did he introduce Jesus (John 1:29–36)?

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world

He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit

The Son of God