



**The Message of
The Minor
Prophets
for Today**

Edited by Aaron Dunlop

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
HOSEA	5
JOEL	9
AMOS	13
OBADIAH.....	17
JONAH	21
MICAH	25
NAHUM	29
HABAKKUK	33
ZEPHANIAH.....	37
HAGGAI	40
ZECHARIAH.....	43
MALACHI.....	50

Introduction

The last twelve books of the Old Testament are called the Minor Prophets. They are called Minor, not because they are less important than other prophets, like Isaiah or Jeremiaah, but because they are shorter.

Many Christians ignore the Minor Prophets because they seem difficult, distant from our present context, and unfamiliar. Yet these prophets have an important message for today. They condemn empty religion and spiritual complacency and show us God's judgment against sin, his grace to those who repent, and his covenant faithfulness to his people.

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Contributors

Michael P. V. Barrett (Hosea and Joel) is Academic Dean and Professor of Old Testament at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

Daniel Timmer (Amos and Obadiah) is a professor of Biblical Studies in the PhD program of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Ian Turner (Jonah and Micah) is a PhD student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Justin Richardson (Nahum and Habakkuk) is a PhD student in Biblical Studies at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He, his wife Liz, and their four children live in Birmingham, Alabama, where Justin serves at Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA).

Rev. Lane Keister (Zephaniah and Haggai) is an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and currently serves as pastor of Momence Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Momence, Illinois. He is also a student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, pursuing a PhD.

Matthew Henry (Zachariah and Malachi) was a minister in England, best known for his *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, published in 1708-1710.

Calvin Goligher is the minister of Sunnyvale Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Sunnyvale, California.

Hosea

History

- Date of writing: ca. 775-725 BC (reigns mentioned in 1:1)
- Author: Hosea, husband of Gomer the prostitute
- Original audience: Northern kingdom in the decades leading up to their exile.

Genre (type of literature)

- Poetry (autobiography in chapters 1-3)

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Many references to Pentateuch (Abrahamic covenant in 1:10, covenant of works in 6:7, the Exodus in 11:1-4, Jacob in 12:2-5)
- Valley of Achor (Joshua 7:24 and Hosea 2:15)

Connections to the New Testament

- Hosea 1:6-10 and 2 Peter 2:10
- Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 and Romans 9:25-26
- Hosea 6:2 and the resurrection

One-sentence summary

God's costly love for his unfaithful people.

Outline

- Hosea's family: a parable about Israel (1-3)
- The Parable Spelt out: No Faithfulness, No Steadfast Love, No Knowledge (4-14)

Key texts

- Call to repentance (6:1-3)
- Steadfast love, not sacrifice (6:6)

Key truths about God

- God's faithful love for his people, imaged by Hosea's faithful love for Gomer

Key truths about salvation

- Exile is part of God's plan for ultimate restoration (1:6-7)
- Our relationship with God is like a marriage; unfaithfulness is like adultery

Commentary

Hosea, whose name means "salvation," has been called the tenderest of the prophets, the St. John of the Old Testament. He is the prophet of love. There is more talk and less understanding about God's love than almost any other divine perfection. Most people define

God's love based on their own experience. Even the Christian's love for God is generated by an attraction to God: We love Him because He first loved us.

God, however, does not love because He sees something attractive in the object of His love. God loves because He is love. Every Christian must humbly acknowledge that he does not deserve or merit divine favour. Hosea, both in his life and in his preaching, taught vital truths about the love of God.

Hosea preached during the years immediately preceding Israel's fall to the Assyrians. The list of kings in Hosea 1:1 spans more than a century; his ministry began sometime before the death of Jeroboam II in 753 BC and ended about 725 BC, after Hezekiah's accession but before Samaria's fall in 722 BC. He ministered to a wicked society, overripe for divine judgment. His list of Israel's sins reads like an unabridged encyclopedia article on ungodliness. The people were lawless, unjust, rebellious, evil, and completely missed the mark of God's holy standards. To these unworthy sinners on the brink of national disaster, Hosea issued the summons to repent (6:1) and declared God's continuing love for His wayward, backsliding people. Hosea's message was of sovereign grace and love. His theme highlighted the love of God that remained constant, even though Israel scorned him. God's love is constant and unchanging.

Two lines of analysis sum up Hosea's message: one was symbolic, and the other was direct to the point.

The symbolic message was Hosea's marriage to Gomer (the focus of chapters 1-3). It was not uncommon for prophets to employ object lessons or symbolic acts as part of their preaching, but Hosea was unique in that his whole life of shame and sorrow was linked to his message. Chapter 1 records his marriage to Gomer and the birth of three children. There are differences of interpretations, but most likely Gomer was pure at the beginning of the marriage, but later became defiled as she surrendered to her latent propensity to adultery. The text bears this out when it says in 1:3 that she bore "to him" a son, Jezreel (God scatters), but in the birth of Lo-ruhamah (not pitied; 1:6) and Lo-ammi (not my people; 1:8) that statement is missing. This would suggest that Hosea was not the father of the latter two children. This is part of the picture.

Hosea's marriage to Gomer parallels God's marriage to Israel: a good beginning that turned tragic (see Jer. 2:2-3). Hosea 3:1 is the key verse of the prophecy as God instructs Hosea to love Gomer "according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel." Humanly speaking, Hosea's love for Gomer did not make any sense. She did not deserve it, yet Hosea remained faithful.

But that is the point. Humanly speaking, God's love for sinners makes no sense, but He is gracious and faithful. It was easy for the people to see Hosea's grief. They were to learn that what Gomer did to Hosea, they were doing to God, and what Hosea did for Gomer, God

does for His people. As Hosea's marriage was a symbol to Israel, Israel's marriage to the Lord is a symbol to the church. The message is indeed for today.

The direct message. Chapters 4-14 record Hosea's direct message to the people. His message about God's marriage to Israel can be summed up in three points.

First, it is initiated by divine love. In human love relationships, somebody always makes the first move. So it is spiritually, and it is always God. We love Him because He first loved us. The fact of God's love is expressly stated (3:1; 11:1; 14:4), and it is a love motivated totally by grace. God gave evidence of His love in three ways.

1. He entered into a covenant, a pledge of everlasting loyalty (2:18-20).
2. He gave His people a law, instructing them on how to please Him (8:12).
3. Third, He gave them a land, a picture of rest and fellowship in His presence (2:8-12).

What God did for Israel is typical of what He does for individuals. Every believer must recognise that in Christ, he is the object of God's love, entirely of grace. Every good is a token of His love.

Second, God's love was spurned by sin. The response to God's love should have been humble gratitude and loving obedience. Hosea 6:6 declares what God desired: mercy and knowledge of Himself rather than religious offerings. But contrary to His desire, the nation transgressed and dealt treacherously (a word often used for the violation of marriage vows; 6:7).

Hosea 4:1 sums up God's accusations against the people with three charges:

1. There was no truth. They were unreliable and untrustworthy in fulfilling their obligations to God.
2. There was no mercy. The covenant loyalty that should have been constant was temporary and unsubstantial.
3. There was no knowledge. There was no apprehension of the truth about God and no experience of a personal relationship with Him.

The many references throughout the book to Israel's breaking the law and their preference for Baal testify to the widespread ignorance of God and His law. They rebelled against authority (8:1) and regarded God's law as loathsome and repugnant (8:12). Their spiritual adultery was linked to ignorance of God (5:4), and that ignorance earned judgment (4:6). The lesson is obvious. If ignorance of God was the essence of the spiritual problem, knowing God is the solution. That was true then and is true now.

The third point in Hosea's sermon is that God's love was maintained by loyalty. Israel was bent on backsliding (11:7), but God remained faithful (11:8). Three thoughts sum up this point.

1. Discipline is the evidence of loyalty. Sin had inescapable consequences (8:7; 9:7, 9; 10:13), but the purpose of discipline was not destruction but to awaken spiritual concerns and pursuits (5:15).
2. Restoration is the goal of loyalty. His plan to restore had three steps: He would isolate them, putting a hedge around them until they recognised God's superiority over Baal (2:6-7). He impoverished them in order for them to learn to depend on Him completely (2:9-12). He enticed them, alluring and persuading them irresistibly with love (2:14-23).
3. Repentance is the proper response to loyalty. There were no shortcuts to repentance, but there was a way back home (6:1-3; 14:1-3). There is hope for the backslider: God has left the door back home open. Other prophets admonished sinners to turn because certain judgment lay ahead; Hosea admonished sinners to turn because God was behind them.

The closing verse of Hosea settles the issue of the book's relevance for today (14:9). It is wise to understand what Hosea says. It is instructive and encouraging to know that there is a way to God open to those so undeserving. This is the gospel.

Joel

History

- Date of writing: probably ca. 830-800 BC
- Author: Joel
- Original audience: Judah and Jerusalem (esp. elders and priests)

Genre (type of literature)

- Poetry

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Vine and fig tree (1:7, 12)
- Garden of Eden (2:3)
- Mountains drip with sweet wine (3:18, see Amos 9:13)

Connections to the New Testament

- Day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10-12, Revelation 9:6-9)
- Pentecost (Joel 2:28, Acts 2)

One-sentence summary

- The value and importance of repentance.

Outline

- God requires repentance (1:2-2:17)
- Recent locust devastation (chapter 1)
- Future divine devastation (2:1-17)
- God responds to repentance (2:18-3:21)
- God renews land and people (2:18-32)
- God judges the nations (3:1-16)
- God blesses his people (3:17-21)

Key texts

- *"I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten"* (2:25)
- *"So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who dwells in Zion..."* (3:17)

Key truths about God

- God will judge the earth and his people, both in his history and at the end of history.
- Destruction of the locusts and foreign invaders is a token of God's judgment.
- God is gracious and merciful (2:13)
- God is jealous (2:18)

Key truths about salvation

- Salvation is available to all (2:32)
- Salvation will involve the outpouring of the Spirit (2:28-29)
- Salvation will involve the renewal of God's people and the creation (3:17-18)

Commentary

Although Joel did not directly date his prophecy, the circumstantial evidence points to the 9th century B.C., either during the illegal, renegade rule of Queen Athaliah or the early days of the boy king Joash, who had providentially escaped Athaliah's deadly plot against the royal seed (2 Kings 11-12).

The days were dark, both politically and spiritually. There seemed to be little prospect for hope, but not even wicked Athaliah could frustrate God's purpose and plan. The Lord raised up the prophet Joel to provide the theological interpretation of all the tragic events of the day and to announce details of God's fixed plans for the future.

Joel 1 describes an invasion of an innumerable army of ravenous locusts that devastated the country with severe economic and religious consequences. It was the cause of consternation, deprivation, and perplexity. Although the particular circumstances are not the same now as then, the situation of our day is not much different from Joel's. Our day is marked by darkness, chaos, and uncertainty, politically, religiously, economically, socially, and environmentally. Joel's message to his generation is equally relevant to ours. Just substitute "coronavirus" for "locusts."

Joel made it clear that what to the natural eye seemed to be a natural disaster—the locust plague—was in reality a manifestation of the Day of the Lord. Disasters happen regularly according to the laws of nature and direction of Providence, and they were particularly common and predictable in Palestine. But this locust plague was different: as a Day of the Lord, it was a "shattering from Shaddai" (1:15). Shaddai, normally the title of God associated with provision, was now revealed as the God who deliberately took away all provisions.

God had directly, supernaturally, and unmistakably intervened into human affairs to accomplish His purpose of judgment against the nation's sin. Eternity had broken into time. The locusts, palmerworms, cankerworms, and caterpillars were dedicated and obedient soldiers under the command of the Lord Himself. Joel declared not only that God had punished, but that He would punish again with even greater severity and devastation unless the people repented. Using both the past (chap. 1) and future Day of the Lord (chap. 2) as the incentive, the prophet issued two great calls for repentance (1:13-14 and 2:12-17). Turning to the Lord was the only hope. But it was a real hope because God does not turn away those who turn to Him.

The invitations in Joel 1 focused on the external manifestations of repentance: putting on

sackcloth and fasting. Sackcloth was a coarse material made from either goat or camel hair, which would be extremely uncomfortable. Fasting was an occasion to put aside physical concerns and pursuits to devote attention to spiritual matters. The focus of fasting was not to deprive or punish the body but to afflict the soul (Lev. 16:29). Sadly, man can turn the best of religious practices into nothing more than outward acts without heart devotion to the Lord.

The call to repentance in Joel 2 does not exclude the appropriate outward displays, but it does underscore the importance of inward reality: “turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God” (2:12-13).

Turning is the key word in the Old Testament for evangelical repentance, picturing a complete reversal of direction. It is a turning away from sin to God, resulting in new attitudes and a change of perspective. True repentance is a matter of the heart, the principal word for the inner being: the mind, emotion, and will. Intellectually, heart repentance requires a change in thought about God, acknowledging sin’s offence against His holiness.

Emotionally, it is expressed in contrition over sin, and volitionally (according to the will), it involves the resolve to flee to God in apprehension of His mercy. God does not despise this kind of broken and contrite heart. The external evidences of repentance will accompany it (weeping, mourning, fasting), but it is imperative to “rend” the heart and not just the garments.

Not only does Joel expose sin, declare judgment, and call us to repentance, but he also gives assurance of God’s mercy that guarantees acceptance. Joel 2:13 is a remarkable catalogue of divine perfections that give hope to the hopeless.

- He is gracious—that objective and sovereign display of divine favour to the undeserving.
- He is merciful—that subjective display of compassion to those in a pitiable state, along with the necessary action to alleviate their condition.
- He is slow to anger—literally, “long of nostrils,” a picture of His patience and longsuffering without which none would be saved.
- He is of great kindness—His faithful loyalty to His covenant oath that guarantees His promise to receive all those who come to Him.
- He relents concerning judgment—His pledge to deal in mercy and not in wrath to those who repent. If God were not who He is, there would be no hope.

Joel preached a God of hope to a people who seemed too far gone for hope.

After Joel described the locust judgment, predicted a more severe one to come, and issued a call to repentance, he detailed the blessings that God purposed for His people. The blessing was threefold:

- An immediate, temporal restoration of what the locusts had eaten (2:21-27),
- A later spiritual blessing fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (2:28-32),

- An even later blessing involving judgment on every enemy and special favour on God's people (chap. 3).

The unifying principle of each is that the experience of restoration and blessing is available to God's people whenever they repent and seek Him. God has a purpose to advance His kingdom that cannot be frustrated.

The immediate blessing of restoration was marked by prosperity, praise, and experience of God's presence (2:26-27). The prospect of such a revival should incite the church today to seek the Lord. God was able to reverse the devastation caused by the locusts; He is able to reverse the darkness of our day as well. Joel teaches us that it is not a vain thing to seek the Lord in genuine repentance.

The two "later" blessings are reminders that God has a purpose for His kingdom that is unconditionally certain. Pentecost commenced a key epoch in the progression of redemption with the massive effusion of spiritual power available to all in the church to serve in kingdom work. Whereas in the Old Testament spiritual empowerment was limited to the leadership, in the New Testament era, every believer has access to the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Joel's prophecy about Pentecost makes his message especially relevant to the church's ministry today.

Joel's final prophecy (chap. 3) remains future for the church and thus most relevant. It is a solemn reminder to sinners that they must repent before it is too late. Those multitudes in the valley of decision (2:14) are in the place of no return; the judgment has been decreed. But the day of judgment on the wicked is also a day of deliverance for God's people (3:18-21). It is a timeless and universal truth that there is safety, security, and salvation with the Lord and doom without Him. That is what Joel preached, and it is the message for the church today.

Amos

History

- Date of writing: ca. 750, reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam (1:1)
- "Two years before the earthquake" (1:1). This shows the historical aspect of prophecy.
- Period of prosperity for Judah and Israel, while Assyria was relatively weak.
- Author: "shepherd of Tekoa" (1:1), farmer (7:14-15)
- Original audience: Northern Kingdom, in the period leading up to Assyrian exile.

Genre (type of literature)

- Poetry, except a bit of narrative in 7:10-17

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- References to Israel's history (2:9-11, 3:1)
- Prophets are like Abraham (3:7 and Genesis 18:17)
- Critique of false religion in 4:4-5 and 5:21-24 is similar to Isaiah 1:14 and Micah 6:6-8

Connections to the New Testament

- Stephen (Acts 7:42-43) quotes Amos on Israel's history of false worship
- Restoration promises (9:11) quoted at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:16)
- A brand from the burning (4:11 and Jude 23)

One-sentence summary

God will judge his people for their sin and restore them to righteousness.

Outline

- Oracles of Judgement (1-6)
- Judgement on Gentiles (1-2)
- Judgement on Israel (2-6)
- Visions of Judgement (7-9)
- Vision of judgement (7)
- Vision of the end (8)
- Vision of the altar (9)
- Thresholds shaken (9:1-10)
- David's booth restored (9:11-15)

Key texts

- *"Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?"* (3:6)
- Call to repentance (5:14-15)
- *"I hate your feasts... Let justice roll down..."* (5:21-24)
- Restoration promises (9:11-15)

Key truths about God

- God is the judge of the entire world: Gentiles (chapter 1) and Jews (chapters 2-9)
- God is the creator and governor of the world (3:6, 5:8-9)

Key truths about salvation

- Salvation will come through a renewal of David's line (9:11)
- Salvation will come to the Gentiles (9:12)
- Salvation will involve a renewal of creation (9:13) and God's people (9:14-15)

Commentary

Despite being composed nearly three thousand years ago, the book of Amos remains highly relevant. Its analysis of humanity's sinful condition reveals the deceptive power of sin as well as its destructive effects, and its presentation of God's justice in response to sin warns all who read it of the ultimate consequences of rebellion against God. But its promises of salvation reveal a glorious God who offers life to His enemies and can free them from a life of sin and death. Here we will first trace these themes in Amos's message and then reflect on their claim upon us.

The prophet Amos ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel in the middle of the eighth century BC. During this time, the Assyrian empire's project of bringing Judah, Israel, and neighbouring countries under its control was interrupted by its political instability, allowing Israel to flourish. Sadly, this economic prosperity enriched only a small part of its society, as evidenced by imported ivory sculptures and receipts for fine wine and cosmetic oils from ancient Samaria.

Those with power and wealth coveted more, oppressing and exploiting the poor and vulnerable (Amos 2:6-16; 4:13; 5:10-12; 8:4-7) while living in luxury (3:15; 5:11; 6:4) and with a false sense of security (6:1, 13). It goes without saying that they did this in flagrant violation of countless covenantal guidelines, all of which called them to love their neighbour (Lev. 19:18) and to take special care of the vulnerable (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 24:19).

No less seriously, worship in the northern kingdom had been idolatrous from the beginning (1 Kings 12:26-31) and was controlled by the king rather than normed by God's revealed will (Amos 7:12-13). In short, many in eighth-century Israel lived with only a superficial acknowledgement of God's relationship to them and pursued their own goals in opposition to His will.

In response to such covenant infidelity, God had already begun to inflict punishment upon Israel by the time Amos arrived on the scene—but Israel had not repented (Amos 4:6-13)! This widespread lack of repentance led God to announce through Amos that "the end" was coming. The visions of 7:7-9, 8:1-3 and 9:1-4 reveal that no more reprieve is possible, and that the northern kingdom will fall (5:27). Yet God will not abandon His covenant commitments to Israel nor allow those who trust in Him to perish. His final work of judgment in the day of the LORD will eliminate all sinners from Israel (9:9-10), and His Messiah will fully establish His rule not

only over God's purified people, but over many from among the nations (9:11-12).

Amos's message of judgment, his calls to repentance, and his promise of salvation and "life" found in God take on even greater power and clarity when seen in light of the gospel. God's judgment of Israel's sin in the exile, significant though it was, pales in comparison with His wrath against sin as expressed in the death of His only begotten Son (2 Cor. 5:21). That same wrath will be borne by all who fail to repent when Christ returns to judge the world (Acts 17:31). This reality drives biblical calls to repent (Luke 13:1-5) and animates the church's mission to the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 13:46-47).

In the same way, the message of salvation through faith and repentance that Amos sketched only in part comes fully into view in the New Testament. There God reveals more clearly than ever the good news of deliverance from judgment and entrance into His kingdom through the work of His Messiah, who makes His people willing in the day of His power (Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:14-17). God's purified people will inhabit the new heavens and new earth without sin and in full enjoyment of the rich blessings God has prepared for them.

With this gospel context in view, let's look more closely at how some key elements of Amos's message bear on believers and unbelievers alike.

- First, Amos calls us to a life with God (Amos 5:4, 14) based on complete submission to His saving, transforming rule over us in Jesus Christ. The believer's entire person (heart, will, emotions, etc.) and life (time, money, plans, etc.) belong to God. If Israel had heightened responsibilities to Him in light of her national election (3:2), how much more is that the case for one for whom Christ has died (Heb. 12:18-29)? To note but one example drawn from Amos, our treatment of others, especially if we hold economic, social, or other forms of power or authority over them, must serve no other goal than the glory of God, and be free of all opportunism and desire for self-advancement.
- Second, Amos insists that salvation does not depend on our being religious. Most of Amos's audience were quite serious about religious activities tied exclusively to externals (Amos 4:4; 5:21-23), but God rejected them because they lacked reverence and love for Him as their root. On the contrary, it was brazen self-advancement and rebellion against God, clothed in religious robes. True Christianity inevitably expresses itself in concrete actions, but we must beware of doing "the right thing" without the right motivation and of focusing more on externals than on what is in our hearts (Mark 7:15).
- Lastly, Amos reminds us that none who refuse to submit to God and live by their own rules for their own ends will escape His judgment. Sin, the devil, and the world will not triumph! God's people can therefore live by following His will, for His glory, and in His strength—and suffer the inevitable opposition that comes with such a life—while being confident that He has overcome the world (John 16:33). The world's belief that God doesn't matter (if He exists at all), its goal of human flourishing apart from Him, and its increasing intolerance of claims to truth and of morality rooted in our status as God's

image bearers, cannot but fail.

God's kingdom has already entered the world in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Mark 1) and continues to grow, sometimes openly and spectacularly (Acts), sometimes almost invisibly and slowly (Mark 4).

Amos's condemnation of human independence from God and his promise of deliverance through God's messianic King are the message and the motive for the church's mission to a world that can never achieve its own destiny, and whose only hope lies in the crucified and risen Saviour.

Obadiah

History

- Date of writing: probably around the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC
- Author: Obadiah (not the same as other Obadiah's mentioned in the Old Testament)
- Original audience: Edom and Judah

Genre (type of literature)

- Poetry

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Lamentations 4:22 – restoration for Jerusalem, but doom for Edom v.9 and Jeremiah 49:7-22

Connections to the New Testament

- Destruction of the wise and mighty (vv. 8-9 and 1 Corinthians 1:25)
- *"The kingdom will be Yahweh's"* (v.21 and 1 Corinthians 15:24)

One-sentence summary

God's enemies will fall, and God's people will rise.

Outline

- Warnings of Judgement to Edom (1-16)
- Promises of Restoration to Jerusalem (17-21)

Key texts

- *"The kingdom shall be Yahweh's"* (vs. 21)

Key truths about God

- God judges justly (15)

Key truths about salvation

- Salvation will come to the Gentiles (vs. 21)

Commentary

What can a book like Obadiah, which is focused mostly on Edom, a state that disappeared over 2,000 years ago, have to say to the church and the world today?

Despite the significant attention the book of Obadiah gives to Edom, its theological horizon reaches far beyond this former and kindred neighbour of Judah and their relationship in the sixth century BC. Yet we need to look at the background of Obadiah if we are to hear its message clearly.

Because Edom descended from Jacob's brother Esau (Genesis 36), it had correspondingly greater obligations toward its relation in Judah. All the same, and despite the fact that Jacob and Esau were reconciled to one another before parting ways (Gen. 33:4-17), the two nations that descended from them were often in conflict. Nowhere is this conflict clearer, and nowhere is Edom's adversarial role more visible than in the events surrounding the fall of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Writing immediately after the Babylonian invasion of Judah and the subsequent exile of many of its elite to Babylon, Obadiah focuses on the final example of Edom's mistreatment of its kinfolk in two contexts, one present and one future.

The Present Context

First, Edom, as a state, trusted in its easily defended location on the rocky plateau to Judah's southeast, taking on airs of invincibility and unaccountability (Obad. 3-4). This same pride led Edom to assume that its relationships with its allies would work to its advantage when quite the opposite was true (Obad. 5-9).

Edom's most flagrant sin, however, was its denial of any compassion, not to say brotherly kindness, to the Judeans who fled Judah in the face of the Babylonian attack in 586. Rather than provide shelter (which some Edomites did; Jer. 40:11), the Edomites who displayed the same pragmatic, God-ignoring attitudes condemned earlier in the book seized this opportunity to exact vengeance by killing these escapees (Obad. 14) or to benefit themselves by handing them over to the Babylonians (Obad. 14).

The Future Context

This sin, and God's response to it, draw the events of 586 into a second context, the Day of the LORD. This "day" is in fact a progressive realisation of God's punishment of sin and of His deliverance of those who repent. In the rest of Obadiah, God will first punish Edom's sin (Obad. 15), and then pour out His wrath on all the "nations" who live as these Edomites did: ignoring Him, despising His people, and living solely for their own benefit and glory. Alongside this judgment, He will deliver His people, defined as those who revere God and live for His glory, and bring them to a renewed Jerusalem (Obad. 17) and a restored promised land (Obad. 19-20) that are free of sin and that manifest His consummated reign over all things.

Keeping in mind that by "Edom" Obadiah refers to those Edomites who acted as described in his book, and not to every descendant of Esau (cf. Amos 9:12), the message of Obadiah for today can be described in terms of three concentric circles. Each of them must be seen in connection with the two most significant episodes of the Day of the LORD in Scripture. The first Day of the LORD occurred in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, when He bore the sin of His people and rose again for their justification. The second Day of the LORD will involve the deliverance of those who are in Christ and the punishment of all who refuse Him at His return (1 Thess. 1:10).

The smallest circle focuses on God's justice in punishing those who mistreat His people (Obad. 15; Gen 12:3). Even though God allows sin, He will eventually punish it and maintain His justice in so doing. When the righteous are persecuted, God's word calls us to patience (James 5:6-11), to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39), and to suffer in a way that follows Christ's example (1 Peter 2:20-23). In all these things, despite appearances, we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). We can rest assured that God uses even affliction to further His work in us (1 Peter 1:6-7) and through us (Phil. 1:12-18).

The second circle concerns more generally those (regardless of nationality or ethnicity) who live as if they were the masters of their own destiny (Obad. 2-9). This shows the condemnation of every human being who persists in rebellion against God and in pursuit of autonomy, as all of us do by nature (Titus 3:3).

Modern societies' trust in their technical ability, which persists even in the face of epidemics like the coronavirus, is a fruit of deeply rooted self-sufficiency and self-deception. Violence and opportunism, whether in economic, political, or military spheres, consistently show the disregard of the powerful for those less powerful or privileged. Within the church in particular, our failure to humble ourselves before God's greatness and our desire to advance ourselves (James 4:1-4) reveal that we often adopt the world's means and ends as we abandon reverence for God along with our role as servants of one another (Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10) and members of the same spiritual body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

The third and largest circle drawn by Obadiah includes both the final deliverance of God's people and the destruction of His enemies.

Here, the trio of faith, hope, and love helps us see some of the ways this truth should affect us. Edom's fall long ago, Christ's first coming, and the preservation and growth of the church over millennia all demonstrate the truth of God's promise to deliver His people and repay His enemies. His truthfulness strengthens our faith in His word, even in difficult circumstances. This faith gives rise to hope, for the arrival of God's kingdom in its fullness and the complete deliverance of all His people is sure!

Believers are identified as "heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7) because we are to live in light of what God will do for us and for all His people when Christ returns.

Finally, love is at the heart of the Christian life. Having learned God's love through the gospel (Titus 3:4; 1 John 4:9), love for Him cannot but flow out in return (1 John 4:19). This love also expresses itself in love for others, not only in the church (1 John 4:7, 11) but outside it (cf. John 3:16).

Believers who know the terrible danger in which sinners stand, and recall that they were once in the same terrible predicament (Titus 3:3), will be committed to bringing this good news to

those around them. Obadiah leads us to pray and work toward the end and goal of all things: "thy kingdom come" (Obad. 21; Matt. 6:10).

Jonah

History

- Date of events: eighth century BC, during the reign of Jeroboam II
- Date of writing: probably shortly after the events, ca.750 BC
- Author: probably Jonah
- Original audience: Judah and Israel in the years leading up to exile

Genre (type of literature)

- Narrative, with some poetry in chapter 2.

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Jonah prophesied the expansion of the northern kingdom (2 Kings 14:25)
- 2:9 and Psalm 3:8 – Salvation is of the Lord!

Connection to the New Testament

- The “sign of Jonah” in Matthew 12:39-41 and Luke 11:29-32.

One-sentence summary

Just as God showed pity and mercy in delivering undeserving Jonah, so Israel should show pity and mercy in bringing the message of deliverance to the undeserving Gentiles.

Outline

- Jonah flees his mission (chapters 1-2)
- Jonah’s commission and flight (1:1-3)
- The endangered sailors’ cry to their gods (1:4-6)
- Jonah’s disobedience exposed (1:7-10)
- Jonah’s punishment and deliverance (1:11-2:1, 2:10)
- Jonah’s prayer of thanksgiving (2:2-9)
- Jonah reluctantly fulfils his mission (chapters 3-4)
- Jonah’s renewed commission and obedience (3:1- 4)
- The Ninevites’ repentant appeal to the Lord (3:5- 9)
- The Ninevites’ repentance acknowledged (3:10- 4:4)
- Jonah’s deliverance and rebuke (4:5-11)

Key texts

- Jonah 3:10
- Jonah 4:2

Key truths about God

- God is merciful and gracious (4:2 and Exodus 34:6-7)
- God is sovereign over man and creation (1:9, 2:10, 4:6-8, compare Matthew 10:29)

Key truths about salvation

- Repentance is part of salvation and is a gift of God (2:9, compare Acts 3:19, Luke 18:27, James 1:17)
- God desires all to repent and be saved (2 Peter 3:9)
- Salvation is for people of all nations (Mark 16:15)

Commentary

The message of the book of Jonah for today is that God's startling compassion for sinners under His judgment should inspire Christians to be genuinely concerned for lost souls and "outsiders" and to repent of any attitudes that dampen our zeal to *"be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"* (1 Peter 3:15).

Jonah and the Sailors: Salvation is of the LORD

The story of Jonah is familiar to most readers. The prophet receives God's call to "go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against" their wickedness, but instead Jonah gets on a boat "to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (1:2-3).

Jonah's motive is clear: he thinks Nineveh should be destroyed and wants no part in preventing it (4:2). Jonah can sleep perfectly well with the thought of pagans being destroyed while he himself receives God's care and concern (2:2). But Jonah is rudely awakened by the panicked urging of the ship's captain to *"call upon thy God...that we perish not,"* for God hurled a storm on the sea that threatened to break up the ship.

When the sailors learn that Jonah worships *"the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land,"* they are gripped with fear (1:9-10). Before they hurl Jonah overboard they pray to the true God, and after the sea becomes calm, *"the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows"* (1:16). Meanwhile, God *"prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah"* and *"Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly"* (1:17-2:1). He thanks God for caring for his soul and his life (v. 5-6), he boasts of God's steadfast love that idolatrous pagans forsake (v. 8), he promises to pay what he vowed, and he declares, *"Salvation is of the LORD"* (v. 9).

Let's observe two things so far.

First, consider how Jonah and the sailors responded to the different amounts of light they received. As a Hebrew prophet, Jonah had received greater light and revelation—the Word of God, written (the Torah, Psalms, etc.) and spoken. But Jonah's response was rebellion. Compare that to the response of the sailors to the smaller amount of light they received—heart-rending conviction and contrition in response to a single storm and a fourteen-word message in Hebrew (1:9).

Jonah's prayer was more eloquent than the sailors' prayer, but the sailors repented while Jonah did not. There is much here for Christians to reflect upon and apply. From our vantage point

with the cross of Christ in our past, we have far more light than Jonah had, along with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 13:17). As recipients of light and grace, God calls us only to “confess [Him] before men” (Matt. 10:32). It is God who does the hard work of converting people, making their dead hearts alive. Will we, by the Spirit’s grace, be faithful to His call?

Second, despite the eloquence of Jonah’s prayer and the timeless truths it holds, the prophet still harboured self-righteous and condescending attitudes toward those “others” who seemingly didn’t deserve God’s mercy (vv. 8-9). The sailors’ attitude was different: “Ironically, while the rebellious prophet is making these self-righteous boasts from the fish’s belly, the praiseworthy pagan sailors are up above, happy recipients of Yahweh’s kindness, doing precisely what Jonah can mostly only promise to do (and what he assumes nobody except faithful Israelites like himself do): they are sacrificing to Yahweh and making vows to him!”

Consider how compassionate and determined God is to save sinners—even in spite of the resistance we find in our hearts to speak to people of Him. “Jonah’s anti-missionary activity has ironically resulted in the conversion of non-Israelites.” The truth of Jonah’s prayer outshines his own actions: “Salvation is”—magnificently—“of the LORD.”

Jonah and Nineveh: Should Not I Spare...That Great City?

As the story continues, Jonah is spared from the fish and receives God’s second call to go to Nineveh “and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” (3:2). Jonah arrives in the city and preaches a surprisingly terse sermon for a man so eloquent (just five words in Hebrew): “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (v. 4). Remarkably, “the people of Nineveh believed God,” and from the king down to the people, and even the livestock, the city repents (vv. 5-9). “And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not” (vv. 8-10).

Jonah, however, is exceedingly displeased and “very angry,” protesting against God’s mercy and character and requesting that God take his life: “for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” (4:2-3). God must now teach Jonah a lesson.

First, God causes a plant to grow to provide shade for Jonah, and the prophet rejoices (v. 6). Then God destroys the plant and sends a scorching wind that makes the heat unbearable, and Jonah is angry again (vv. 7-8). Father-like in His patience and pleading, God points out that if Jonah is concerned about the short-lived plant, which he didn’t even make grow, shouldn’t he see why God is concerned about an entire city of people? “Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city?” (v. 11).

Some have compared the story of Jonah with Jesus’s parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). God’s patient pleading with Jonah to understand His compassion for Nineveh is like the father of the prodigal son pleading with the angry older brother to try to understand his compassion for the younger brother. Jesus’s parable develops Jonah’s two themes: “hope for

the repentant sinner and a plea for understanding on the part of the (self-)righteous faithful—who like rebellious Jonah also need to repent.”

The point of this prophecy is not to denounce Jonah, but his “example shows that those who have a close external connection to God...can still persevere in calm, reasoned rebellion against that same God...despite God’s disciplinary actions.”

We must examine our attitude toward God’s providence, character, and will—not least because of our inestimable privilege of being united to Christ in His death and resurrection by the Holy Spirit and our call to “*shine as lights in the world*” (Phil. 2:15). Israel was commissioned to be a light to the nations (much like Jonah), but they rebelled.

Israel thus underwent God’s judgment and restoration (much like Jonah), until the true Israel and “*light of the world,*” Jesus Christ, came to work salvation for His people and to commission His redeemed bride to proclaim the gospel to the nations. As the next book envisions, the nations will one day say “*Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the house of the LORD...that He may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths*” (Micah 4:2). Let us, as recipients of God’s grace, imitate the God who is “*gracious...merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness*” (4:3)—and may He empower us to proclaim His grace to people—from our neighbors to the nations.

Micah

History

- Date of writing: ca. 735-700, (reigns in 1:1)
- Author: Micah of Moresheth (1:1), southwest of Jerusalem, "Who is like Yahweh?" (7:18)
- Original audience: Judah before the exile.

Genre (type of literature)

- Poetry

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Influence on Hezekiah is mentioned in Jeremiah 26:18
- Vision of the end times in 4:1-5 is similar to that of Isaiah 2:1-5)
- Critique of false worship (6:6-8) similar to Isaiah 1:14 and Amos 4:4-5
- Reference to the history of the exodus (6:4-5)

Connections to the New Testament

- 5:2 quoted in Matthew 2:6
- 7:6 quoted in Matthew 10:36

One-sentence summary

God is the judge who scatters his people for their sins, and he is also the King who forgives and blesses them.

Outline

- Announcement of Judgement (1-2)
- Present Injustice and Future Justice (3-5)
- Indictment and Restoration (6-7)

Key texts

- A vision of the end times (4:1-5)
- The Ruler from Bethlehem (5:1-5)
- "With what shall I come before the Lord? (6:6-8)
- "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise..." (7:8)
- "Who is a God like you?" (7:18-20)

Key truths about God

- The Lord is our Shepherd (2:12-13, 4:6-8)
- God's anger and wrath (5:15)

Key truths about salvation

- Salvation will involve deliverance from enemies (4:11-13)
- Salvation will come through a King from Bethlehem (5:1-5), in Jerusalem (4:7-8)
- Salvation will come to the remnant (4:6, 5:7-9)
- Salvation will involve transformation into true worshippers (5:10-15)

Commentary

The message of Micah for today is that as we wait for God's kingdom to come, we should honestly assess our sins, repent of them, immerse ourselves in the beauty of God's character and covenant, walk humbly before Him in justice and kindness, and proclaim His grace to a world under judgment.

Behold the Goodness and Severity of God (1; 7:8-20)

The book of Micah opens with God's thunderous indictment of His people's sin and His determination to bring judgment upon them (1:2-5). Samaria would be destroyed. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would be sent into exile. This devastation would be both up close and personal, tearing through homes and small towns, and public and spectacular, reaching "unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem"—a picture of the total devastation sin brings upon us when we persist in it (Micah 1:9-16).

But this opening section on sin and judgment parallels the closing section on grace and forgiveness (7:8-20). 1 The sinfulness of sin and the devastation it brings (chap. 1) give way to God's grace and the hope He offers (7:8-20). Micah prays, "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage," and God answers by promising to show His people "marvellous things" (7:14-15). God would forgive them because of His character—"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity...? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy" (vv. 18-19)—and because of His covenant—"Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old" (7:20).

God's judgment and forgiveness—His severity and goodness—remind us of what Paul concluded in his letter to the Gentiles about God's dealings with Israel: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22). Let us, therefore, repent of our own sins, walk in renewed obedience to Christ, and, in hope, rely on the deliverance He brings. The goodness and severity of our God have not changed.

Don't Be Like Everyone Else: Follow the LORD (2:1-13; 3; 6; 7:1-7)

Society in Micah's day was corrupt. Oppression was rampant. Fellow Israelites devoted much time and thought to devising ways to "oppress a man and his house," to "covet fields, and take them by violence" (2:2). Therefore, Micah preached that God would "devise" the removal of the whole land (vv. 3-5). But the people's response was "prophecy ye not"—Micah's message received no "likes." The problem, however, was not with God's word but with the hearers' wicked hearts. After all, God reminds us, "Do not my words do good to him that walketh

uprightly?" (v. 7).

Seeing that the prince and judge ask for a bribe, that the great man utters his "mischievous desire," and that even the son and daughter treat their own parents with contempt, Micah concluded, "there is none upright among them... the good man is perished out of the earth" and "the best of them is like a brier" (2:6; 7:2-6). Like Micah, John Owen observed the apostasy that was rife in his day, with people "corrupted in their principles and profane in their lives"—and so he warned his readers: don't presume that God will prevent this apostasy from growing until "it swallow up all visible profession."

Letting profaneness and corruption slowly creep into us—or, more accurately, creep out of us (Mark 7:21)—as we cut corners in our spiritual disciplines, business, family, and duties may leave us in a much worse condition than we ever imagined. For "he that endeavours not to be better, will by little and little grow worse and worse." Let us not follow what everyone calls "normal" and what God calls "evil." Let's follow what Micah resolved when everyone else wanted him to be corrupt like them: "But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me" (7:7).

Micah then addresses the sins of the leaders (chaps. 3 and 6): the prophets were prophesying for pay, priests were teaching for a price, and rulers were giving judgment for a bribe (3:11)—even though God's requirements had been made clear to them: "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (6:8). The prophets did not give people God's word. They prophesied "peace" as long as their mouths and bellies were full (3:5), but to God this was spiritual cannibalism: "they eat the flesh of my people" (3:3)—a chilling, unexpected onset of the curses for covenant-breaking, namely "thou shalt eat...the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters" (cf. Deut. 28:53-63). In response, God would empty their mouths of food—"you shall eat, but not be satisfied"—and empty their mouths of prophecies—"they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God" (3:6-7; 6:13-16). Considering the failure of the prophets depicted here, let's take to heart à Brakel's exhortation to Christians who bear a kind of prophetic responsibility:

If you love Christ, you will be desirous to speak of Him, and you will be desirous that He be known, praised, and glorified by everyone.... If someone is unfaithful, lazy, void of desire, and neglectful of the work of a prophet, such a person will generally walk in darkness and be lacking spirituality; his light will become dimmer and dimmer and he will become less capable of performing his task.

When those entrusted with God's Word fail to give it to people, God may withdraw His light.

Submit to the Ruler from of Old (Micah 4-5)

Chapters 4 and 5 address the desire for restoration in chapters 1 and 7 and the longing for righteous leadership in chapters 3 and 6. After a spectacular reversal of Israel's suffering (4:11-5:1), God would extend His rule over the nations (4:1-5; 5:10-15), grant His grace to the remnant (4:6-7; 5:5b-9), and provide a ruler from David's line to "stand and shepherd his flock

in the strength of the LORD" (4:8-10; 5:2-5a).

In contrast to Israel's corrupt leaders (3:1-4), a ruler would come forth "for me," for the LORD—not for His own advantage (5:2). He would guide the nations in God's law and bring peace to His people (4:1-5; 5:5). This ruler's "goings forth," His origins and activities, "have been from of old"; this is "a description of Christ's eternal generation." This ruler, Jesus Christ, brings the longed-for forgiveness of sins (7:8-20; cf. Matt. 2:6)—He answers the prayer in 7:14 to "Feed thy people with thy rod"—but He "will be Saviour to none but those to whom he is a Master."

Are you a stranger to grace? Has sin wrought havoc in your life? There is a ruler whose name is "Peace," who will never cast out those who come to Him. But come quickly, for He "will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen" (5:15). Are you in, or on your way to, a state of backsliding? Cutting corners in your duties or dabbling in impurity today may, by slow degrees, leave you irrecoverable tomorrow.

Return to God, and let His character and covenant be your delight. Do you feel pressure to join everyone else in sinful, hastily devised thought, speech, and action? Be resolved, like Micah, to follow God in patience and prayer: "But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me" (7:7). Bend the knee to Christ, submit to His rule, and put your hope in His kingdom to come.

Nahum

History

- Date of writing: After the fall of Thebes in 664 BC (3:8- 10), before the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC
- Author: Nahum ("Comfort"), probably from Judah (1:15)
- Original audience: People of Judah (1:15) during the height of Assyria's power

Genre (type of literature)

- Poetry

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Jonah is the other prophecy about Nineveh
- In 1:3 God is "slow to anger" (Exodus 34:6) and "will not clear the guilty" (Exodus 20:7)

Connections to the New Testament

- 1:15 and Romans 10:15

One-sentence summary

God will destroy his and our enemies.

Outline

- The Judge (1:2-8)
- The Verdict (1:9-2:13)
- The Sentence (chapter 3)

Key texts

- 1:7 *"Yahweh is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him."*
- 1:15 *"Behold upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah; fulfil your vows, for never again shall the worthless pass through you; he is utterly cut off."*

Key truths about God

- He is jealous, avenging and wrathful (1:2)
- He is slow to anger (1:3)
- He is great in power (1:3)
- He is righteous (1:3)
- He is incomprehensible (1:3)
- He is good (1:7)
- He is faithful (1:7)

Key truths about salvation

- God will save his people by judging the wicked.
- God's salvation frees his people to worship joyfully (2:15)

Commentary

I recently had a conversation with a church friend about a class paper on Nahum I was working on. As the conversation progressed, the friend interrupted, "Wait, I know I should know this. Is Nahum a book of the Bible?" Such a sentiment might characterise more of us than we would care to admit. If asked to turn to Nahum, we might first consult the table of contents.

As Christians, hearers and doers of God's word, our task when reading Nahum is to hear what the book says in its Old Testament context and to consider how it connects with the New Testament as a mutual witness to Christ and God's redemptive plan. We ask as we read, "How does Nahum witness to Christ?" Along with that, we might ask, "What does a fresh reading of Nahum reveal in our current situation?"

Nahum is a message of hope for God's people in every age. In fact, Nahum means "comfort." Who else but the Lord can offer comfort in every circumstance? Nahum's prophecy proclaims judgment on Israel's oppressors. His focus is on Nineveh, the capital of Assyria (1:1). The prophecy is set in the seventh century BC, sometime after the destruction of Thebes in 664 BC and before the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC (3:8). In the eyes of Israel and the surrounding nations, Assyria might be considered an omnipotent human foe (3:19). The Lord had raised up Assyria for a time as a rod of judgment against Israel, yet Assyria overstepped its bounds (Isa. 10:5-19; 2 Kings 18-19). Nahum's message gives God's people hope that their enemy will ultimately fall.

Nahum's prophecy opens with a hymn depicting God as a divine warrior who judges and saves His people (1:2-2:2). In Scripture, divine-warrior imagery portrays the Lord engaged in warfare, using cosmic and creation terminology. Nahum first depicts the Lord's character as a God who is jealous, avenging, and wrathful. He takes vengeance on His adversaries and reserves wrath for His enemies. The Lord is also patient, powerful, and just (1:3). This is good news for God's people. The cosmic terminology at the end of verse 3 demonstrates the Lord's sovereignty over His creation. All creation belongs to Him and obeys His voice (1:4-5). Creation is no match for the Lord. Neither is Assyria, the once-omnipotent human foe. Who can stand before the Lord's indignation?

Assyria is further depicted as plotting against the Lord. Although Assyria is at full battle strength, the Lord will make a complete end of them. The Lord will break the Assyrian yoke from the neck of His people and cut off Assyria and her idols. The destruction of Nineveh is comforting news for Judah (1:15; 2:13; 3:19). The contrast between kingdoms is clear in Nahum. The Lord will make a complete end of Nineveh, but He knows those who take refuge in Him (1:7-8). The Lord will restore His people (2:2).

Nahum 2:3-13 offers us a prophetic vision of Nineveh's demise. The scene is rendered with vivid battle imagery, featuring chariots, spears, warriors, and plunder. Assyria is pictured in desolation, taunted by the Lord with images of her former success. Assyria once delighted in portraying herself as a lion, safe in its den, devouring its prey. In similar imagery, the fearful words of 2:13 are proclaimed against Assyria: "Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts." The lion is no longer safe.

Nahum 3 is a woe-oracle accompanied by taunts against Nineveh. Woe oracles typically announce judgment on nations and sometimes even on Israel. Nineveh, the bloody city, is depicted again in battle tumult, with galloping horses and chariots, spears and swords, and hosts of the slain (3:1-3).

Nineveh is further mocked as a whore. She is portrayed as a prostitute, alluring the nations with her charms and whorings. In stark imagery, the Lord's opposition will see her embarrassed before the nations, despised with no one to comfort her (3:4-7). Once powerful Nineveh is compared with Thebes. Although Thebes enjoyed the support of the surrounding nations, it too came to ruin and exile. From the smallest to the greatest city, Nineveh will be among those who meet the same doom. She is compared to a shaken fig tree. Her troops are derided as feminine, and all her powers are diminished (3:10-14). Like an army of locusts, they are here today and gone tomorrow (3:15-17). In the end, Nineveh's downfall is applauded (3:18-19).

Jesus in the Field of Divine Warfare

Nahum has focused our attention on the depiction of God as a divine warrior. As such, He fights for His people, subduing all His foes. Nahum's message brought hope and comfort to his original audience. We see this same divine-warrior language used frequently of Jesus in the New Testament. The New Testament adopts and redirects this language, presenting Jesus's life, death, and resurrection as His field of divine warfare. Jesus carries on His warfare under the banner of the cross, where He fights our greatest enemies, sin and death.

The gospels are replete with images of Jesus as the divine warrior.

- John the Baptist's proclamation, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight", evokes Jesus's victory march with His train of captives (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4).
- The baptism of fire attendant upon His coming is also an image of divine warfare (Matt. 3:11-12).
- Jesus controls the elements; He commands the wind and waves (Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25).
- He treads upon the mountains and walks upon the sea (Matt. 14:22-33; 17:1-9; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21).
- Jesus is the divine warrior who rides upon the clouds (Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27).
- The book of Acts illustrates the spread of the divine warrior's kingdom throughout the nations through the preaching of His gospel by His servants sent on His authority (Acts

1:6-11; 28:28-31).

- Jesus holds preeminence and makes peace by His own blood (Col. 1:15-20).

The Christian in the Field of Struggle and Warfare

Paul portrays the Christian life as a struggle and warfare in which we are to put on the full armour of God (Eph. 6:10-20; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11). Revelation rounds out this portrayal with its depiction of Jesus as the Lamb of God who conquers, judges, and wages war (Rev. 17:14; 19:11). Triumphant, He leads His people in a new song (Rev. 5:9; 14:3).

The Christian life is lived in the way of Christ's victory, but this does not mean we do not face temporal griefs and trials. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our current social and economic climate may be a source of anxiety. Rest assured that these momentary afflictions are not beyond the reach of Jesus's mighty hand.

Habakkuk

History

- Date of writing: ca. 610 BC
- Author: Habakkuk
- Original audience: Residents of Judah and Jerusalem before the Babylonian invasion

Genre (type of literature)

- Poetry

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Like Psalms, lament and confidence (Habakkuk 1:2-4, 1:12-2:1, 3:17-19, cf. Psalm 13)
- God uses the Babylonians (1:5-11, cf. Isaiah 10)

Connections to the New Testament

- *"The righteous shall live by his faith"* (2:4 and Romans 1:17, Gal 3:11, Hebrews 10:38)

One-sentence summary

Trusting God's mysterious providence.

Outline

- Cycle 1
- Habakkuk's complaint (1:2-4)
- God's response (1:5-11)
- Cycle 2
- Habakkuk's complaint (1:12-2:1)
- God's Response (2:2-20)
- Cycle 3
- Habakkuk's vision of God (3:1-16)
- Habakkuk's hymn to God (3:17-19)

Key texts

- *"The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea."* (2:14)
- *"In wrath remember mercy"* (3:2)

Key truths about God

- God is everlasting (1:12), of purer eyes than to see evil (1:13)
- God is sovereign, even over evil (1:5-11), and will bring justice (2:5-20)
- God is incomprehensible (2:4)
- God is different from idols (2:18-20)

Key truths about salvation

- God saves his people through an anointed king (3:13)
- Hope in the future joy of salvation sustains believers in present suffering (3:17-19)

Commentary

The book of Habakkuk offers a message of hope for God's people. Habakkuk's name derives from the Hebrew verb meaning "to embrace." When trouble and suffering come, where else do we want to be but in the comfort of God's embrace? Habakkuk shows that kingdoms rise and fall, "But the LORD is in his holy temple" (2:20). As Christian readers of Scripture, we must ask, "How does Habakkuk and his dialogue with God witness to Christ and God's redemptive plan?" The storyline of Habakkuk traces a prophetic dialogue between the prophet and God, centred on the rise of the Chaldeans (Babylon) under the LORD's hand as a punishing force in the world and upon His people (1:6). Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah, and the book of Habakkuk was most likely written between 605 and 587 BC. He prophesied in Judah during the days of Josiah (640 BC) and the early part of the reign of Jehoiakim (608-598 BC).

The structure of Habakkuk is straightforward: Habakkuk laments twice to the Lord (1:2-4; 12-17), and each lament is followed by God's response (1:5-11; 2:1-5). God's second answer includes a taunt composed of a series of woes directed towards the Chaldeans (2:6-20). The psalm in chapter 3 concludes the book (3:1-19).

Habakkuk's first lament questions God's concern for justice. Habakkuk poses two questions to the LORD: "How long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear?" (1:2) and "Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?" (v. 3). Habakkuk's complaint centres on his concern that the law be upheld and justice carried out in the face of consuming wickedness, destruction, and violence (vv. 3-4). Habakkuk's lament asks God to "hear" and to act rather than "idly looking at wrong."

God responds to Habakkuk in kind. Habakkuk had asked God to "look" here and respond. God tells Habakkuk to "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard" (v. 5). Open your eyes! God is doing something far greater than Habakkuk expected. God was raising up the Chaldeans in judgement against Judah (v. 6). This should not surprise Habakkuk. God had previously raised up Assyria as a rod of discipline against Israel (Isa. 10:5). The description of the Chaldeans is particularly heinous and fearsome. They act as a law unto themselves, moving across the earth and devouring kings and kingdoms. Their own might is their god (vv. 7-11).

In his second lament, Habakkuk recognises God's eternity. He addresses Him as "O LORD my God, mine Holy One" and "O mighty God" (vv. 12-17; cf. Deuteronomy 32). Habakkuk recognises the Chaldeans as the vessel of God's judgement and again appeals to God's sight, asking, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" (v. 13). Furthermore, Habakkuk's lament

depicts mankind through fishing imagery, with the Chaldeans pictured as clearing the sea. This imagery leads Habakkuk to question the Lord, "Shall they therefore empty their net, and continue to slay nations without pity?" (v. 17). Habakkuk's second lament ends with the picture of himself as a watchman on a tower, watching "to see" how the Lord will answer concerning his complaint.

The Lord's answer expands on Habakkuk's watchman imagery from 2:1. The Lord commands clarity about His message. What the Lord has said will come—it will not delay (vv. 2-3). Habakkuk 2:4 is central to Habakkuk's message, "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." Here we are presented with a contrast between kingdoms and peoples. The proud Chaldeans are contrasted with the righteous who live by faith. The heinous depiction of the Chaldeans is further developed in the series of taunts in 2:6-20, where they are pictured as plunderers of nations (vv. 6-8), conquerors (vv. 9-11), builders with blood (vv. 12-14), shameless (vv. 15-17), and idolaters (vv. 18-20). The Lord will not allow their wickedness to go unpunished. The series of taunts ends with a call for silence—the Lord is in His holy temple (v. 20).

Habakkuk then responds to the Lord with a prayer—a hymn of victory. Thus, his lament ends in praise. God is portrayed through cosmic divine-warrior imagery drawn from creation and the exodus. Habakkuk's response is fitting and reflects the faithful: "O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid" and "When I heard, my belly trembled.... I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops" (vv. 2, 16). Habakkuk's expression of faith is further clarified in his statement of confidence in the LORD in 3:17-19.

When we consider Habakkuk's witness to Christ, we see several connections with the New Testament. First, Habakkuk depicts the righteous, particularly their suffering and vindication. Habakkuk asks, "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" (1:13). At the cross, we see Jesus, the righteous One, devoured by the ungodly (Matt. 27:32-44). In His death, Jesus experiences the Father's silence (Matt. 27:46). Yet Jesus's trust in the Father is vindicated in His resurrection (Matt. 27:43; Rom. 1:4).

A second connection is the divine-warrior imagery applied to Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus displays the same creative power in the Gospels as depicted in Habakkuk 3—walking on water, stilling storms, and raising the dead. In the Gospels, we have a picture of Jesus's work of new creation and exodus. We all face the great enemy of sin and death, from which Jesus, the divine warrior, delivers us in His death and resurrection.

A third connection is the life of the believer. Habakkuk 2:4 is frequently quoted throughout Paul's epistles. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes that in the gospel, "the righteousness of God [is] revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (1:17). Faith comes from the "hearing" of the gospel (something Habakkuk has emphasised) (Rom. 10:17).

Similarly, Paul's central tenet in his letter to the Galatians is that "the just shall live by faith" (3:11). Additionally, Hebrews 11 offers us a full picture of those who have walked in faith before us. As we look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, we can run the race set before us (Heb. 12:1-2) and say with Habakkuk, "Yet I will rejoice in the L ORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The L ORD God is my strength" (Hab. 3:18-19).

Zephaniah

History

- Date of writing: In the days of Josiah (1:1), 640-609 BC, probably before the revival in 622 BC
- Author: Zephaniah, a descendant of Hezekiah
- Original audience: Residents of Judah and Jerusalem before the Babylonian invasion

Genre (type of literature)

- Poetry

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Moab and the Ammonites will be judged like Sodom and Gomorrah (2:9)

Connections to the New Testament

- *"The day of the Lord"* in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
- The joy of salvation (3:14-17) in John 15:11, 16:24, 1 John 1:4

One-sentence summary

God will bring judgment on all people and the joy of salvation to the faithful remnant.

Outline

- Judgement on Jerusalem (1:1-2:3)
- Judgement on Nations and Jerusalem (2:4-3:8)
- Hope for the Nations and Jerusalem (3:9-17)

Key texts

- *"Seek Yahweh, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands..."* (2:3)
- *"Yahweh your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save..."* (3:17)

Key truths about God

- God is fierce and jealous in his wrath against sin (1:17, 3:8), like burning fire (2:2)
- God is righteous (3:5), mighty (3:17), loving (3:17)

Key truths about salvation

- God will save his faithful remnant (2:3,7,9, 3:12)
- Salvation cannot be bought with money (1:18)
- Salvation is global (3:9-10)
- Transforming character (3:13), removing condemnation (3:15), defeating enemies (3:15)

Commentary

Historical Situation

Zephaniah was most likely a relative of King Josiah. Zephaniah was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah of Judah, whereas King Josiah of Judah was the great-grandson of King Hezekiah by another line.

This would make Zephaniah and King Josiah second cousins once removed. Zephaniah's prophecy can be placed in the middle of the seventh century before Christ, in the early part of King Josiah's reign (639-609 BC). Given the contents of Zephaniah, it seems clear that the reforms that occurred under Josiah's reign had either not yet taken place when Zephaniah received the words of the prophecy, or were in the early stages (the reference in 1:4 to the "remnant of Baal" could indicate that some reform had already occurred). Probably, Zephaniah's prophecy was the instrument God used to create an atmosphere of reform, in which the rediscovery of the law (2 Chron. 34:14ff.) would have an enormous impact.

Contents

The "Day of the Lord" is the main theme of Zephaniah. Each one of the seven parts of Zephaniah contributes to this idea.

In the first section (1:1-6), language of judgment reminiscent of the flood narrative prevails. The Southern Kingdom is supposed to remember the flood and tremble, since there is no escape except by the way God commands. They are not supposed to think that, just because they are God's people, they will escape God's judgment. The primary sin mentioned is idolatry, especially in verse 5. Verse 6 describes the result of the idolatry in verse 5. Those who follow other gods will turn back from following the Lord.

The second part (1:7-18) explicitly introduces the Day of the Lord (starting in verse 7) and outlines both what God will do and how people are to respond now, given how they will respond in the future if they are complacent in the present. If there is repentance now, there will be no need for the far worse responses they will surely face if they wait too long. "Those that leap on the threshold" in verse 9 are most likely engaged in some kind of pagan ritual. It is not certain what "Maktesh" in verse 11 means, but it is likely the name of a place now unknown. The Lord God is still working, even if some of His work is behind the scenes. As in the book of Esther, the hidden providence of God directs all things to His glory.

Fortunately for the readers, there is still time in 2:1-3 before the Day of the Lord comes. There is yet time to "seek righteousness, seek meekness" (v. 3). There is no guarantee that such seekers will escape judgment altogether. However, they will certainly have a better chance at such an escape. It is time now to seek the Lord, while He may be found, and call on Him while He is near (Isa. 55:6).

The nations that have plagued Judah and sought to prevent her from repenting will get their recompense. In 2:4-15, Philistia (the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron are Philistine

cities), the Cherethites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Ethiopians, and the Assyrians, will all face their doom from the LORD God. At this point, it is worth noting that the structure of Zephaniah resembles that of the major prophets, with judgment oracles, oracles against the nations, and oracles of hope. The punishment of the nations is part of the Day of the Lord. God orders all things for the good of the church.

Since Judah has not yet repented, her doom is all but certain on the Day of the Lord (3:1-7). She would have conquered the nations and sat on top of them if she had repented, but it was not to be. In particular, the rich are oppressing the poor, the prophets are anything but true prophets, and the priests are doing the exact opposite of their duty (3:1-3). The nations were already cut off (3:6), yet Judah did not learn her lesson (3:7). Persecution and hardship always have something to teach us, and we should never ignore those lessons.

Despite the Day of the Lord's judgment, grace remains for the remnant of God's people (3:8-13). That grace is still part of the Day of the Lord is evident in verse 11. God's fierce anger will never result in the complete destruction of God's people. There are always the seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. God will always ensure that a remnant remains.

The reaction of God's people to salvation and being spared on the Day of the Lord should be that of singing, gladness, and great rejoicing (3:14-20). God is still in her midst (3:17) and has not abandoned her. The gathering of the scattered will still occur (3:20), and God's people will experience a sort of vindication (3:19). Salvation leads to doxology.

Jesus Christ and the Day of the Lord

The phenomenon called "prophetic foreshortening" describes how events in the Old Testament that seem to happen at the same time are, in the New Testament era, seen as spread out over time. It's similar to how foothills of mountains look just as close as the mountains themselves from a distance, but when you approach, you realize the foothills are still several miles away.

In the case of Zephaniah, the judgment and the grace are presented as occurring at the same time. Even during the exile (which is surely the immediate fulfillment of Zephaniah's prophecy), the grace was somewhat delayed relative to the judgment, even though God never abandoned the people in exile.

In the New Testament, Jesus's first coming fulfilled the Day of the Lord, bringing grace and some judgment upon humans primarily (though most of the judgment fell upon Jesus Christ Himself, as He vicariously bore the guilt of His people). However, the bulk of the judgment still awaits the world, as part two of the Day of the Lord is still to come. Now is the time of repentance, just as it was for Zephaniah's readers. There is still time, as long as it is called "today" (Heb. 3:13). There might not be a tomorrow, so putting off the claims of Christ is dangerous. Grace is for today, and today is the only time we can count on having it, for tomorrow is unknown.

Haggai

History

- Date of writing: August-December 520 BC
- Author: Haggai = "festal"
- Original audience: Jews who returned to Jerusalem from exile to rebuild the Temple.

Genre (type of literature)

- Prose (text)

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Zerubbabel, a descendant of David through Jeconiah (1 Chronicles 3:19, cf. Jeremiah 22:30, Matthew 1:11-13, Luke 3:27)
- Zechariah and Haggai's ministry (Ezra 5:1-2)
- Purity laws (2:13, cf. Leviticus 11)
- Vine and fig tree (2:19, cf. Habakkuk 3:17 and others)
- Horse and rider destroyed (2:23, cf. Exodus 15:1)
- Signet ring (2:23 and Jeremiah 22:24, 1 Kings 22:8, Daniel 6:17, Esther 8:8)

Connections to the New Testament

- A kingdom that cannot be shaken (2:6 and Hebrews 12:25-29)
- Worthy to open the seal (Revelation 5:5)

One-sentence summary

We need to put God's work first in our lives.

Outline

- August: Haggai Accuses the People (1:1-15)
- October: Haggai encourages the People (2:1-9)
- December: Haggai Calls the People to Faithfulness (2:10-19)
- December: Haggai encourages Zerubbabel (2:20-23)

Key texts

- He who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes." (1:6)
- "Work for I am with you ... My Spirit remains in your midst." (2:5)
- "Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth..." (2:6-8)
- "...and make you like a signet ring." (2:23)

Key truths about God

- God is concerned for his glory in the worship of his people (1:8)
- God is sovereign to provide and withhold, to bless and withhold blessing (1:9-11,

2:14-17)

- God is able to change hearts (1:14), and he also calls us to change our hearts (2:4-5)

Key truths about salvation

- God chastises us to bring us to repentance (2:17)
- God will bring about a new creation, with a worldwide temple (2:6-8)
- God will restore the house of David as a worldwide kingdom (2:20-23)
- Our choices matter because our obedience is part of how God works in the world.

Commentary

Historical Situation

After the Babylonian exile ended, God's people returned to Jerusalem (around 536 BC). The first order of business was to reestablish the worship of God in a rebuilt temple. However, a combination of factors stalled the work. First, there was the people's inactivity, either from selfishness in wanting to build their own homes first (1:4) or from a sense of hopelessness that the second temple would not come anywhere near the first in glory (2:3). Added to this was an incorrect view of the temple's significance, tied to its magnificence.

In other words, the people seemed to believe that the temple's magnificence guaranteed God's presence there. Second, there were opponents of the Lord's work (2:22). The people's priorities were wrong: they feared men rather than God and placed their own comfort and priorities before the worship of God.

Contents

The book of Haggai is centred on the temple. However, it is not merely about the temple and its rebuilding. The temple stands for union with the covenant God. God's aim in this prophecy is to direct the people's gaze forward in time towards a greater glory than they have ever known. For them, the best is yet to come.

In the opening of the book (1:1-6), the equivalent of a king (Zerubbabel) and a priest (Joshua) receive the Word of God. The leadership of Judah is meant to tell God's people what their proper priorities should be. The people had been busy building their own houses, even to luxurious specifications. They had put their relationship with God on hold, putting their work and houses first. Their priorities were wrong. In a way, Jesus's exhortation on priorities can be seen as a commentary on the message of Haggai: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:33-34). Haggai, therefore, has much to say to us about our goals in life.

In the second part of the chapter (1:7-11), the Lord tells the people how to address the problem. They are to reorient their priorities towards the things of God and to build the second temple. This is accompanied by a reminder of the consequences of ignoring God's instructions (1:9-11).

The people respond in faith and obedience (1:12-15). They begin building. Compared with 2:1, we can infer that they kept it up for about a month. Their attention and strength flagged because they still laboured under misimpressions about the nature of the temple and the God they were supposed to meet there.

The heart of the book of Haggai lies in 2:1-9. In this section, the Lord reminds them of the glory of the first temple and directly addresses the people's fears that the second temple won't measure up to the first. Far from not measuring up, the second temple will greatly surpass the first! They should have known this if they had recalled the covenant God made with them at Sinai (2:5). God's Holy Spirit would not leave them. From apparently small beginnings, God would bring about something that would shake the heavens and the earth. The exegesis of 1:6-7 compelled Charles Jennens to include these words in the libretto that George Handel would set to music in *The Messiah*. The promise of peace is the culmination of the shaking.

In 2:10-19, the people are reassured that past judgments from God (10-19) would not dictate future blessings (19b). The people were unclean. However, if God were to change those circumstances, there would be nothing but blessing in the future. The people, their work, and their offerings are all currently unclean (2:14). There needs to be cleansing, just as we also need the cleansing power of Christ's blood.

Lastly, Zerubbabel, the governor, receives reassurance from God that the shaking will not be of Judah, but of the nations (2:22), and that Zerubbabel will be as a signet. The signet was the seal that could be worn about the neck or as a ring on the finger. Officials used them to indicate to the recipient of a letter who the sender was. Not only was the genuineness of the letter thus guaranteed, but there was also proof that the letter had not been tampered with.

Jesus Christ, the New Temple

The glory that was coming could only be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The second temple itself was not breathtakingly glorious, especially when compared with Solomon's temple. The desire of all nations (2:7) refers to a person whom all nations will seek. This will shake everything up. Priorities will be realigned. Jesus's contagious holiness will be the answer to the contagious uncleanness of humanity and of God's people (2:11-14). The message for God's people today is to seek first Jesus Christ, His kingdom, and His righteousness, and all the other things we need will be provided by God in His own good time. In what will we invest?

What will be our goals in life? Some of the most fundamental questions we can ask ourselves find answers in this short but important minor prophet.

Zechariah

History

- Date of writing: 520 BC (chapters 9-14 probably written later in his ministry)
- Author: Zechariah
- Original audience: Residents of Judah and Jerusalem during the period of temple rebuilding.

Genre (type of literature)

- Poetry (including apocalyptic)

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Zechariah and Haggai's ministry (Ezra 5:1-2)
- Vine and fig tree (3:10)

Connections to the New Testament

- Thirty pieces of silver (11:12-13, and Matthew 22:15, also Exodus 21:32)
- Strike the shepherd (13:7 and Matthew 26:31)

One-sentence summary

Israel's return and God's return (Murray)

Outline

- Introduction (1:1-6)
- Part 1: Visions and Oracles (1-8)
- Eight Visions and a Sign (1:7-6:15)
- Four Horsemen (1:8-17)
- Four Horns, Four Blacksmiths (1:18-21)
- Jerusalem is Measured (2:1-13)
- The High Priest's Dirty Clothes (3:1-10)
- Olive Trees for the Son of David (4:1-14)
- The Flying Scroll (5:1-4)
- Woman in a Basket (5:5-11)
- Four Horsemen (6:1-8)
- A Sign: The High Priest Crowned (6:9-15)
- Oracles: From Fasting to Feasting (7-8)
- Ritual or reality? (7)
- Hope for the future, a motive to faithfulness in the present (8)
- Part 2: The Return of the King (9-14)
- Humility: The Coming King is the Rejected Shepherd (9-11)
- Glory: Judging the Nations and Transforming the People (12-14)

Key texts

- *“Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.”* (1:3)
- *“I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy...”* (12:10)
- *“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David...”* (13:1)

Key truths about God

- God’s equal is struck by God’s judgment (13:7)
- God hates sin (8:17)

Key truths about salvation

- God cleanses his people from sin by his Spirit and his Son (12:10–13:1)
- Clean clothes for dirty clothes (chapter 3)

Commentary

Zechariah was a colleague of the prophet Haggai and worked with him to advance the building of the second temple (Ezra 5:1); for two are better than one. Christ sent forth His disciples two by two. Zechariah began to prophesy sometime after Haggai.

But he continued longer, wrote more, and prophesied more particularly concerning Christ than Haggai had done. He begins with a plain, practical sermon, expressive of the scope of his prophesying, in the first five verses; but afterwards, to the end of chapter 6, he relates the visions he saw and the instructions he received immediately from heaven through them.

In chapter 7, following an enquiry by the Jews about fasting, he shows them their duty for the present day and encourages them to hope for God’s favour, continuing to the end of chapter 8. After this, there are two sermons, both called burdens of the word of the Lord (one begins with chapter 9, the other with chapter 12), which were probably preached some time later. The scope of these sermons is to reprove sin, to threaten God’s judgments against the unrepentant, and to encourage those who feared God with assurances of the mercy God had in store for His church, especially the coming of the Messiah and the setting up of His kingdom in the world.

In **Zechariah 1**, after the introduction (v. 1), we have,

- First, an awakening call to a sinful people to repent of their sins and return to God (vv. 2-6).
- Second, great encouragement to hope for mercy is given through the vision of the horses (vv. 7-11); the angel’s prayer for Jerusalem and the answer to that prayer (vv. 12-17); and the vision of the four carpenters who were employed to cut off the four horns with which Judah and Jerusalem were scattered (vv. 18-21).

In **chapter 2**, we have another vision which the prophet saw, not for his own entertainment,

but for his satisfaction and the edification of those to whom he was sent (vv. 1-2). There is a sermon upon it in the rest of the chapter, serving as an explication of the vision and showing it to be a prediction of the replenishing of Jerusalem and of its safety and honour (vv. 3-5).

By way of application, here is a use of exhortation to the Jews who were still in Babylon, pressing them to hasten their return to their own land (vv. 6-9); a use of consolation to those who had returned, in reference to the many difficulties they had to struggle with (vv. 10-12); and a use of caution to all not to dictate demands to God or limit Him, but to wait patiently for Him (v. 13).

The vision in chapter 2 gave assurances of the re-establishment of the civil interests of the Jewish nation, promises that were fulfilled in Christ.

Now the vision in **chapter 3** concerns their church-state and ecclesiastical interests, and assures them that they shall be put into a good posture again. The promises of this also have an eye to Christ, who is not only our Prince but the High Priest of our profession, of whom Joshua was a type. Here is a vision relating to Joshua, as the representative of the church in his time, representing the disadvantages he laboured under and the people in him, with the redress of the grievances of both. He is accused by Satan but is brought off by Christ (vv. 1-2). He appears in filthy garments but has them changed (vv. 3-5). He is assured of being established in his office if he conducts himself well (vv. 6-7). This is a sermon relating to Christ, who is here called "the Branch," who should be endued with all perfections for His undertaking and be carried triumphantly through it, and by whom we should have pardon and peace (vv. 8-10).

We have another comforting vision in **chapter 4**, which, as it was explained to the prophet, contained much to encourage the people of God in their present straits, so great that they thought their case hopeless, that their temple could never be rebuilt nor their city replenished. And therefore the scope of the vision is to show that God would, by His own power, perfect the work, though the assistance given to it by its friends was ever so weak, and the resistance given to it by its enemies was ever so strong. Here is the prophet's awakening to observe the vision (v. 1). The vision is of a candlestick with seven lamps, supplied with oil and kept burning, immediately from two olive-trees that grew by it, one on either side (vv. 2-3). The general encouragement hereby is intended to be given to the builders of the temple to go on in that good work, assuring them that it should be brought to perfection at last (vv. 4-10). The particular explication of the vision is for the illustration of these assurances (vv. 11-14).

Hitherto we have seen visions of peace only, and all the words we have heard have been good and comforting. But the pillar of cloud and fire has a dark side towards the Egyptians, as well as a bright and pleasant side towards Israel. So have Zechariah's visions; for God's prophets are not only His ambassadors, to speak of peace with the sons of peace, but also heralds, to proclaim war against those who delight in war and persist in their rebellion.

In **chapter 5**, we have two visions, by which “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” God will do great and kind things for His people, which the faithful sons of Zion shall rejoice in; but “let the sinners in Zion be afraid” for two reasons.

- **First**, God will reckon severely with those particular persons among them who are wicked and profane, and who hate to be reformed in these times of reformation. While God is showing kindness to the body of the nation and loading it with His blessings, they and their families shall, notwithstanding, lie under the curse which the prophet sees in a flying roll (vv. 1-4).
- **Second**, if the nation’s body degenerates hereafter and wickedness prevails among them, it shall be carried off and hurried away with swift destruction, under the pressing weight of divine wrath, represented by a talent of lead upon the mouth of an ephah, carried upon the wing I know not where (vv. 5-11).

The two kingdoms of providence and grace are what we are all very nearly interested in, and therefore we are concerned to acquaint ourselves with them, all our temporal affairs being in a necessary subjection to divine providence, and all our spiritual and eternal concerns in a necessary dependence upon divine grace; and these two are represented to us in **Zechariah 6**, the former by a vision, the latter by a type. Here is God;

- One, as King of nations, ruling the world through the ministry of angels, in the vision of the four chariots (vv. 1-8).
- Two, as King of saints, ruling the church by the mediation of Christ, in the figure of Joshua the high priest, crowned, the ceremony performed, and then explained concerning Christ (vv. 9-15).

We have finished with the visions, but not with the revelations of this book. The prophet sees no more such signs as he had seen, yet “the word of the LORD came to him.”

In chapter 7, we have a case of conscience proposed to the prophet by the children of the captivity concerning fasting, whether they should continue their solemn fasts which they had religiously observed during the seventy years of their captivity (vv. 1-3). The answer to this question, given in this and the next chapter, was not given all at once, but by piecemeal, and, it should seem, at several times, for here are four distinct discourses, each of which has reference to this case, and each is prefaced with “the word of the LORD came” (vv. 4-8; 8:1, 18). Their method is very observable.

In this chapter, the prophet,

- One, sharply reproves them for the mismanagement of their fasts (vv. 4-7).
- Two, exhorts them to reform their lives, which would be the best way of fasting, and to take heed of those sins which brought those judgments upon them, and which they kept these fasts in memory of (vv. 8-14).

And then, in the next chapter, **chapter 8**, having searched the wound, he binds it up and heals

it, with gracious assurances of the great mercies God had yet in store for them, by which He would turn their fasts into feasts.

The work of ministers is rightly to divide the word of truth and to give everyone his portion. So the prophet is here instructed to do, in the further answer he gives to the case of conscience proposed about continuing the public fasts. His answer, in the foregoing chapter, is by way of reproof to those who were disobedient and would not obey the truth. But here, in chapter 8, he is ordered to change his voice and to speak by way of encouragement to the willing and obedient. Here are two words from the Lord of hosts, and they are both good and comforting.

- **In the former** of these messages (v. 1), God promises that Jerusalem shall be restored, reformed, and replenished (vv. 2-8), that the country shall be rich, and that the nation's affairs shall be successful, its reputation retrieved, and its state in all respects the reverse of what it had been for many years past (vv. 9-15); he then exhorts them to reform what was amiss among them, that they might be ready for these favours designed for them (vv. 16-17).
- **In the latter** of these messages (v. 18), he promises that their fasts should be superseded by the return of mercy (v. 19), and that, upon this, they should be replenished, enriched, and strengthened, by the accession of foreigners to them (vv. 20-23).

Chapter 9 begins another sermon, which continues through the end of chapter 11. It is called "The burden of the word of the LORD," for every word of God carries weight for those who regard it and will be a heavy, dead weight upon those who do not. Here is a prophecy against the Jews' unrighteous neighbours—the Syrians, Tyrians, Philistines, and others (v. 1-6), with an intimation of mercy to some of them in their conversion (v. 7), and a promise of mercy to God's people in their protection (v. 8). There is also a prophecy of their righteous King, the Messiah, and His coming, with a description of Him (v. 9) and of His kingdom, including its nature and extent (v. 10). It is an account of the obligation the Jews lie under to Christ for their deliverance from their captivity in Babylon (vv. 11-12). Here is a prophecy of the victories and successes God would grant to the Jews over their enemies, as typical of our great deliverance by Christ (vv. 13-15). Finally, it contains a promise of great plenty, joy, and honour that God had in reserve for His people (vv. 16-17), written for their encouragement.

The scope of **Zechariah 10** is much the same as that of the foregoing chapter—to encourage the Jews who had returned, with the hope that though they had been under divine rebukes for their negligence in rebuilding the temple, and were now surrounded by enemies and dangers, God would do them good and make them prosperous at home and victorious abroad. Now they are directed to look to the great God in all events that concerned them, and, both in the evils they suffered and in the comforts they desired, to acknowledge His hand (vv. 1-4). They are encouraged to expect strength and success from Him in all their struggles with the enemies of their church and state, and to hope that the issue would be glorious at last (vv. 5-12).

God's prophet, who in the earlier chapters was an ambassador sent to promise peace, is a herald sent to declare war in **chapter 11**. The Jewish nation shall recover its prosperity, flourish for a time, and become considerable. It shall be very happy, at length, in the coming of the long-expected Messiah, in the preaching of His gospel, and in the setting up of His standard there. But when the chosen remnant among them are effectually called in and united to Christ thereby, the body of the nation, persisting in unbelief, shall be utterly abandoned and given up to ruin for rejecting Christ; and it is this that is foretold here in this chapter—the Jews rejecting Christ, which was their measure-filling sin, and the wrath which for that sin came upon them to the uttermost. Here is a prediction of the destruction itself that should come upon the Jewish nation (vv. 1-3).

Here is also the putting of it into the hands of the Messiah. He is charged with the custody of that flock (vv. 4-6). He undertakes it and bears rule in it (vv. 7-8). Finding it perverse, He gives it up (v. 9), breaks His shepherd's staff (vv. 10-11), resents the indignities done to Him and the contempt put upon Him (vv. 12-13), and then breaks His other staff (v. 14). He turns them over into the hands of foolish shepherds, who, instead of preventing, shall complete their ruin, and both the blind leaders and the blind followers shall fall together into the ditch (vv. 15-17). This is foretold to the poor of the flock before it comes to pass, that, when it does come to pass, they may not be offended.

The apostle (Gal. 4:25-26) distinguishes between "Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children"—the remaining carcass of the Jewish church that rejected Christ—and "Jerusalem that is from above, that is free, and is the mother of us all"—the Christian church, the spiritual Jerusalem, which God has chosen to put His name there. In the foregoing chapter, we read the doom of the former, and left that carcass to be a prey to the eagles that should be gathered to it. Now, in chapter 12, we have the blessings of the latter, with many precious promises made to the gospel Jerusalem by Him who (v. 1) declares His power to fulfil them. It is promised that the attempts of the church's enemies against her shall be to their own ruin, and that they shall find that it is at their peril if they do her any hurt (vv. 2-4, 6). It is further promised that the endeavours of the church's friends and patrons for her good shall be pious, regular, and successful (v. 5). God will protect and strengthen the meanest and weakest who belong to His church, and work salvation for them (vv. 7-8).

He will pour upon them a spirit of prayer and repentance as a preparative for all this mercy, and as a pledge of it, the effect of which shall be universal and very particular (vv. 9-14). These promises were of use then to the pious Jews who lived in the troubled times under Antiochus and other persecutors and oppressors, and they are still to be improved in every age for the directing of our prayers and the encouraging of our hopes with reference to the gospel church.

In this final chapter, we find additional promises for gospel times. Here is a promise of the remission of sins (v. 1), of the reformation of manners (v. 2), and particularly of the convicting and silencing of false prophets (vv. 2-6). We have a clear prediction of the sufferings of Christ and the dispersion of His disciples thereafter (v. 7), of the destruction of the greater part of

the Jewish nation not long after (v. 8), and of the purifying of a remnant of them, a peculiar people to God (v. 9).

Malachi

History

- Date of writing: ca.450 BC
- Author: Malachi (means “my messenger”)
- Original audience: Residents of Judah and Jerusalem in the period after the temple rebuilding.

Genre (type of literature)

- Prose

Connections to other parts of the Old Testament

- Laws on sacrifice (1:7-8 and Leviticus 1:3 etc.) and tithing (3:8-10 and Leviticus 27:30)
- Law of Moses and Elijah the prophet (4:4-6 is a general reference to law and prophets)
- Faithfulness to the wife of your youth (3:14 and Proverbs 5:18, Ecclesiastes 9:9, Song)

Connections to the New Testament

- The Messenger (3:1 and Mark 1:2)
- The Dayspring (4:2 and Luke 1:78)
- Elijah (4:5 and Mark 15:35-36 and others)
- Stubble (4:1 and 1 Corinthians 3:12)

One-sentence summary

Return to God in love before he returns in judgment.

Outline

- Exposing Israel’s Corruption
 - First Dispute: How has God shown love to Israel? (1:2-5)
 - Second Dispute: How have we despised God? (1:6- 2:9)
 - Third Dispute: How have we broken our covenants? (2:10-16)
- Confronting Israel’s corruption
 - Fourth Dispute: Where is the God of justice? (2:17-3:5)
 - Fifth Dispute: How shall we return to God? (3:6- 12)
 - Sixth Dispute: It is pointless to serve God (3:13- 18)
- Conclusion: The Future of the Remnant (4:1-3)
- Appendix to Malachi, and also to the Law and the Prophets (4:4-6)

Key texts

- *“From the rising of the sun to its setting, my name will be great among the nations”* (1:11)
- *“They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession.”* (3:17)

Key truths about God

- God is a great king (1:14)
- God blesses marriage and rejects sinful divorce (2:13- 16)
- God does not change (3:6)
- God demands costly obedience, and promises to reward it (3:8-12)

Commentary

God's prophets were His witnesses to His church, each in his day, for several ages—witnesses for Him and His authority, witnesses against sin and sinners, affirming the true purpose of God's providence in His interactions with His people then, and the kind purposes of His grace concerning His church in the days of the Messiah, to whom all the prophets bore witness, for they all agreed in their testimony.

Now we have only one more witness to call, and we are done with our evidence. Though he is the last, and in him prophecy ceased, yet the Spirit of prophecy shines as clearly, as strongly, and as brightly in him as in any who went before, and his testimony commands equal regard. The Jews say that prophecy continued for forty years under the second temple, and this prophet they call the seal of prophecy, because in him the series or succession of prophets broke off and came to a close. God wisely ordered it so that divine inspiration should cease for some ages before the coming of the Messiah, that this great Prophet might appear the more conspicuous and distinguishable and be the more welcome.

Let us consider the person of the prophet. We have only his name, Malachi, and no account of his country or parentage. Malachi signifies my angel, which has given occasion for the conjecture that this prophet was indeed an angel from heaven and not a man, as in Judges 2:1, but there is no just ground for the conjecture.

Prophets were messengers, God's messengers. His name is the very same as that found in the original (3:1) for *my messenger*, Malachi.

Let us also consider the scope, or aim, of the prophecy. Haggai and Zechariah were sent to reprove the people for delaying the building of the temple; Malachi was sent to reprove them for neglecting it once it was built, and for their profanation of the temple-service (for from idolatry and superstition they ran into the other extreme of impiety and irreligion). The sins he witnesses against are the same as those complained of in Nehemiah's time, with whom, it is probable, he was a contemporary. And now that prophecy was to cease, he speaks more clearly of the Messiah as nigh at hand than any other of the prophets had done, and concludes with a direction to the people of God to keep the law of Moses in remembrance while they were in expectation of the gospel of Christ.

This prophet is sent first to convince and then to comfort, first to discover sin and reprove it, and then to promise the coming of Him who shall take away sin. And this method the blessed

Spirit takes in dealing with souls (John 16:8). He first opens the wound and then applies the healing balm. God had provided (and one would think effectually) for engaging Israel to himself by providences and ordinances; but it seems, by the complaints here made of them, that they received the grace of God in both these in vain.

They were very ungrateful to God for His favours to them, and rendered not again according to the benefit they received (1:1-5). They were very careless and remiss in observing His institutions; the priests, especially, were so, who were in a particular manner charged with them (v. 6-14). And what shall we say of those whom neither providences nor ordinances work upon, and who affront God in those very things wherein they should honour him?

There are two great ordinances which divine wisdom has instituted, the wretched profanation of both of which is complained of and sharply reprov'd in Malachi 2.

- **First**, the ordinance of the ministry, which is peculiar to the church and is designed for the maintenance and preservation of that; this was profaned by those who were themselves dignified with the honour of it and entrusted with its business. The priests profaned the holy things of God; this they are here charged with; their sin is aggravated, and they are severely threatened for it (v. 1-9).
- **Second**, the ordinance of marriage, which is common to the world of mankind and was instituted for the maintenance and preservation of that; this was profaned both by the priests and by the people, in marrying strangers (v. 11-12), treating their wives unkindly (v. 13), putting them away (v. 16), and herein dealing treacherously (v. 10, 14-15). And that which was at the bottom of this and other instances of profaneness and downright atheism was thinking God altogether such a one as themselves, which was, in effect, to say, There is no God (v. 17). And these reproofs to them are warnings to us.

In the third chapter, we have a promise of the coming of the Messiah and His forerunner; the errand he comes upon is particularly described here, both the comfort His coming brings to His church and people and the terror it will bring to the wicked (3:1-6). There is also a reproof of the Jews for corrupting God's ordinances and sacrilegiously robbing Him of His dues, with a charge to them to amend this matter, and a promise that, if they did, God would return in mercy to them (v. 7-12). The wickedness of those who speak against God is described (v. 13-15), and the righteousness of those who speak for Him, with the precious promises made to them (v. 16-18).

In this final chapter of Malachi, we have proper instructions given to us (very fitting to close the canon of the Old Testament with) concerning the state of recompense and retribution before us, the misery of the wicked and the happiness of the righteous in that state (4:1-3). This is represented to us under a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the unbelieving Jews with it, and of the comforts and triumphs of those among them who received the gospel.

Concerning the state of trial and preparation we are now in, we are directed to have an eye to divine revelation and to follow it; they must then keep to the law of Moses (v. 4) and expect a

further discovery of God's will by Elijah the prophet, that is, by John the Baptist, the harbinger of the Messiah (v. 5-6). The last chapter of the New Testament is much to the same purpose, setting before us heaven and hell in the other world and obliging us to adhere to the word of God in this world.