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Is God Speaking?

Reflections

Twelve Minor Prophets

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To my wife Teresa and children for their love and support

PREFACE

The Bible informs us that God has spoken. (Heb. 1:1) He is immutable. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Not only did He speak in the past, but He is speaking to us now. As you read, listen for His voice. You will be surprised as the twelve Minor Prophets unveil God's relevant message for us today.

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CHAPTER ONE

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET OBADIAH

(845 B.C)

Scripture Reading: Obadiah 1:15

“For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.”

INTRODUCTION

As we review the writings of the prophets, we discover God’s character and divine attributes within the context of human relationships. This is one of many reasons that the Bible is so important. It provides us with a wonderful portrait of God.

Today, we come to the shortest book in the Old Testament: Obadiah. I will focus on three points: a man, his message and God’s mandate

THE MAN

Who is Obadiah? We do not know much about him. He may have been born in Judah. His name means servant or worshipper of God. We know that he delivers a message to the nation of Edom. In order to understand this book, it is important to know a few things about Jewish history. Obadiah focuses on the relationship between two brothers – Jacob and Esau. They are twins. The Bible records that they fought in their mother’s womb. Esau (Edom) sells his birthright to Jacob (Israel) for a pot of beans. Jacob deceives his father and steals Esau’s blessing. Esau becomes angry with Jacob and seeks to kill him. The two brothers split up. Jacob winds up in the home of Laban. Esau heads in the opposite direction. Even though they seem to reconcile with each other, their descendants continue to feud.

Obadiah deals with a feud that continued throughout the pages of the Bible. We see evidence of the feud throughout the writings of Moses, and during the rule of David and Solomon. In the pages of the New Testament, the battle rages on. Herod, a descendent of Esau seeks to kill Jesus, a descendent of Jacob. Herod puts to death all the children in Bethlehem (descendents of Jacob) two years after the birth of Jesus. Esau’s descendants are also responsible for the death of John the Baptist and the apostle James. Today, the feud between Jacob and Esau’s descendents continues in the Middle East

Something very tragic happens in the book of Obadiah. An enemy attacks Jacob’s descendants. Esau’s descendants stand by and watch. They rejoice when Jacob’s children come under the judgment of God. In fact, Esau’s descendants assist the enemy. When the enemy gathers all its spoils, Esau’s children are present to receive their share of the loot. God is angry because the Edomites assisted Israel’s enemies.

THE MESSAGE

God sends Obadiah, to deliver a message to the city of Petra, the capital of Edom. Obadiah declares to the Edomites "Rumor has it that you will be destroyed in battle." The

Edomites laughed. They ridiculed the prophet. Obadiah declared, “God knows who you are! You are just a small, proud, despised, and self-deceived nation.” (vs. 3) You say, “Who can bring us down?” Do you really think you are safe in the clefts of the rocks? Do you really think your habitation is beyond God’s reach?

The Edomites had a false sense of security. They were arrogant. They built a city on a mountain. The walls of the city were 700 feet high. There was one entrance into the city through a narrow gorge. To get into the city, men had to walk two miles through the gorge. It was practically impossible to fight against the city because the enemy could not gain access to it.

Listen to how God responds to Edom’s pride,

“I do not care if you think you are an eagle. I do not care if you put your nest among the stars (vs. 4). I will bring you down. Thieves will walk into your city and take all your treasure. Your friends will turn on you. You will be deceived. They that eat bread with you will prevail against you.”

"You will reap what you have sown."

The message to Edom focuses on judgment. The people sinned against God and now they must give an account. The thing that makes this book different from other minor prophets is that God does not give Edom a chance to repent. Edom has come to the point of no return. Their attitude is defiant. They say, “We don’t need God. We are doing very well without Him.” They pushed God out of their lives. Their prosperity caused them to turn their back on any hope of salvation. They planted bad seed and now they will reap the fruit of their labor.

Do you think this happens today? Well, throughout Scripture there is evidence of God stretching out His hand all day long calling us to return to Him. Instead of reaching out to God, we have turned our back on Him. God called the Edomites to salvation and service, but they defy Him by rejecting His call. Paul describes this failure in his epistle to the Romans (1:28).

“... They do not like to retain God in their knowledge. God gave them over to a reprobate mind...”

When the creator of the universe issues a command, there is only one option – obedience.

History provides many examples of men who thought they had a choice to reject God’s command. Pharaoh hardened his heart repeatedly and worked himself right out of salvation. Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, thought he was in control. He took credit for his accomplishments and God causes him to lose his mind for 7 years. Belshazzar, also a king, thought he was the captain of his own destiny until God slayed Him. In the book of the Acts, Herod exalts himself and fails to give God the glory. While he delivers a speech, Herod becomes a meal for the worms. How often men are deceived by their pride.

The writer to the Hebrews states,

“Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost says, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts...)” (Heb. 3:7)

The Edomites harden their heart and did not receive another opportunity to repent.

The Edomites died in battle.

There is a clear message for us here. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord. He will lift you up. As Paul discusses the events in the Old Testament, he states,

“Now all these things happened unto them as an example and warning to us and they are written for our admonition...” (1st Cor. 10:11)

God’s Mandate

What can we glean from the book of Obadiah? Firstly, we can take to heart God’s warning. He opposes the proud. Scripture records,

“These six things doth the LORD hate; yea, seven are an abomination to the LORD – a proud look...”

David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah, Malachi, Mark, Paul, John, among others speak to the issue of pride and its destructive effects. Pride flows from within and causes the heart to become indifferent toward God. It brings shame, contention, destruction and deception. It defiles the one who entertains it and causes its owner to self-destruct. Because of pride, individuals fall into the condemnation of the devil. History records many examples of those who have fallen due to its appeal. It has taken its toll on leaders who have kept company with it. Pride usually comes before the fall. God does not tolerate it long. He silences, cuts off, rebukes, judges and brings low those with the proud look. The Scripture declares, "The proud shall be punished and judgment day will burn them up."

There is a second thing we can glean from Obadiah. God is concerned about how we treat others. Edom watches on as others are under attack by an enemy. God is speaking. What actions do we take when we see others in pain? Do we look on and pretend that there is no problem?

Do we judge them? Do we say, "They deserve this?" How do we respond when we see others fail? Do we secretly rejoice because of their downfall?

God is speaking. He cares about the way we respond to those in need. He calls us to restore, encourage, strengthen, and build others up. Our job is not to find fault. When God brings us into the company of others, we do not look for weakness. We celebrate the work God is doing in the life of others.

Our mandate is to introduce the love of Christ, disciple believers, and reform our culture. We are to bring people into the presence of God. We must sow good seeds. God told the Edomites,

“You are going to reap, what you have sown. You deceived your brother and now you will be deceived. You plundered Jacob and now you shall be plundered as well.”

God calls us to reach out to those around us. He calls us to share the wealth He has deposited into our lives. We are a light to those in darkness. We share joy, mend broken hearts, and heal.

It is a privilege to share good news. We have tapped into the gold mine – the God of the Bible. He has brought us joy, peace and full satisfaction. He is calling us into a living and loving relationship with Himself. He has sent His Son into the world to forgive our sin and failure. He is here to give us a new beginning.

We end with a quote that sums up God’s message in Obadiah:

“As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.”

CHAPTER TWO

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET JOEL

(830 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Joel 3:18

“And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth out of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim.”

INTRODUCTION

We begin this study with a passage of scripture that outlines God’s promise to His people. The prophet declares, “The Mountains will drop new wine, the hills will flow with milk, the rivers with waters, and the fountains shall come forth.” This is a wonderful promise. **What does it mean?** This is God’s way of saying “I want to bless you.” The prophet Joel makes known to us God’s good intention: Joel states: God wants to satisfy you. He wants to make you glad. He wants to shower the rain of His Spirit upon you and restore all that you have lost to the enemy. God wants to pour out so much blessing upon you that you will praise the name of the LORD your God who has dealt wondrously with you.

God has a wonderful plan to do good for us and seeks for reasons to bless, but there is a problem! Sometimes, when God looks in our direction, instead of finding us seeking after Him, He finds us chasing after sin. He finds us in a state of rebellion. He sees our stubborn will. God makes very clear through the prophet Joel that if we are not enjoying His fullness, the problem is on our side.

In this review, we will focus on three points: A Crisis, the call and root cause of the crisis and the divine solution.

THE CRISIS

This book begins with a people in crisis. Imagine with me. It is a bright and beautiful day when suddenly the rays of the sun disappear. The sky becomes dark as far as the eye can see. You hear the deafening sound of rattling chariots. The earth begins to shake. The heavens tremble. Suddenly, millions of locusts fly in from every direction. They march in like an army from hell. In a matter of hours, the locusts transform your garden into a desolate wilderness. They eat the vineyards, and the fig tree. They consume the pomegranate, the palm and apple trees. They clean out the wheat and barley fields and eat all the grass. This is what happens to the recipients of Joel’s message. The people are in anguish and their faces are pale. Unfortunately, the tragedy does not end here.

After the plague of locusts, fires breaks out. Everything is in flames. The brooks of water dry up. The prophet records that people became thirsty and their food supply disappeared. The animals began to die.

Joel speaks to a people who are undergoing a severe trial. They are in desperate need of

divine intervention. They do not understand “WHY” all this is happening.

THE CALL AND EXPLANATION OF THE CRISIS

Joel blows a trumpet, sounds an alarm, and gathers the people into the house of God. Joel is not polite. Listen to his sermon:

“Wake up you drunkards. I can hear you weep, wail, and lament. You tremble because of the crisis at hand. Some of you are confused about why all this is happening. Did you see the army of locust? They descended in four waves. They looked like war-horses. They have teeth like a lion. They run like mighty men and you are powerless before them. I am here to tell you that the horde of insects you saw today is God’s army. God sent them. It is God’s attempt to get your attention and turn your hardened heart, but you have refused to listen.”

Many of those in rebellion were in denial. Joel informs the reader that they were in shock. They stated in unbelief, “God could not possibly be responsible for all this chaos.”

God is speaking. He has not changed. Does God still use plagues to get our attention? I think we give the devil too much credit. Not every negative thing that we experience comes to us from the devil. Sometimes God allows things to happen in order to wake us up. The God of the Bible is sovereign. He is in control of all the details. He has the last word. He works all things after the counsel of His own will. Next time you find yourself in the middle of the storm, look up! Call out, bow your knee and seek God’s face.

Joel records that God’s people fell into sin. They failed to remember that sin opens the door to judgment. Joel had to re-teach them this important concept.

I see this happening today. We often make a choice to live contrary to God’s word. Judgment comes and we say, O God, why me? Joel says to the people of his time, Joy and gladness have fled from you. Peace has vanished. Have you considered that your situation may be the result of reigning sin in your life? Joel is not as polite as I am. He stands before the people and says:

“**God is judging you!** You are living contrary to His commandments. You have broken His covenant and have made Him angry.” This sounds harsh, but the story does not end here. Even though the people are in despair, Joel moves on to reveal a wonderful picture of grace. He speaks to them about a divine solution.

THE SOLUTION

In chapter two of his sermon, Joel deals with God’s intervention. He challenges God’s people. If you want to turn things around, you must repent! Change your mind! Stop living for yourself and start living for God. Stop serving Him with your lips and start seeking Him with your heart. Sanctify yourself. Stop selling yourself out to sin and set yourself aside for divine use. God has a great plan for you. Cry out to God with all your heart. Fast, weep and mourn. Joel even tells them what to pray:

“Spare your people, O LORD.”

Now that is a short prayer! Do you know what happens when we approach God with a humble

and contrite heart? God moves into action! According to Joel, the actions God will take include the following:

He will leave behind a blessing for us.

He will restore all that we have lost.

He will recover our joy and gladness.

He will renew the anointing of His Spirit in us.

He will pour out His Spirit upon us.

He will cause us to prophecy.

He will restore our dreams.

He will give us visions.

He will satisfy us

God is speaking. Maybe you are facing a trial today. You have lost the joy of serving God. Maybe you have lost your sense of direction. You wonder where you fit into God's plan. The prophet provides the answer. Give God control of your life and surrender to Him. Give Him first place. Let go of sin and embrace God. This is the path to restoration. What does God promise to us when we turn to Him? He will rescue us from our crisis. He will restore what is lost. He will fill us with His Spirit and grant joy and gladness. He will satisfy us completely. What a deal!

Why is God so willing to do all this? The prophet makes God's motive clear. He is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and His kindness is great.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET JONAH #1

(790-750 B.C.)

(His Assignment, Attitude and Adjustment)

Scripture Reading: Jonah 1:1-17

1 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

4 But the **LORD sent out a great wind** into the sea, and there was a **mighty tempest** in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

INTRODUCTION

How many of you know that blessing comes to those who expose themselves to the reading of God's Word. Firstly, we acquire a greater vision of God. God reveals His nature, character and divine attributes. Secondly, we become aware of our condition. We gain a deep sense of our need for God. If these two things are not taking place, there may be a problem. As we review Jonah's biography, we will discover God and learn something about our need.

In this chapter, I will focus on three points regarding the life of the prophet Jonah: His assignment, his attitude and God's adjustment.

JONAH'S ASSIGNMENT

The opening statement of this book reads as follows, "The word of the LORD came unto Jonah." (vs. 1) In verse two, we hear about Jonah's assignment. God issues a command. He states to the prophet, "Go (East) to the ancient and great city of Nineveh." (vs. 2)

Nineveh is the capital of the kingdom of Assyria. It had an estimated population of over one million people. Isaiah the prophet informs us that Nineveh was proud. (Isaiah 10:13) According to the prophet Nahum, the city had a reputation for cruelty. God's command is very specific to Jonah in relation to where he is to execute his ministry.

God is also specific regarding the message that Jonah is to deliver. God said to Jonah, "When you get there, I want you to cry out against Nineveh because their wickedness is come up before me." (vs. 2) God assigns Jonah the task of bearing bad news. God will judge them for their wickedness. Listen to what God declares to Nineveh. (Isa 10:12)

“I will punish the king of Assyria (in Nineveh) for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.”

Now, listen to the words of the king of Nineveh. (Isa. 10:12)

“By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom, because I have understanding. I removed the boundaries of nations, I plundered their treasures; like a mighty one I subdued their kings.”

The king of Nineveh is clear. The king stated, “Everything I have accomplished is the result of the work of my hands. I am the captain of my own destiny.” The king’s pride opened the door to divine judgment.

How many of you know that God does not always wait until judgment day to set the record straight? Sometimes He judges in time.

In this book, God is about to judge a city due to its persistent sin. He sends Jonah to warn them of impending judgment. The message is simple: Repent or Perish! God is speaking. How many of you know that we have a message to communicate. We must also bear bad news. We must inform our community concerning the results of disobedience to God. Jonah’s task was to inform Nineveh about its sin and then move on to share the good news of God’s promise to restore those who receive His offer of forgiveness. God does not wish that any should perish. He is ready to erase our offense and give us a new beginning. His heart is to restore, not destroy. He desires to bless, not curse. Jonah was responsible for sharing a simple message, but there was a problem with his attitude.

JONAH’S ATTITUDE

How did Jonah respond to God’s assignment? He rose and fled to Tarshish, a Phoenician city on the south coast of Spain. God told Jonah, I want you to go east, but he went west. He found a ship and paid the fare. Scripture informs us that he went down into Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. (3) Jonah, in short, disobeyed God.

Why did Jonah disobey God? We do not know the reasons for his disobedience. We could speculate that he did not want to be the bearer of bad news. Commentators indicate that he may have had a problem with Nineveh. It is possible that Jonah did not think they were worthy of salvation. He may have been aware of their arrogance and cruelty. Others state that Jonah was afraid of the cruel king of Nineveh. These conclusions are just speculation. What we know is that God told Jonah, “Go and warn the city! Jonah answered “No, you have the wrong man!”

God is speaking. I do not know why Jonah disobeyed, but let me ask you. Why is it that we do not want to warn our community? Are we afraid of becoming unpopular? Are we afraid of rejection? Jonah was disobedient! What is our problem? Is it apathy? (I do not care.) Are we complacent? (It makes no difference either way.) Are we aware of the judgment that awaits those who refuse to surrender their lives to Christ?

Maybe we do not believe that God will execute judgment upon disobedience. Verse three of chapter one speaks to us about the prophet’s disregard for God’s command. He ran from God. When we disobey God, we are running from Him as well.

The Bible informs us that Jonah got into a boat, went to the lowest part of the ship and fell asleep. Jonah probably thought, “I got away.” I wonder how many in this auditorium think that they can get away from God. Yes, we might be able to run, but we cannot hide! Remember, God will not tolerate our indifference! What happened to Jonah? God adjusted his attitude.

JONAH’S ATTITUDE ADJUSTED

The Bible reports that the LORD sent a great wind into the sea. A mighty tempest rose. The ship began to fall apart. The mariners were afraid. (vs. 5) Every man cried unto his god. They began throwing everything overboard in order to keep the ship afloat. Jonah was taking a nap on the ship. The shipmaster found Jonah asleep. (vs. 6) Listen to the words of the shipmaster:

“What meanest thou, O sleeper? Call upon thy God. It may be that your God will think upon us, that we perish not.”

The shipmaster initiated a prayer meeting. The Bible reports that everyone on the ship was pleading for mercy. (vs. 7) After prayer, they cast lots to determine who was at fault and the lot fell on Jonah. The shipmaster questioned Jonah. (vs. 8) They discover he was running from God and reprimanded him. (vs. 9) Jonah told the shipmaster to cast him into the sea. The men prayed to Jonah’s God and asked for forgiveness. As soon as they threw Jonah overboard, the sea became calm. It is amazing to see how God can redirect a prophet by using a storm. Jonah was running from God and discovered that it is not possible to do so.

God is speaking. We have received an assignment from God! We can postpone it, but we cannot ignore it. Is it possible that God will use a storm to get our attention or wake us up? Is it possible that storms sent from God will disappear as soon as we begin to obey? Jonah understood that his disobedience was going to hurt those around him. Our disobedience not only robs us of God’s blessing, but also robs the people we love – our children, wife, husband, parents, and friends. Why should others suffer because of our disobedience? Jonah had only one option – Surrender! Jonah made some progress with regard to his attitude.

LESSONS LEARNED

God is speaking. He called Jonah. He is calling us! God had a plan for Jonah! He has a plan for us! God gave Jonah an assignment! He has an assignment for us! Jonah ran! Are we going to run from God? God generated a storm to get Jonah’s attention. What will God have to do to get our attention? God is inviting us to respond! When we obey Him, the raging storm within us should stop. When we respond to God, He restores us!

CHAPTER FOUR

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET JONAH #2

(790-750 B.C.)

(God's Response, Jonah's Reaction, Divine Restoration)

Scripture Reading: Jonah 2:1-2, 9-10

1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,

2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

10 And **the LORD spake unto the fish**, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

The book of Jonah is unique among the 12 Minor Prophets. We find that there are no sermons delivered by the prophet. Other Minor Prophets preach sermons. This book is a narrative or biography. We find the story of a man. God speaks to us through the life and actions of Jonah. As we observe the life of this man, we **discover a hidden message**.

In this study, we will review three points: God's response to disobedience, Jonah's reaction, and God's restoration.

GOD'S RESPONSE TO JONAH'S DISOBEDIENCE

How does God respond to Jonah's disobedience? He works three miracles. The Bible reports that God generates a storm, causes the lot to fall upon Jonah and sends a great fish. God does not ignore Jonah's disobedience. He does not tolerate his indifference. God takes action. He is offended. A small creature, Jonah, is defying the Creator. A small creature is challenging the All Mighty. God does not remain silent. If the nations are but a drop of water, what is a man to defy the ruler of nations?

God is speaking. How does God respond to our disobedience? Will He ignore it? Will He tolerate it? No, He will take action. The message is clear. God is willing to do anything to get our attention. In the days of Noah, He allowed millions to drown after they refused to heed His warning. (120 years) In the days of the tower of Babel, He confused the multitudes when they pushed Him out of their lives. He transformed the Pharaohs' paradise into a desolate place because of his disobedience. God killed the first-born sons of Egypt to get their attention. He destroyed many nations because of their insolence. We cannot toy with or ridicule Him. Jonah ran and God caught up to him. How did Jonah respond to God's judgment?

JONAH'S REACTION TO GOD'S JUDGMENT

When the mariners cast Jonah into the sea, what does he do? First, he prays. (vs. 1) His

affliction motivated him. (vs. 2) He cried out of the belly of the whale. Jonah came to his senses. He understood that God was responsible for his redirection. He stated,

“Lord, this is **Your** storm.” “Lord, **You** cast me into the deep sea.” (vs. 3)

Jonah realized that God was at work behind the scenes. He realized that God was sovereign and in control of all the details of life. While in the belly of the whale, Jonah stated,

“I feel like you have cast me out of your sight. (vs. 4) I feel like I am sinking and the weeds have wrapped themselves around my head. (vs. 6) I am fainting.”

God is speaking. We can relate to Jonah’s emotional state of being. This is the way we feel when we are not walking with God. We feel like God has abandoned us. The truth is that we have walked away from Him. We feel like we are sinking. We become confused about the direction our life is taking. We feel like we are suffocating. We feel like the burdens of life are going to crush us at any moment.

If this is where you find yourself, remember, God has a plan. What did Jonah do? He came to his senses. (vs. 7) He declared,

“I will look again to your temple. (vs. 4) I will sacrifice with a voice of thanksgiving. (vs. 9) I will pay my vows to you.”

These words sound like the words of a repentant man. When Jonah repented, God forgave and fully restored him.

GOD’S RESTORATION

The prophet declared,

“God rescued my life from corruption.” (vs. 6) “Salvation belongs to God.” (vs. 9)

The Bible reports that God spoke to the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. (vs. 10)

Is it possible that God will allow us to remain in a cycle of discipline until we repent? While Jonah was in the belly of the whale, God revealed Himself as the God of the second chance and the God of restoration. God does not want to curse. His desire is to bless us beyond belief.

LESSONS LEARNED

Listen to the words of King David. He captures the heart of Jonah’s prayer.

7 Where shall I go from Your spirit? or where shall I flee from Your presence?

8 If I ascend up into heaven, You are there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

10 Even there shall Your hand lead me, and Your right hand will hold me.

11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

12 Yea, the darkness hides not from you; but the night shines as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to you”.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET JONAH #3

(790-750 B.C.)

(New Assignment, New Attitude, New Outcome)

Scripture Reading: Jonah 3:1-10

1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

10 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.

INTRODUCTION

This short biography entitled “Jonah” comes to us 700 years prior to the birth of Jesus Christ and communicates a profound message. In chapter one, we see Jonah running. In chapter two, we see Jonah praying. In chapter three, we see Jonah preaching. In chapter four, we see Jonah pouting. In this chapter, we will deal with three points: Jonah's new assignment, Jonah's new attitude and a new outcome.

JONAH'S NEW ASSIGNMENT

The Word of the Lord came unto Jonah a second time. Verse one of this chapter reveals Jonah's renewed assignment. It is not a new assignment. God takes Jonah back to square one

and gives him a fresh start. What is that assignment? God says to Jonah, “Arise! (vs. 2) Go to Nineveh. Preach what I command.” I think the phrase “second time” is very meaningful. It speaks to us about God’s love. God does not give up on Jonah because of his failure the first time. God gives him the opportunity to get it right. Sometimes, we run, fail, and sin against God. He does not give up on us! His forgiveness is greater than our sin. His grace is greater than our failure. Today, God is saying to us, “I will not let you go. I am bigger than your weakness. I want to restore you.” God gives Jonah another chance to obey and He is willing to do the same for us.

JONAH’S NEW ATTITUDE

It is amazing to see the changes that a God-sent storm can generate. Again, Jonah is off to Nineveh. He enters the city. Remember, Nineveh, at the time of this letter, is the capital city of a world power and has the greatest army on the globe. The walls of the city are 100 feet tall. You could drive 3 chariots side by side on its walls. The city had 1500 towers whose height was 200 feet. The city had a large population. Jonah traveled about 20 miles into Nineveh before he stopped. His message was short,

“Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown”

Jonah was the bearer of bad news. He informed the inhabitants of the city that they were going to perish. This is not an easy task! Maybe this is why Jonah ran the first time.

The warning Jonah communicated to Nineveh also includes good news. That news was that God was willing to give the city an opportunity to respond in order to avoid judgment. God was ready to wipe away their sin! He was ready to offer them a new beginning! What is the result of Jonah’s preaching? The entire city repented and revival ensued.

God is speaking. If we want to see revival in our cities, it must begin with us. God must change us. If we are busy running, we cannot be a channel of God’s blessing and power. Revival must begin in the house of God! It is only then that we will see God’s miracle working power in action.

A NEW OUTCOME

How does Nineveh respond to Jonah’s message? Word came to the king of Nineveh. (vs. 6) The King arose from his throne, laid his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. We see evidence of personal repentance. The King then makes a proclamation and publishes that proclamation throughout Nineveh by decree. (vs. 7)

The king's decree included the following:

- No food or water for man or beast
- Cover yourselves with sackcloth
- Cry mightily unto God (vs. 8)
- Abandon your sin and violence

- Maybe God will change His mind (vs. 9)
- Maybe God will turn from his fierce anger so we do not perish.

The Bible informs us that they believed God and repented. What was God's response to their repentance? (vs. 10) He saw their works. He saw them abandon their evil way. God changed His mind. He did overthrow the city. He did not destroy its people. There is a beautiful message in the repentance of Nineveh. When God saw their response, He moved in their direction. When God saw their repentance, He rescued them. Seven hundred years later, the Ninevites delivered a message through Jesus.

Listen to the words of Jesus. (Matthew 12:41)

"The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they (Nineveh) repented at the preaching of Jonah; behold one greater than Jonah is here."

Matthew indicated that Jesus is a type of Jonah. We have no excuse! Jesus Himself is calling us to respond.

In this chapter, God reveals His heart. He desires that all men repent and come to the knowledge of the truth. He does not want any to perish. He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked! God is reaching out to us! The problem is that we refuse to receive God's provision.

LESSONS LEARNED

This book is about a believer (Jonah) who is running from God's call. What is God saying to us? "I want you to be my Jonah!" "I want you to be my channel of life and power in your community. "I am knocking on the door of your heart. "Will you allow me to rule your life? Let's start over?"

CHAPTER SIX

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET JONAH #4

(790-750 B.C.)

(His Anger, His Pouting, God's Response)

Scripture Reading: Jonah 4:1-11

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is a wonderful book. It is like a window that allows us to see God's heart. As we read its history, its laws, its poetry and its prophetic literature, we can hear the voice of God. The Bible unveils the invisible God. It allows us to understand His attributes. Do you want to know Him? Read the Bible. Do you want to know your place in HIS GREAT PLAN? You have to become familiar with the pages of the book. In this study, we will focus on Jonah's anger, Jonah's pouting, Jonah's prayer and God's response.

JONAH'S ANGER

The verses we have read indicate that Jonah was unhappy. Why was he angry? Even though God gave him a second chance to get things right, Jonah continued to have a problem with God's plan! In chapter one, we saw how God performed three miracles in order to change his attitude. In chapter four, God works another three miracles to re-adjust his attitude again. I think they call this life-long learning! How many of you know that our understanding of God's way will be under construction until we leave this world. The lesson today focuses on God's desire to save the lost. Listen to the words of Jesus,

"I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents."
(Luke 15:10)

This passage informs us that God loves the human race. Every time an individual surrenders to Him, the angels celebrate! How can we put a smile on God's face? Repent! Now, imagine the rejoicing in heaven when a million people repented. What would you have done? Would you have rejoiced with God and His angels?

Yet, we find that Jonah was unhappy while God was celebrating! Jonah was angry. He did not think the Ninevites deserved God's mercy. He did not think they were worthy! He wanted to see them suffer! To Jonah, these people were outside the boundaries of God's grace. He failed to remember that God does not bless the human race because of its greatness. God blesses it because HE IS GREAT.

In verse two, we hear Jonah's pouting prayer. He has a complaint.

God, he stated, "this is the reason I ran the first time! (vs. 2) I know you are a gracious God. I know you are merciful and slow to anger. I know your kindness is great."

I knew you would change your mind about destroying these unworthy sinners. He is in essence saying, "God, I don't like your plan." (vs. 3) Jonah then moves to make a request, "Kill me! I would rather die than live." Can you see the prophet's pride?

I think God is speaking. Have you ever been disappointed because you did not like the way God handled your situation? He understands all the details of your life. He knows what He is doing! You can trust Him even when things do not make sense! Jonah was struggling with God's plan and constantly complained. Why was Jonah so insensitive to God's plan? Jonah did not want God to show mercy, love or kindness to others. Why was he so critical of those "sinners?" Jonah had amnesia. He had forgotten all about his disobedience. He had forgotten that he had also run from God. He had forgotten that God had to rescue him repeatedly. He had forgotten that he was as unworthy as all the rest! Jonah had forgotten that God's forgiveness is greater than man's sin. Jonah had no problem with receiving God's benefit. His problem was that he did not want to share it. Sometimes, we are critical of others because we forget about our own failure. Jesus sums it up very well when He states:

"And why do you behold the speck that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam (telephone pole) that is in your own eye?"

Again, Jonah was intolerant because he had forgotten his own history. Sometimes, our intolerance is present because we forget all that God has had to do for us. How does God respond to Jonah's pouting prayer?

GOD'S RESPONSE

In verse 4, God questions Jonah. God asked, "**Jonah, is it right for you to be angry?**" God asked Jonah to consider his motives. Why are you angry? I did not give up on you when you ran from Me. I did not give up on you when you disobeyed Me." Once again, God is revealing the desires of His heart! He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked! He does not want to destroy. God does not want to curse men. He is the same yesterday, today and forever! God's desire is to restore, renew, revive, bless and heal. I wonder if Jonah understood God's question.

The Bible informs us that Jonah sat outside the city to see what would happen. The day was hot. He built a booth and sat under its shade. He was miserable. As Jonah was throwing a tantrum, God was preparing His lesson plan. The Bible states that God prepared a plant that grew over night and cooled Jonah. God delivered Jonah from his grief. Jonah was happy because of the plant. (vs. 6) The second thing God did was to prepare a worm to kill the plant.

(vs. 7) Jonah became angry. He was uncomfortable and hot again. The last thing God did is to prepare a vehement east wind to raise the temperature. God turned up the heat. The sun beat upon Jonah's head. (vs. 8) He become faint. The Bible informs us that Jonah was so miserable that he, once again, wished to be dead.

While Jonah sulked, God asked him, "Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died? (9) Jonah responds: "YES, EVEN UNTO DEATH!" God's message was clear in verse 10. God says, "Jonah, you cared about the shade producing bush." You did not plant it. You did not make it grow. Jonah, you became attached to it because of the benefit it provided you. Do you think those 120,000 children in Nineveh are more important than your little plant? I created the Ninevites. I have sustained them. I care for them. God then asked Jonah, "**Should I not spare Nineveh?**" God asked Jonah, "what is more important, a plant or a human being?" I gave you a second chance. Should I not give them another chance? I rescued you. Should I not rescue them?

Jonah valued his need for shade more than the eternal fate of the human race. I think God is speaking. We can relate to the prophet. There are times when we place more value on the temporal than the eternal. We forget that we are just passing through! We forget that God rescues us so we can rescue others. Are you concerned for the eternal destiny of others? Do you understand that God has made provision for their salvation and happiness?

LESSONS LEARNED

God has revealed His heart. He loves humanity. His desire is to rescue it from the coming wrath. He is calling us to total surrender. If you give Him your weakness, He will give you His strength. If you give Him your past, He will give you His bright Future. If you give Him your sin, He will give you His Forgiveness. If you give Him your shame, He will give you His Glory. If you give Him your scars, He will give you His Healing. If you give him your pain, He will give you His Joy. The God of Jonah is making you a wonderful offer.

If you belong to God already, the message is clear. You may hide, but you cannot run. God is calling you to divine service. God has a plan to save, restore, and revive the human race through you. He wants you to be his instrument of hope to the lost. We are to share the bad-good news with others.

The **bad news** is that we are all born in sin. The judgment of God hangs over our head. The day of wrath is coming. We will soon stand before the court of heaven to give an account for our life. The Bible reveals our condition when it states, "All have sinned and have fallen short of God's glory."

The **good news** is that God has provided us with an attorney that will plead our case. Because of our guilt, Jesus Christ had to pay the judge. What was the price? The penalty for our crime called for a death sentence. Jesus died so we can live. While on the earth, Jesus lived a sinless life. Now, we are able to stand before God and enjoy His presence because of the righteousness Jesus Christ has transferred to us. Because of His resurrection, we can now enjoy newness of life. We can taste heaven before death. We can experience God's fullness. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has rescued us from the curse and wrath of God.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET AMOS

(755 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Amos 5:4

For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live:

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is a revelation of God. This is why it is so important to read its pages. As we walk through the pages of the Bible, we will discover how God reveals Himself within the context of human relationships.

Today, as we review the book written by the prophet Amos, we will observe God as He deals within the context of a nation. We will see God's holiness on the one hand and His great love on the other. I will focus on three points: The messenger, the message, and a response.

THE MESSENGER

Who is Amos? His name means burden bearer. He is both a herdsman and a cultivator of sycamore trees. He lives and works in the same desert in which we find John the Baptist. This desert, is the one in which Jesus was tempted 40 days and 40 nights. While Amos tends his sheep, God calls him to become His prophet. God says to him,

“Amos, you will bear my burden to the house of Israel.”

All this happened in the year 750 B.C. when Jeroboam II was king in Israel. I want you to imagine with me. You are walking into the capital city of Israel. People are prosperous and proud. The temple is buzzing with activity. Outwardly, they appear to be very religious. The priests are dressed in fine and beautiful linen. The city includes several palaces. You also observe prostitutes, idols and entertainment on every side. While you view the sites, suddenly a poor shepherd walks onto the scene and begins to shout like a mad man.

THE MESSAGE

Listen to the shepherd's message: “The LORD is roaring like a lion from Zion.” This is not a troubling message to the nation of Israel. They believe God is going to judge the nations and make the Jews a world power. Amos is preaching a message familiar to Israel. The prophet outlines the judgment to come:

God will judge **Damascus** (2-5)

He will send fire

He will devour

He will break

He will cut off

He will enslave

God will judge **Gaza** (6-8)

God will judge **Tyrus** (9-10)

God will judge **Edom** (11-12)

God will judge **Ammon** (13-15)

God will judge **Moab** (2:1-3)

God will judge **Judah** (2:4-5)

If we were present, we would probably hear the Jewish people say, “This is a great sermon. Amen! Preach on brother Amos.” When the prophet personalizes his message, the crowd becomes silent.

Amos proceeds to bring the message home to the Jews by stating, “and God is going to judge **YOU**. (2:6-16)

There is suddenly a loss of interest. They probably begin yawning. “When is this sermon going to end?” Amos is preaching the unpopular message of judgment to a people who thought they lived beyond the boundaries of God’s discipline. His message is so unwelcomed that the high priest runs the prophet out of town.

The Bad News:

The prophet has a message to deliver. It will include both bad and good news. Amos returns to deliver the bad news first:

God will punish you for your sin (3:1)

He is coming to visit you (14)

He will destroy your possessions (15)

He will lead you away with fishhooks (4:2)

You need to prepare to meet your God (4:11)

He will ensure that you do not enjoy your prosperity

You will weep and wail

You will run and hid, but will not escape

If you dig your way to hell, His hand will find you (9:2)

If you climb to heaven, He will bring you down (9:2)

If you hid in a mountain, He will search you out (9:3)

If you descend to the bottom of the sea, He will command a serpent to bite you (9:3)

When captured by an enemy, He will command them to slay you

Your friends will not be able to help you

Judgment will come upon those who have misled you

He will cause you to be enslaved

It will be a dark, sorrowful and bitter day

He will destroy your way of life

I assure you that they were no longer yawning. Their jaw probably dropped. They refuse to believe that God would judge them. They said, "How can God turn on His own people?"

The prophet provided Israel with details concerning their sin. Do you want to know why judgment is coming, asked the prophet? You have refused to allow God's word to govern you. You are flirting with sin. You are playing games with God. You are violating His moral law. You pretend that He is going to look the other way.

The prophet provided them examples of their sin:

1. You are so busy with your prosperity that you no longer think about those in need around you.
2. You are so busy with the here and now that you have lost sight of the eternal.
3. When you meet with me in the temple, you say to yourself "when is worship going to be over?"
4. While worshipping in my temple, your mind wanders. (8:5)
5. You offer sacrifices, but your heart is not in it.

The prophet's message was direct. When will you stop rendering lip service to God? He will not tolerate your sin! The prophet outlines ways in which God had attempted to reach out to His people. The prophet listed the many ways in which God tried to get their attention.

He withheld the rain.

He caused the labor of your hand to fail many times, but you would not turn to Him.

He sent mildew to destroy your plants, but you did not respond.

He sent worms to kill your trees.

He sent sickness.

He allowed death to touch you.

You failed to surrender!

I want you to notice something. Immediately after warning them, God reasoned with His people. God invites His people to seek Him and live. (5:4) He invited them to surrender.

God wanted to save Israel from judgment. God desired to heal and restore. I heard someone give the following example:

"A story is told of an angel who was sent to carry out a mission for God. Well, the angel arrived on the earth. Got an apartment, bought a car and shopped for some clothing because his mission was going to take a while. Before you know it, the angel is out looking for a bigger house because everyone had one. He went out to get another car, because the new model was in. The angel became so distracted with keeping up with his neighbors that he lost sight of his mission. God had to say to His angel, "Come on back."

This is what happened to Israel. God chose Israel to carry out a divine mission, but they become distracted with their materialism. They become absorbed with living for the here and now. Jesus summarizes exactly what happened to Israel.

Jesus said, "You hear the word; then ...

The cares and anxieties of the world

The distractions of the age

The pleasure, delight, false glamour, and deceitfulness of riches,

The craving and passionate desire for other things **creep in** and **choke** and **suffocate** the Word and **you become unfruitful**" (Mark 4:19)

This also happens to us! We have received an assignment from God, but often fail to carry it out. We become complacent, and lose sight of our mission. We begin to set our mind on earthly things and forget all about the eternal. Before you know it, 70 years have gone by and we are unfruitful and unsatisfied. We spend the rest of our days putting on a religious show that takes on a form of godliness, but denies its power.

God has no desire to focus on our failure. His heart is to restore. God draws His people back to Himself by revealing His character and traits. He states to His people,

"Do you know who I am? I formed the mountains that surround you. I created the wind that caresses you. I know your thoughts. I make the morning darkness and thread upon the high places of the earth. I am the one who touches the land and it melts."

The people had lost sight of the greatness of God. They had reduced God to their level. God became "the man upstairs." They had lost reverence for the Almighty. They violated God's commandments and judgment followed.

It is at this point in the story that we see a shift. The prophet suddenly changes his tone, "But, I also have some good news." This is relevant to us. Remember, God's love is not limited to the nation of Israel; He desires to extend His good intention to us. God does not will that we perish. He takes no pleasure in the demise of the wicked.

Let us review the good news in chapter 9:11-15:

God's heart is to restore, not destroy

Though you fall, He will pull you out of your failure (9:11)

Those areas of your life that are weak, He will strengthen

He will lift you out of your ruins

He will build you up

He will prosper you

He will give you joy

He will rescue you from judgment

He will establish you

THE RESPONSE

God is reaching out. His heart is to restore, pull you up, lift you out, build, strengthen, prosper, rescue and establish you.

After revealing His good intentions, God then issues an invitation. God invites us to return to Him and abandon our destructive ways. He pleads with Israel for 45 years. God did not judge them immediately. He patiently, lovingly and persistently invited them. Unfortunately, Israel refuses God's offer. They remain complacent. They keep going down a sinful path. They refused to believe that God would judge them and chose to embrace their pleasure and sin. They continued to toy with God as if He were but a mere mortal. When Israel refused to respond, God allowed the Assyrians to destroy them and their way of life.

When judgment finally arrived, 90% of them die. The remnant that survived told the story.

LESSONS LEARNED

God invited Israel to respond and gave them 45 years to repent. God is speaking. God has issued an invitation to us. We have all sinned and broken God's heart. We deserve His judgment. We have lost sight of our mission. We live for the moment. We have chosen our pleasure over God. We have been unfruitful. Whatever the shortcoming might be, God is offering to pull us out and lift us up. He is ready to prosper, restore, rescue, rebuild, strengthen and establish us. This is what God will do when we surrender to Him.

The prophet delivers a clear message. The blessing flows in the direction of those who set aside their sin and walk with God.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET HOSEA

(750-725 B.C)

Scripture Reading: Hosea 4:1, 14:1

1 Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, mercy, or knowledge of God in the land.”

O Israel, **return unto the LORD thy God** for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. (14:1)

INTRODUCTION

As we read each prophetic book, we discover a pattern. First, we see the condition of God’s people at the time of the writing. Secondly, we see God’s people under judgment because of sin or failure and lastly we see God’s offer of restoration.

In this study, I will focus on three points that relate to the book of Hosea: The messenger, his message and a call to respond.

THE MESSENGER

Who is Hosea? We know his name means salvation. Jeroboam II is king when Hosea preaches in Israel. The Bible records the details of a domestic problem faced by the prophet. Upon instruction from God, Hosea marries a prostitute by name of Gomer. They have three children.

The first child is Jezreel (meaning “God’s judgment”)

The second child is Lo-ruhamah (meaning “No mercy or not loved”)

The third child is Lo-ammi (meaning “not my people or not mine”)

After Hosea was married, he and his wife Gomer settled down. The Bible records that after a few years in the relationship, Hosea’s wife left him for another man. Her relationship with the new man did not work out and Gomer returned to her former life of prostitution. Hosea was heart-broken. He loved his wife. He was probably confused and lonely. He did not know what he was going to do with the children. Can you imagine how the prophet feels?

The Bible informs us that Hosea pursued his unfaithful wife and bought her back for 15 pieces of silver and some barley. Why would God choose such a prophet to deliver His message to Israel? His experience with Gomer qualified him to speak for God. Hosea knew how God felt. He understood God’s pain. God’s people had deserted Him and run off with other gods.

Hosea approached Israel as God’s prosecuting attorney. Hosea stated,

“God has pressed charges against you. He has filed a law against you.”

Picture this. God puts His people on trial. The book reveals a court scene! It’s **God vs. The Children of Israel.** This is the context of Hosea's message.

THE MESSAGE

Hosea delivered a somber message to Israel. As God’s prosecuting attorney, he outlined the charges filed due to Israel’s failure to keep the covenant. The charges are as follows:

Charge #1:

You have rejected, forgotten, deserted, and run from God! The contract states that you would have no other god’s before Me, yet you continue to worship idols and refuse to repent.

You have rejected the knowledge of God and have refused to seek Him. You are therefore guilty of violating command #1.

Charge #2:

You have made idols of silver, wood and stone. They have taken control of your life. You have failed to surrender your life to the true God. You are guilty of violating commandment #2.

Charge #3:

You have failed to acknowledge God’s gifts. You have misused them and have not credited God for His blessing. You are therefore guilty of breaking commandment #3.

Charge #4:

You have violated the Sabbath by refusing to set it aside. You have refused to give God what is rightfully His and are therefore guilty of breaking commandment #4.

Charge #5

You have refused to submit yourself to the authority of God and have conspired against the leadership of Israel. You have sown unrest, confusion and anarchy. You are therefore guilty of violating commandment #5.

Charge #6

You have refused to help those in need and have committed violence against your neighbor. You have murdered by sowing seeds of discord in the minds of your neighbor and are therefore guilty of violating commandment #6.

Charge #7

You have committed adultery, fornication and have allowed a spirit of immorality to control your life therefore have violated commandment #7.

Charges # 8 and 9 and 10 respectively

You have stolen from God and your neighbor by using dishonest weights. You have lied to God and men. You have become arrogant refusing to acknowledge your sin. You have violated commandments 8, 9 and 10.

All the charges against His people were violations of the Decalogue. They had violated God's moral law. The prophet moved on to explain the serious nature of these violations and the judgment that was to follow.

God made several declarations. He informed Israel that when men choose to break God's moral law, they become like a wild donkey, like birds that flutter without direction, and like animals driven by instinct. Those who choose to break the moral law of God, make themselves worthless.

The people had nothing to say to the charges. The evidence all pointed to their guilt. They were guilty on all counts. Now they had to pay. What follows is the tragic penalty for their crimes.

Their glory was lost

They were shamed

They lost God's presence

They lost their wealth and freedom

Their enemy pursued them

Their path became full of thorns

They became fruitless

They lost their joy

Their plans failed

They became wanderers

The prophet revealed a side of God we rarely see. He declared that God had become like a **moth**, a **roaring lion**, a **leopard**, a **bear**, and an **eagle** in order to destroy them by tearing them to pieces.

What lessons can we learn from this narrative?

Sin is suicide

Sin is a poor investment

Ask Israel!

How does Israel respond to God? Some were terrified. Others said God cannot possibly be responsible for all this. God is love! They forget that God was both holy and just. Israel fell. Listen to God's message while Israel was in a state of judgment.

“O Israel, **return unto the LORD thy God**; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

Israel brought judgment upon itself. Note what happened. While God’s people found themselves steeped in judgment, God chose to reveal His heart. Hosea portrayed a beautiful picture of God reasoning with His people. God states to His people ...

“Now that you have brought judgment on yourself because of your iniquity, I want to rescue and restore you.”

Hosea revealed something wonderful about God’s character. Think about it:

The people are guilty

Judgment comes in like a flood

God reveals His heart and makes a plea. Listen to God's plea:

I do not want to destroy you!

I want to restore you!

My heart is to make you like the sand of the sea in number.

I want to heal and bind your wounds.

I want to come to you as the rain.

I want to strengthen you.

I want to reveal My love to you.

I want to redeem you from the grave.

I want to return your fortune.

The prophet declared,

“It’s time to return to God? He is ready to bless you beyond belief.”

You would think that God’s people would respond. History informs us that they did not accept God’s offer.

THE RESPONSE

Israel refused to return and repent! They refused to believe that God would judge them. What happens to them?

They lost their freedom.

The majority of them lost their life.

Pregnant women lost their babies as the enemy cut them open

Many of their babies were “dashed” against stones.

The rest were enslaved and dragged away with fishhooks.

God turned His back on them because they chose sin.

They gambled on sin and lost everything!

Now you may be thinking. What a horrible punishment. Did God offer them a second chance? The fact is that God gave Israel 45 years to repent. They rejected, forgot, deserted, rebelled and turned away from God. They kept saying, “God will not allow judgment to fall on us.” God reasoned and pled with His people for 45 years. He informed them that sin would eventually destroy them, but they refused to listen.

Do you think this still happens today?

God is speaking. God has been calling some of us to release our hold on a certain secret sin and we refuse. We justify our actions. We assume that God will not judge in time. We become stubborn. God is pleading for our return. God has good intentions toward you.

God is once again inviting us to respond. If we are living contrary to God’s Word, it is a matter of time before we fall into a pit of chaos. It is just a matter of time before we stand in God’s presence to give an account. The Bible declares, “It is appointed unto man once to die and then comes the judgment.”

Remember, we have all sinned. We have all broken God’s heart. We have been stubborn and arrogant. We have deserted and rebelled against Him. We cannot run forever. God’s desire is that we would flee from the wrath to come. He wants to wipe away our sin. He has sent Jesus to cancel all our sin-debt. He wants to start over. Listen to the words of Hosea:

"It is time to seek the Lord. He will shower blessing upon us. He will heal, care for and love us. He will cause us to flourish, blossom and grow."

This is still God's offer to us. This is what God is ready to do. Will you surrender to Him?

CHAPTER NINE

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET MICAH

(735 - 700 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Micah 4:1-2

1 But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

2 And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

INTRODUCTION

Every book of the Bible unveils a wonder vision of God within the context of human relationships. He has declare, "I am the same yesterday, today and forever." This is why we read our Bible. It is not possible to know God intimately if we are lazy in our study of Scripture. Today, we continue with the prophet Micah. In this lesson, I would like to focus on three points: God's messenger, God's message and God's mercy

GOD'S MESSENGER

Who is Micah? His name means, "Who is like Jehovah." We know he lived about 20 miles Southeast of Jerusalem. He was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah and possibly Hosea. Micah writes his book about 700 years before the birth of Christ. His messianic prophecies include the following themes:

The first coming of Jesus

The birthplace of Jesus

The death of Jesus

And the second coming of Jesus

Micah was a fearless prophet who was full of the power and Spirit of the Lord. He was zealous in his declaration of the truth. Micah loved God's people. When he discovered that God was going to judge His people, Micah wept and wailed. We are informed that he howled like a jackal and ostrich. He stripped himself naked and rolled in the dust

Even though Micah loved the people of God, the crowd did not share his sentiment. When he preached his three sermons, the people were upset. Stop preaching so many negative sermons, they said. The people wanted Micah to preach a more positive message and refused to believe that God would judge them.

WHAT ABOUT GOD'S MESSAGE

What is the prophet's message? Well, all three of his sermons begin with the word: "LISTEN!" The prophet begins with a negative message:

You have an incurable wound

God knows all about it

He is not interested in your burnt offerings

He wants your heart and allegiance

You are outwardly religious, but your heart is far from God

You are going through the motions of a relationship, but possess a dead and cold religion

Israel had committed two crimes against the Almighty. The first crime was idolatry. God declared the following:

You are unfaithful

You married me and now you are running around with another man

I no longer have first place in your life

You have pushed me away

After expressing His disappointment, He then declared,

"Do not My words do good to him who walks uprightly? But lately My people have stood up as an enemy."

I rescued you from slavery!

I redeemed you from the house of bondage

I sent you a savior

Why have you deserted me?

When Israel heard this message, there was probably a deafening silence.

The prophet discussed a second crime: Coveteousness:

Thus saith the Lord:

Your desires are out of control

You stay up all night thinking about how to get ahead

You have a one-track mind. You say, "I want more!"

You are willing to run over others to feed your lust

You have turned away from My Word

Your leaders say, “How much am I going to be paid for my service?”

Israel pushed God out of their lives. They made money their master. They set aside the eternal for the temporal. They fail to understand that “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses.” They were living for the moment. God gave them the opportunity to respond. They refused, so judgment followed.

How did God judge them? He hid His face from them in the hour of trial. He allowed false prophets to abuse them. God uprooted the nation. Its cities became a pile of trash. God refused to bless them. He planned evil from which they were unable to escape. Others laugh at them because of their downfall. Israel became an enemy to God. They were plagued with an incurable sickness. They ate, remained unsatisfied. They planted, but did not reap. Babylon conquered them and a remnant told the story.

What do you suppose the Jews learned from this experience? They discovered the key to failure and ruin. If you want to be a failure in life, the book of Micah provides us with a formula:

Shove God out of your life

Give Him the back seat

Disobey His Word

Be lazy and refuse to seek Him

Be reckless with your life

This is the prophet’s formula for failure. Micah is not preaching to the heathen. He is preaching to believers. Micah’s message is a warning to those who believe, but fail to follow God. The Jews kept saying:

“No evil is going to come upon us”

“God is in our midst”

“He is not going to judge us just because we are living in sin”

What happened to them? Babylon destroyed them. What would the few that escape death report to us?

God will not tolerate secret or open sin.

The path of sin leads to certain judgment.

GOD’S MERCY

Before judgment came, God pled with His people and admonished them to abandon their sin. Though God reached out, they refused and rejected His offer.

God made them a conditional promise. If you will abandon your sin,

I will establish you

I will exalt you

I will cause you to be a counselor to the nations

I will be in your midst

I will make you strong

I will deliver you

I will redeem you

I will make you like a dew to the nations

I will make you like a shower upon dry land

I will fight for you

I will rule you

God had a wonderful plan for His people. Israel refused God's blessing. Their sin robbed them of God's best.

LESSONS LEARNED

God is speaking. If we fall, He is prepared to lift us up! If we are sitting in a dark place, He wants to be our light! If we are undergoing judgment, He is ready to cast our sin into the depths of the sea and **give us a new beginning**. If we surrender to Him, He will establish, exalt, strengthen, deliver, redeem and protect us.

CHAPTER TEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET ZEPHANIAH

(630 - 625 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Zephaniah 2:3

Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger.

INTRODUCTION

As we review the writings of the Minor Prophets, a pattern emerges. The writers often begin with bad news and then introduce God's good intention. Each prophet reveals two aspects of God's character. They show the reader a God of wrath and then proceed to reveal a God of mercy and restoration. This is important especially when we share the gospel with others. Those who hear our message must understand the bad news before they can appreciate the good. They must understand their condition before they reach out to the Savior.

In this study, we focus on three points: the warning of judgment, a call to repentance and the promises of God.

THE WARNING OF JUDGMENT

In the first two chapters of Zephaniah, God reveals Himself as an angry God. He reminds His people concerning their covenant. We have an agreement states God. I rescued you from certain death. You agreed to be faithful. You have deliberately disregarded our covenant. You have deserted and turned your back on Me! You have refused to seek Me out. Because of this, I will utterly consume man, beast, fowl, fish, and everything you have built."

Now, I know some may be asking. "Why is God so vengeful? Should He not be a nice and happy God? "Why does it seem like God is paranoid? Let me ask you a question. What would you do if you found out your husband or wife was cheating on you? Would you be satisfied with the unfaithfulness of your spouse? You would be outraged! You would be jealous. You do not want to share your spouse with someone else. God is no different! Because of His love for us, He has no desire to share us. He wants to be the center of our lives.

The prophet tells the people, I have bad news for you. Judgment is right around the corner and I am here to describe the day. It will be a day of "wrath, distress, anguish, devastation, darkness, gloom, clouds, a day of the blast of the trumpet and battle cry. What is the point? I think the prophet is telling us that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of angry God. God is a consuming fire!

It seems that every book thus far has dealt with the idea of judgment. It seems like every prophet paints a picture of an angry God. Zephaniah wrote his book over 2600 years ago. God is speaking. Do we have to worry about judgment today? Yes! God has not changed. God still hates sin. Men continue to toy with Him. They continue to defy and reject Him. Judgment day will bring about weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Bible states that we are all going to appear

before the judgment seat of Christ! What is going to happen? How are you going to respond?

If we have not surrendered our life to Jesus Christ and accepted his provision for pardon, then we will stand before a dreadful judge who will have to carry out our eternal death sentence. We ought to be concerned about this! I do not want to stand before a dreadful judge.

Once again, what does the prophet do in the first two chapters of the book of Zephaniah? He paints a dark picture of an angry God. He unveils coming judgment. He presents all the evidence of guilt. After sharing the bad news, Zephaniah moves on the share the rest of the story. God has provided you with a way to escape.

GOD'S CALL TO REPENTANCE

God invites His people to turn from their sin and embrace Him. The prophet states, "Seek ye the LORD!" "Seek to obey His Word!" "Humble yourself."

God is offering us a way of escape. If we reject His offer, we will not stand a chance on judgment day!

Once again, we see a wonderful picture of God pleading with His people to repent. We see Him stretching out His hand to rescue and restore. He not only pulls us out of judgment; He also shares His wealth with us.

THE PROMISES OF GOD

The prophet reveals that God desires to hide us from judgment. The prophet states that God is mighty. He then proceeds to outline what God is ready to do for anyone who will repent and draw near to Him:

He will save

He will rejoice over us with joy

He will rest in His love for us

He will joy over us with singing

He will gather us who sorrow

He will undo those that afflict us

He will give us praise and fame in every place where we were shamed

He will make us a praise among all the people of the earth

Do you see God's good intention? It should be a source singing and shouting!

LESSONS LEARNED

The prophet begins with bad news. There is a death sentence hanging over our head. It is there because of our sin. The story does not end with judgment. There is also good news. God wants to pardon us and forget all about our failure. He will no longer make mention of or

remember our past sins. He wants to cast our enemies out of our life. He wants to be our king. We do not have to be afraid anymore. He is here to rescue us.

The prophet states, God is thinking of His love for us. God is singing over us. He wants to restore and make us part of His family. He will cause all the nations to hear of our greatness. Some of us may be thinking, "Well, it is great that God was so good to those people 2600 years ago." What does all this have to do with us?

How and when has God done all this for us? He did this when He sent Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus saw that God's judgment was coming upon us because of our sin. Jesus saw there was an eternal death sentence hanging over our head. He came into this world and said, "Father, judge me in their place." Jesus removed the eternal death sentence and then gave us the gift of eternal life in its place. He took our past, present and future failure and nailed it all to the cross forever. After paying our sin-debt by providing us with forgiveness, He then brought us into the company of His Father and family. He has been singing ever since! When he walked the earth as a man, he lived a sinless life. When we, by faith, receive His forgiveness, he not only erases our sins, but also transfers His righteousness to us so we can stand before Father.

When He looks at us, he sees a masterpiece! The nations will not only be in awe, but they will seek our counsel regarding the source of our joy and peace.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET NAHUM

(625 - 612 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Nahum 1:6-7

6 Who can stand before his indignation? Who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

7 The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.

INTRODUCTION

We have been reviewing the central message of each of the Minor Prophets and have discovered a wonderful revelation of God. He does not change. The God of the Old and New Testament is the same. In Nahum, we see two aspects of God's character. First we see an angry God who is about to pour out his indignation like fire upon those who live contrary to His Word then we see a God of love.

The prophet states, "God is good. You can turn to Him in the day of trouble. He knoweth them that trust in him." The author reveals a God who is holy and just and will not tolerate anyone to live contrary to His divine standard. He then moves on to unveil a God who is ready to embrace anyone who seeks His friendship.

All the prophets make it clear that God wants to rescue us from judgment. God would rather bless than curse. His desire is total restoration. He is ready to cast our sins into the depth of the sea. We must accept His gift of forgiveness.

In every book thus far, we have seen two aspects of God's nature: HIS WRATH & HIS LOVE. In our study today, we will focus on four points.

The Context of the Book

The Messenger of the Book

The Message of the Book

The Lessons of the Book

THE CONTEXT OF THE BOOK

The book of Nahum is the sequel to the book of Jonah because it deals with the ancient city of Nineveh. If you recall, about 100 years before Nahum, God sent the prophet Jonah to deliver a message to the king of Nineveh. His message focuses on impending judgment. The Ninevites repented and escaped judgment. The story of Jonah ends well.

God demonstrated His love and mercy by rescuing Nineveh from judgment. Nineveh soon forgot all about the God of mercy. They turn their back on Him and begin to follow their own way. They became cruel, arrogant and callous. The Bible records that God saw the willful

pride of their heart and the haughty look in their eyes. Nineveh had returned to its previous sin. Isaiah summarized their sin of pride as he quotes the king's declaration:

"By the strength of **my hand** I have done this, and by **my wisdom**, because I have understanding. **I removed** the boundaries of nations, **I plundered** their treasures; as a mighty one **I subdued** their kings."

As one reaches into a nest, so my hand reached for the wealth of the nations; as men gather abandoned eggs, so **I gathered** all the countries; not one flapped a wing, or opened its mouth to chirp."

God was furious. He raised up the Assyrians to judge the nations. He made Assyria a world power. He gave Assyria its wealth. Everything Assyria had accomplished was the result of God's working out His plan. Assyria was just a tool used by God to carry out His purpose in history. Assyria's prosperity led to the sin of pride! This is the background of our story.

THE MESSENGER OF THE BOOK

We do not know much about Nahum. The book records that he is fearless. Unlike Jonah, Nahum is not afraid to challenge Nineveh. He is not afraid to stand up for God.

Imagine for a moment. Nahum is standing before the walls of the ancient city of Nineveh. The walls are 100 feet high. One could ride three chariots side by side on the top of its walls. Nineveh has the greatest army on the planet. The city has about 1500 towers whose height is about 200 feet. There are over 1 million people in the city. Nahum, the fearless prophet, is standing before arrogant and prosperous men as he delivers his message:

THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK

Nahum looks up at the wall and says: "Pay attention" I have a message from God." Nahum delivered a three-point sermon.

POINT ONE: GOD HAS DECREED YOUR JUDGMENT

Nahum stated the following:

"You have made God angry. He has stored up wrath for you. He will take revenge upon you."

After declaring God's intent, Nahum moves on to reveal something about God's character.

"God is great in power. He is the God of the whirlwind and the storm. He controls nature and rebukes the seas. He dries up the rivers. He makes the mountains to quake and the hills to melt. His presence sets the earth on fire.

Nahum tells the people of Nineveh,

"Do you think you will be able stand before His indignation? Do you think you will abide the fierceness of his anger?"

POINT TWO: GOD WILL EXECUTE HIS DECREE

God will Himself destroy you. He will devour you as fire devours dry grass. Nahum made some incredible predictions.

The enemy will surround you

Your walls will dissolve

Your temple will become a tomb

Your city will be plundered

Your people will be massacred

Your heart will melt

Your knees will knock

Your face will become pale

The God who conquered the Thebes, will conquer you

The soldiers on the wall probably laughed. They informed Nahum that they had never been conquered. They arrogantly declared, "We rule the world. No one has ever penetrated our walls."

POINT THREE: REASONS FOR THE DECREE OF JUDGMENT

In the final point of his message, Nahum revealed the reasons for God's judgment. He outlined their sin. Nineveh had once again become a bloody city with a reputation for cruelty. They apparently had a practice of skinning people alive. They would pierce them with staves and leave them hanging alive. They would behead someone and then forced a relative to carry the head as a necklace. The prophet included the following sins. Nineveh as full of lies and robbery. They worshipped idols. Do you see the pattern here?

"Thou shalt not kill"

"Thou shalt not lie"

"Thou shalt not steal"

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"

God judged them because they were living contrary to His moral law. This is what we see in every one of the Minor Prophets. God judges those who live contrary to His standard. God's word is not optional. Men either embrace it and prosper or reject it and suffer the consequences.

The Bible is our rule and standard of faith. It is our manual for life. It not only allows us to see and know God, but also reveals the best way to live.

What happened to Nineveh? The prophet predicted five things would occur:

First Prediction:

"Nineveh would be surrounded by an enemy."

In the year 612, Babylon and the Medes surrounded Nineveh. They were there 2 years, but could not penetrate the walls because they were too thick.

Second Prediction:

"The walls of the city would be dissolve.

History informs us that a storm set in and torrential rains soaked the walls of the city. The walls began to deteriorate. The river Tigris overflowed and a large section of the wall of the city fell.

Third Prediction:

"The temple would become a tomb."

The king and his wives gathered in the temple and set themselves on fire making the temple their tomb.

Fourth Prediction:

"The city will be plundered.

The Babylonians not only destroyed, but also plundered the city.

Fifth Prediction:

"The inhabitants of Nineveh would be destroyed."

The Babylonians massacred its people.

LESSONS LEARNED

God is speaking. He is sovereign. He is in control of all the details. He is the master of our destiny. Nineveh refused to give God His place as sovereign. They failed to remember that God had chosen them to carry out His plan.

This is relevant to us. I think we often forget. Are we aware that God has brought us into this world to carry out a specific task?

Man's seeming greatness will never intimidate God. He will not tolerate anyone to live in open sin. If we choose to defy Him and live contrary to His word, judgment will soon follow. The enemy will surround us. Our walls of false security will crumble. Our sin will become a tomb. We will be defeated. Our heart will melt. Our knees will knock. Our face will become pale. Judgment is not a joy ride.

The Ninevites laughed when Nahum told them about impending judgment. What do we do? If you are running from God, you cannot hid. If choose to live in sin, judgment will follow.

God would rather give us good news. He would rather guard us like the apple of His eye. He would rather be our strong hold – Protection. He would rather cast our sin into the depth of the sea.

Yes, God judges men for their crimes, but not without first giving us the chance to repent. Why do so many perish? Is it because of crimes committed against God? More often than not, they perish because of their rejection of God's offer to rescue them. Nineveh repented the first time, laughed the second and became a byword. Because of her rebellion, she became dry like a wilderness. Zephaniah called Nineveh the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly and said in her heart "I am, and there is none beside me." Again he states, "Every one that passes by her will hiss and wage his hand." There is no future in rebellion.

CHAPTER TWELVE

GOD IS SPEAKING: THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

(625-605 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Habakkuk 3:17-19

17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation

19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we come to the prophet Habakkuk. Not much information about him is available. His name means Embrace. This book is different from the other prophetic books. This prophet delivers His message directly to God. He is full of troubling questions. I will focus on three important points that summarize the book.

His Burden (Hab. 1:1-2:1)

His Vision (Hab. 2:2-20)

His Prayer (Hab. 3:1-19)

HIS BURDEN

The prophet begins with a complaint to God. He has witnessed injustice and has seen:

Violence

Iniquity

Grievance

Spoiling

Strife

Contention

Habakkuk is confused as to why God has not taken action. The prophet can see that the law is slack, judgment is not going forth, the wicked are compassing about the righteous and that wrong judgment proceeds. He wants to know why God does not hear his prayer or move to save His people.

Habakkuk's confusion is common. How often have we seen injustice and have wondered when God is going to take action in order to make things right? In our impatience, we often

accuse God of being callous or indifferent to the problems we face. God will always answer in His time.

In verse five, God provided an answer to the prophet's troubling questions. God made Habakkuk aware of the fact that He had been at work long before his troubling questions arose. God raised up the Chaldean nation to judge His people. The prophet complained that the Chaldeans were bitter, hasty, terrible, and dreadful. God acknowledged that he knew all about it. He knew their horses were as swift as a leopard and as fierce as the wolf. God was aware that their horsemen were as swift as eagles and violent. God knew that the Chaldeans gathered His people as the sand. God knew that they scoffed at kings and scorned the princes. He knew that they destroyed every strong hold. God knew that after the Chaldeans completing His mission of judgment they then credited their victory and power to a false god.

God is speaking. Just because we do not understand God's plan does not mean that God is absent or indifferent. God is always at work. God works all things according to the counsel of His own will. He is sovereign. He is not only aware of our situation, but is also intimately concerned for us.

Habakkuk raises a second question.

“Why are wicked men used to judge Your people. Habakkuk provides a list of the sins committed by the Chaldeans. Habakkuk informs God of the following:

The evil Chaldeans devour your people

They make men as the fish of the sea, as the creeping thing

They catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag

They sacrifice unto their nets

They burn incense unto their drag

Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

The prophet declared that he would wait to see how God reproved him for his questions. Habakkuk knew God was able to judge evildoers. He had a problem with how God carried out His plan. Paul addresses this question when he states, “God works all things according to His own counsel.” God does not have to consult with a creature when He sets out to unfold His plan. God told the prophet, “I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. God does not ignore Habakkuk's question, but patiently responds through a vision.

HIS VISION

God instructed the prophet to write a vision upon tables. He explained His actions by revealing the moral condition of the Chaldeans.

About the Chaldean, God declared:

His soul is lifted up and is not upright in him

He transgresses by wine
He is a proud man
He does not keep at home
He enlarges his desire as hell and is as death
He cannot be satisfied
He gathers unto him all nations
He heaps unto him all people

God allowed the prophet to look behind the curtain of His secret plan. God revealed His total awareness of the moral condition of the Chaldeans. God understood that they were drowning in sin. God revealed His plans to judge them as well. God was not under any obligation to explain His actions to the prophet, yet He chose to do so.

God declared that His people would write a taunting proverb about the Chaldean's judgment. He provided the following example:

The Taunting Proverb

"Woe to him that increased that which is not his.

Woe to him that ladeth himself with thick clay. They shall rise up suddenly that shall bite you. They shall awake that shall vex you. You shall be for booty unto them. You have spoiled many nations; the remnant shall spoil thee.

Woe to him that covets an evil coveteousness to his house.

Woe to him that coveted to set his nest on high.

Woe to him that covets deliverance from the power of evil. You consulted shame to your house by cutting off many people. You have sinned against your soul.

Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood.

Woe to him that established a city by iniquity.

It is not of the LORD of hosts that His people should labor in the very fire.

It is not of the LORD of hosts that His people shall weary themselves for very vanity.

The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Woe unto him that gives his neighbor drink and puts a bottle to him.

Woe to him that makes his neighbor drunk to look on his nakedness. You are filled with shame for glory and your nakedness will be revealed. The cup of the LORD'S right hand shall be

turned unto thee. The shameful spewing shall be on they glory. The violence of Lebanon shall cover you. The spoil of beasts, which made them afraid shall cover you because of men's blood, violence on the land and of all that dwell therein

What profit did your idolatry bring you?"

The vision in chapter two ends with the following statement, "But the LORD is in His temple: Let all the earth keep silence before Him." The prophet understood that God's ways are perfect even though often misunderstood.

HIS PRAYER

Habakkuk stated that He had heard the voice of God. He was frightened. He petitioned God to revive His work and to remember mercy in wrath. He understood that God rules over all the affairs of men and stops questioning God's plan and methods. The prophet witnessed a wonderful vision of God and described it as follows:

He began by stating that God, the Holy One, had visited the earth.

His glory covers the heavens

The earth is full of his praise

His brightness is as the light

He has horns coming out of his hand: and there is the hiding of his power

Before him goes the pestilence

Burning coals go forth at his feet

He stands and measured the earth

He beheld, and drives asunder the nations

The everlasting mountains are scattered,

The perpetual hills bow: his ways *are* everlasting.

The prophet witnesses the judgment of God and declares what he has seen:

I see the tents of Cushan in affliction

I see the curtains of the land of Midian tremble

I see God march through the land in indignation

I see God thresh the heathen in anger

I see God wound the head out of the house of the wicked

I see God strike through with his staves the head of his villages. They come out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing *is* as to devour the poor secretly

I see God walk through the sea with His horses, *through* the heap of great waters.

The prophet also witnessed the restoration of God's people. He stated to God,

"You went forth for the salvation of thy people, *even* for salvation with thine anointed."

When God unfolded his plan, the prophet became speechless. Habbakuk declared,

"When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when He cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops."

Habakkuk understands that God can be trusted to carry out His plan as He sees fit. The prophet concluded that the just shall live by faith. Man is not to lean on his own understanding. We are to believe that God has good intentions toward us and is sovereign King.

He stated,

"...even though the fig tree shall not blossom or the vine bear fruit or the labour of the olive fails or the fields yield no meat or the flock shall be cut off from the fold and *there is* no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God *is* my strength. He will make my feet like hinds' *fee*. He will make me to walk upon mine high places."

What a wonderful expression of faith in God.

LESSON LEARNED

God is speaking. The story begins with a questioning prophet and ends with a man who learned that even when men do not understand the ways of God, He can be trusted. The just is to live by faith.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET HAGGAI #1

(520 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Haggai 1:1-4

1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.

3 Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,

4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?

INTRODUCTION

The twelve books under study include three restoration prophets. They are Haggai, Zacharias and Malachi. After God's people were release from Babylonian captivity, these three prophets dedicated themselves to restoration. They assist the Jewish nation to carry out God's will.

The book of Haggai focused on the theme of restoration. The Jews returned to Jerusalem to carry out God's purpose of rebuilding both the city and its temple. They were beside themselves when they arrived. They celebrated the privilege of service to God.

Not long after they began their work, their attitude changed. They lost their zeal and became indifferent to the things of God. God's rebuilding work came to a halt for 14 years as they made excuses for their failure. This is the context of this book.

How did God respond to His people when they became indifferent? How did He motivate them to get back on task? This is what we hope to discover in our review of Haggai. I will address three points in this study: The condition of God's people, God's discipline and God's restoration.

THE CONDITION OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1-4)

Verses 1-4 reveals the spiritual state of God's people. Haggai declared, "Thus saith the Lord, These people say that it is not time to rebuild My house."

Evidently, the Jews had set aside God's plan in order to focus on their own concerns. God no longer had first place in their lives. God stated,

"While my house lays waste, each one of you is taking care of personal business."

Upon His visit, God found His people dwelling in their "ceiled houses."

Do you remember when you first came into relationship with God? We were full of zeal and love for divine things. We were moving at full speed. Along the way, certain things happened and our heart became cold. Why do hearts grow cold? Why do people become discouraged? Why does zeal die?

Paul, described the believer as an earthen vessel that contains a treasure. We are vessels of Christ. Christ indwells us. When we are in our first love, we appreciate the Christ in the container. We are enthusiastic when we see or meet a fellow believer. Something in us bears witness with them. As times moves on, **our eyes begin to move away from the indwelling Christ to the flawed vessel.** We become aware of weakness, failure and remaining sin. Eventually, we become discouraged and our walk suffers.

Jesus, in His parable of the sower outlined a series of distractions that paralyze our service to God. Jesus stated,

“They receive the word with joy, but then comes affliction, persecution, the worries of life, and the deceitfulness of riches.” These things distract and cause us to become fruitless. “

The believers in Haggai’s day were no different. They became distracted and began to build paneled houses for themselves. Fourteen years elapsed and God’s plan moved down their priority list.

GOD’S DISCIPLINE (5-11)

God instructed His people to continue with the divine project they agreed to complete. When the people refuse, God redirected them.

"5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; consider your ways.

6 Ye have sown much and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; consider your ways.

8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says the LORD.

9 Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? says the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

11 And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands."

Note God’s response to their indifference and lack of concern. In verses 6-11, God pled with His people when he stated, “Consider your ways.” He encouraged them to get back on task.

God specifically provided them with a plan of action. He told them, “Go up to the mountain, bring wood, and build the house. I will take pleasure in it and will be glorified.”

When the people failed to respond to His command, God then moved to take disciplinary action.

The issues they face due to their disobedience are listed:

1 "You plant much, but bring in little" (They are getting a poor return on their investment of labor.)

2 "You eat, but you have not enough, drink, but you are not filled and clothe yourself, but there is none warm." (Satisfaction eludes them.)

3 “You put your wages into a bag with holes.” (There is more month at the end of the money. There is never enough to go around.)

4 “When you bring your harvest home, I blew on it.” (God takes credit for the problems they face.)”

In verse 9, God provides the reader with His motive for action. God would not remain silent while His plan was set aside. Is there anything wrong with building a paneled house? Why would God discipline a group of people for building a house? The problem is not the building of a dwelling. The problem is their indifference to God’s plan. God desires that we receive His abundance. He has given us all things “to freely enjoy”. The issue in this scene is one of total neglect for God’s presence and plan.

Disciplinary action comes to us when we neglect God’s plan and purpose for our lives. The apostle Paul repeatedly reminds us that we are to set ourselves aside for divine use. We forget that God has brought us into this world in order to fulfill a divine mission.

God is speaking. We often embrace a lifestyle that focuses on the human and ignores the divine. We attend to the temporal things of life and disregard the eternal. We ignore the creator and come under discipline. The problem is not building a house. The issue is our apathy and indifference to God.

Again, in verse 9, God takes full responsibility for the tools of discipline He uses in order to redirect His people. God's tool of choice is a drought. The prophet states, the heavens stayed from dew. God’s action affected...

The land

The mountains

The corn

The new wine

The oil

The productive power of the soil

The productive ability of men, cattle and labor

Listen to God's declaration,

"I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me." (2:17)

God will not tolerate our indifference. We find this in the book of Jonah. Scripture informs us that God generates a storm in order to get one man's attention. When our lives are on the wrong path, God uses any means to turn us around.

God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He continues to demonstrate His love by redirecting us. The type of discipline we see in this book is a last resort. It comes to us as an act of mercy. When the storm sets in, it is important to look up. It is time to seek God's face. It is time to make some adjustments.

The last thing we see in this first chapter of Haggai is God's desire to restore us when we fail or fall. God takes no pleasure in our pain. His heart is to renew, restore and revive.

GOD'S RESTORATION (12-15)

"12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.

13 Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD.

14 And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God,

15 In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king."

Verses 12-15 report the results of a proper response to God. The leaders of the community along with God's people obeyed the voice of the Lord and did fear before the LORD.

God confirmed that He was present by stating, "I am with you." What a wonderful beginning. God's desire is never to highlight our weakness, failure or sin. His heart is to restore us. When we sin, he is ready to forgive. He is the God of beginnings. I do not know about you, but when I take a wrong turn in my life, I usually become disoriented. Doubt sets in. I become aimless. It is not until God confirms, "I am with you" that I regain my sense of direction.

The prophet informs us that obedience ensued when He spoke to the people. They came to the realization that they had missed the mark. God's people then feared the Lord. King Solomon referred to the "Fear of the LORD" as the hatred for and a departure from evil. (Prov. 3:7; 8:13) Solomon records that the whole duty of a human being is to "Fear the LORD." (Ecc. 12:13)

The realization of our failure is the first step to restoration. The second step is receiving

God's provision for our renewal. When God regenerates us, He gives us the power to believe and pushing away those things that bring the curse of sin. This is still the pattern today. We must acknowledge our sin, receive the forgiveness of Christ, move away from sin and then obey. When we do these things, God rescues us from apathy and complacency by stirring up our spirit. The prophet stated that the LORD stirred up their spirit. God not only forgive, but also restored the will to obey and work. This is how God restored our motivation to serve.

LESSONS LEARNED

The first chapter of this book answers several questions. When we become cold and indifferent to God, He allows things to come into our life that awaken us to our need for change. The negative things that come our way turn us in the right direction. God revives our motivation for service when we confess our sin. God restores us by giving us the desire necessary to carry out our God-given mission. Our sense of direction in life and the power to act are present when we are in right relationship with God.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET HAGGAI #2

(520 B.C.)

SCRIPTURE READING: 3:18

18 Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid, consider it."

INTRODUCTION

In chapter one of Haggai, we are introduced to a people who have been rescued from slavery. Their assignment is to rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. After a season of work and of enjoying their freedom, they became apathetic and complacent. The divine project came to a halt and God took action.

In this study, we will focus on three points.

Problems (3, 9, 11-14)

Promises (5, 6-9)

Potential Rewards (15-19)

PROBLEMS

The following passages reveal the problems faced by God's people.

3 Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? How do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?

9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, says the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

11 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; ask now the priests concerning the law, saying,

12 If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No.

13 Then said Haggai, if one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.

14 Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.

A number of problems plagued God's people. **The first problem** evident in this chapter is the issue of the past. (3) Their entire outlook or focus was on the 'good old days.' They were comparing the past with their present.

God declared to them, “Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? How do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?”

While they were thinking about the glories of the past, God focused their attention on the present. In verse 9, God informed them that he intended to do a greater work. He stated again, “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.”

When they looked at the task before them, the Jews had to readjust their focus. Many of them had seen the temple in its former glory, but could not image how the new temple would be build.

As we consider chapter two, it is evident that God is speaking. How many times have we doubted that God can accomplish great things among us? We become discouraged with the present because we cannot see how God will bring us to our destination.

I have heard people say, “When brother IDEAL was among us, the church was packed. We had a big choir. Things were moving! Now, well, we have this!”

The past has its place. The past is one of many teachers that guide us, but it becomes an enemy when it dampens our desire to act. God challenged His people to stop venerating the past and encouraged them to refocus on His new plan for the future.

The second problem faced was due to their past failure. They had previously enjoyed God’s glory and blessing and then lost it. They served as slaves for 70 years because of their sin. They may have felt shame and guilt because of their history. They did not feel qualified for service.

God is speaking. We can relate. We must focus on God's great ability, not our human weakness. God is a God of beginnings. His grace and forgiveness will always be greater than our sin and failure. He is not interested in who we were; He is all about who we can become. The apostle John informs us, “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us.” Learn from your mistakes and move on.

The third problem they faced dealt with the failure of others. The self-declared just blamed the unjust because of their lack of dedication. They became discouraged because others did not serve God with the same zeal. Remember, we are all under construction. We are all at different stages of growth. God is at work in each of us.

In verses 11-14, God reprovved His people concerning their impurity. Clean hands are a prerequisite when doing divine work. We must set aside our sin. After doing some house cleaning, God then spoke to His people about His promises.

PROMISES (5-9)

"5 According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.

6 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens,

and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;

7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts.

9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts."

Before the Jews began their task of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem the second time, God encouraged them and then revealed His promises to them. (5) God declared,

I made a covenant with you

I am with you. Do not forget.

My Spirit is with you

God reminds His people of the fact that they are not alone. As His people complete a seemingly impossible task, God reminds them that He is present. Not only is God present, but His Spirit is made available to ensure there is power to carry out divine work.

In verse 6, God declared,

"I am going to shake (6)

The heavens

The earth

The sea

The nations

God told them that the treasure desired by all nations would come. (7) The temple would be full of His glory. God offered them the resources necessary to carry out His task. (8) God informed that the work He would do would be greater than any prior work. I will put my peace in this place, He said. In these verses, God makes a connection between the work in progress and the coming of the Messiah. God confirms that their work is preparing the way for the coming of Christ.

God is speaking. Sometimes, we fail to understand the importance of our work. By making a connection between the work that was being done and the coming of Jesus Christ, He is confirming the value of all divine work.

God is saying to His people, "your labor is valuable because it is connected to a higher purpose and plan." Sometimes, we do not see how vital our labor is, but rest assured, it is indispensable to God's plan. The prophet moved on to deal with the potential of obedience.

POTENTIAL REWARDS OF OBEDIENCE (15-19)

"15 And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD:

16 Since those days were, when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press fat and draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty.

17 I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the LORD.

18 Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid, consider it."

19 Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you."

The implications of this chapter are profound. God challenged His people to compare the difference between obedience and disobedience. God asked His people to compare the difference between 14 years of disobedience with 3 months of obedience.

God makes a wonderful statement. The blessing begins the moment we make a move toward obedience. (18-19)

God outlined the results of Disobedience:

1 You looked for 20 measures of wheat and found ten.

2 You looked for 50 vessels of fat and found 20

3 The seed in your barn was not producing

4 From this day on, I will bless you

God is inviting us to take action. He desires to demonstrate the difference between obedience and disobedience. The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians uses the phrase "in union with Christ" thirty five times. In his letter to the Colossians, he states, "in union with Christ, everything falls into its proper place." God's message to His people is simple. Obedience pays dividends. Obedience is the way to God's best. God tells His people, "From this point on, I want you to compare the difference obedience makes."

LESSONS LEARNED

God is speaking. In chapter two of this book, God calls us to overcome the obstacles of the past and focus on the present task. Do not allow your failure to paralyze the work God wants to do through you. Do not allow the weakness of others to rob you of the miracle God wants to realize in you. Remember, you are never alone. Through obedience, you can begin to reap God's blessing today.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH #1

(520 - 518 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Zechariah 1:16-7

16 Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem.

17 Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

INTRODUCTION

Zechariah is a prophet of restoration. He prophesied after Israel returned from its Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C. Restoration means several things to the Jews. It represents freedom from slavery. It means the recovery of an inheritance promised by God to Abraham. (Gen. 13:15) Restoration means becoming a light to the Gentiles, a channel of blessing to the nations and the preparation for the coming of Jesus into the world.

The Jew and Christian have several things in common. God has rescued the Christian from the power of darkness and has restored them to His inheritance. Christians are to be a light to the world. They are a channel of blessing to the nations. Christians introduce Jesus Christ as savior and Lord. In this study, we will briefly review the background of the book, a warning and the prophet's visions.

THE BACKGROUND

Who is Zachariah? His name means. "The Lord has remembered." He was a priest before serving as one of three prophets of restoration. His primary assignment was to encourage and motivate God's people to do the will of God by rebuilding the temple. In this study, we will focus on a warning, the prophet's visions and God's message.

A WARNING (1-6)

The prophet begins his message by declaring to his hearers that Jehovah is angry with their forefathers. God stated,

"Why do you not return to Me? I will return to you."

God said to them, I do not want you to be like your fathers. I warned them to depart from their wicked ways, yet they refused. A review of history will reveal that sin does not pay good dividends. Because of sin, the Jews lost God's manifested presence, the kingdom and ultimately their freedom. The rebellious nation was eventually led captive.

Today, God provides us with many warnings concerning sin and disobedience and the outcomes that will follow. God provides His wayward people with the road to recovery – repentance. God calls us to change our mind about sin. He calls His people to return to the task

of doing His will – building His house. The prophet makes clear that when we align ourselves to do God’s will, we will reap favor, blessing and protection from God.

VISIONS:

In this book, Zechariah reveals eight visions. These visions are a source of encouragement to God’s people as they carry out the task of rebuilding the temple.

In his **first vision**, the writer reveals a man sitting on a red horse who (8,10,11) is accompanied by other red horses who are speckled and white. (9) The prophet poses a question to an angel in his vision. “What are these? The man on the red horse responds,

“They are whom the LORD has sent to walk to and fro through the earth.” (11) They saw the nations sitting still and at rest.

What was the condition of God’s people while the nations rested? They had been under judgment for 70 years. The angel that spoke with the prophet pled with the LORD of hosts to show mercy to Jerusalem and Judah. Though God’s judgement had been poured out on Jerusalem and Judah, God’s heart was to restore them. His heart was to return to them with mercies, to build, prosper and comfort His people. (1:16-17)

It is interesting to note that God disciplines with the intention of improving us. The prophet Jeremiah outlined both God’s judgment and promise to His people.

In Jeremiah 29:11-12, God stated,

“11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

12 Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I **will hearken** unto you.

13 And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

14 And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.”

God disciplines His people with an end of restoring them.

You will seek me

You will find me

You will search for me with all your heart

I will turn away your captivity

I will gather you from all the nations

I will bring you again

Not only does God affirm His love, but also informs His people that He will judge their enemy - Babylon. This is the nation used by God as a rod of discipline against His own people. (Isa. 32: 9, 11) Babylon went beyond God's command to discipline and now it faced impending judgment. God fulfilled His promises. He set His people free from slavery. God restored the temple. Babylon fell.

In **his second vision**, the writer sees four horns. He asked an angel to explain their meaning. The angel explained that the four horns represented the nations that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. Soon after seeing these four horns, Zechariah also saw four carpenters. According to the angel, these represented the nations that would defeat and cast out the enemies that had scattered Judah.

In **his third vision**, the writer saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. If God's people would repent and obey Him, God would become a wall of fire around them and their glory within. He would dwell in their midst. He declared to His people, "He that touches you touches the apple (pupil) of my eye." What a beautiful picture of restoration. In this vision, the prophet portrays not only how God blesses his people, but also prophecies about the day in which many nations will be joined to the LORD. God calls those outside the Jewish bloodline His people.

LESSONS LEARNED

God is speaking. God uses pagan nations to both discipline and protect His people. One of the wonderful attributes of God evident in this book is His sovereignty. He rules over all the affairs of men – saint and sinner alike. He uses whatever means He desires to carry out His plan. The prophet states, "Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of His holy mountain." It is wise to bow to the sovereign who is not only aware of all the details of human life, but is also in control.

The three visions discussed in this study serve as a source of encouragement to God's people. He wants to restore them. His heart is to judge their enemies and transform them into a channel of blessing to the world. This is what God wants to do for us when we come into relationship with Him.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH #2

Scripture Reading: Zechariah 3:3-5

3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel.

4 And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

5 And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.

INTRODUCTION

We continue our study of Zechariah. The emphasis of his ministry is restoration. As we review the pages of the Old Testament, we discover that God made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He made a promise to bless and prosper His people. Though God had shown good faith, His people repeatedly fell into sin. The Jewish nation repeatedly followed a similar pattern:

1. Slavery – The people begin in slavery and cry out to God
2. Repentance – The people recognize their condition is due to sin and confess
3. Restoration – God forgives their sin and restores them
4. Blessing – God prospers and blesses them beyond belief
5. Sin – God’s people forget God is the source of blessing and become entangled with sin again
6. Slavery – Because of sin, the people return to a state of slavery

In this study of Zechariah, we will continue to focus on his visions.

Fourth Vision

We come now to the fourth vision of Zechariah. In his vision, the prophet can see Joshua the High Priest standing before the angel of Jehovah. Satan is also present. The setting for this vision is a courtroom scene. We see a guilty party – Joshua, a defending attorney – The angel of Jehovah, An accuser – Satan, and a Judge – God.

Jehovah tells Satan,

“The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan: even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this (Joshua) a brand plucked out of the fire?”

Various commentators state that the angel of the LORD is speaking. Jehovah had rescued Joshua. Jehovah had plucked him like a brand out of the fire. Satan is recommending

that God punish Joshua for his sin. The angel is seeking forgiveness on behalf of Joshua. This scene is similar to the one we find in Revelation. There, the believer stands before a judge and Satan is the accuser of the brethren.

Listen to the words of John (Rev. 12:10)

“And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.”

God is speaking. In this passage, Satan is the accuser of the brethren. He accuses us before God. He focuses on our sin and reminds us of all the reasons why we are sure to fail. His message is discouraging and often gives us a sense of worthlessness. We have all heard him. Satan, the accuser, whispers in our ear such things as:

“God does not love you.”

“There is no forgiveness for your sin.”

“You are outside the boundaries of God’s grace.”

“God is not interested in you.”

“You are insignificant to God.”

These are lies meant to discourage us to the point of giving up. In the passage we have read, Satan accuses Joshua before God. The good news is that Joshua’s attorney is present. The angel of the LORD rebukes Satan. When the accuser condemns us, we must remember that Jesus cast our sins into the depth of the sea. When we are accused, we must thank God for the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. The Bible confirms this point in the following passages:

“And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (First John 1:9)

Joshua’s Condition (3:3)

Joshua stood before an angel. The scripture informs us that Joshua is clothed with filthy garments. The angel issues the order that Joshua be clothed with royal robes. The angel declares Joshua clean. The angel states, “Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee.” Joshua receives a turban.

This is what happens to us as believers. Joshua removes his filthy robe and receives a royal robe. He receives a new turban, signifying separation. He has done nothing to deserve this labor of love. He is guilty.

God is speaking. This is a wonderful picture of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Jesus removes our filthy garments of sin and replaces them with His robes of righteousness. In the New Testament, we find several examples:

One example is the story of the prodigal son: After feeding pigs in a foreign land, the prodigal comes to his senses and returns home. His father receives him and removes his filthy robe in order to give him a new wardrobe.

Another example is the story of the man in the region of the Gaderenes: The demon possessed man approaches Jesus. He is naked. When Jesus rescues him from a legion of demons, he is clothed and in his right mind.

A third example is the story of Lazarus: He is dead and buried in a tomb. Jesus approaches the tomb, calls him out and issues a command to remove his death garments. This is what Jesus has done for us.

In the passages we have read, the angel of Jehovah declares several conditional promises.

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, If you walk in my ways and keep my charge, then ...

You will judge my house

You will keep my courts

I will give you places to walk among these that stand by”

The conditional promise applies to any believer today. If we walk in His ways and allow His Word to govern our lives, blessing will follow. We will govern, guard and have access to God’s best. We will rule in life if we surrender to His way and Word. Our responsibility is to hear and apply His Will. When we fail to obey Him, we become useless servants.

The prophet’s message does not end with this conditional promise. He speaks of restoration. God promised to send His servant The BRANCH. He removed the iniquity of the land in one day (3:10) and then prospered them. This reference is to the finished work of Jesus Christ. The fourth vision encouraged the Jews as they carried out God’s purpose in the rebuilding of the temple. Even though God’s people were under constant accusation by an enemy, God’s defending attorney was present to plead their case.

LESSONS LEARNED

In this study, we witness a court scene. We see how God makes provision for His people. We see a judge, a defending attorney, an accuser and the guilty party. What God accomplished for Joshua is what He has accomplished for us. Today, Jesus is our defending attorney. He has presented us before the judge. Because of His work, we now wear a new robe of righteousness and are promised a crown of life. Jesus Christ has cast our sins into the depths of sea. We are now on a new path to glory.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH #3

Scripture Reading: Zechariah 4:6

Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the Zechariah's eight visions, it is important to understand the context of this book. Again, what is the condition of God's people? They are discouraged because of their failure. God rescued them so they could in turn build the temple. Instead of accomplishing God's purpose, they become distracted. The work came to a halt for 14 years. They faced an enemy who spreads lies about them in order to hinder their work. They were also discouraged because of the apparent lack of progress. In comparison to the temple of Solomon, there was no evidence that a complete restoration would take place. It was during this time of discouragement that God sent the prophet with encouraging visions. In this study, we will deal with the fifth vision, its significance and then make some applications.

The Fifth Vision

Zachariah reveals the fifth vision in chapter four of his book. The angel revealed to him a candlestick of gold that includes seven lamps, seven pipes and two olive trees that supply oil to the lamp. Zachariah asked the angel concerning the meaning of the vision.

Significance of the Vision

The angel assigned several meanings to the fifth vision. Firstly, the vision was a message to Zerubbabel and those rebuilding the temple. It encouraged God's people as they carried out the task of building. What is the message?

“This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying,

Not by might,

Nor by power, but

By my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”

The message is simple. Divine work can only be accomplish by divine power.

The second meaning of the vision dealt with Zerubbabel's enemies. God addressed the enemy when He stated,

“Who are you, O Great Mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain and he will bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.”

God reminds his people that He is responsible for dealing with the obstacles that impede progress. God will eliminate the obstacles.

The third meaning of this vision is wonderful. In essence, God communicated to His people that they are a channel of God's Spirit. God is going to do divine work through you

Application of Vision

God is speaking. Today, the church is doing divine work. Our mission is to introducing Christ to our community, disciple Christians and reforming our culture. There are times when we may become discouraged because of our failure or for a lack progress. This vision speaks to us. It communicates three important things to the church.

1. Divine work requires divine strength.
2. Do not worry about obstacles. The work we are doing is God's work and He will defend it. God is in the business of removing mountains that stand in our way. Do we have obstacles? Yes, we do. Our enemies are often internal. Our mountains are at times none other than our lack of faith, a mindset, fear, procrastination and other things. The God who removes armies also has the power to remove the internal mountains that keep us from doing His will. God, who began the work, will also complete it.
3. You are a channel of the Holy Spirit. Do not forget the day of small things. Do not despise what God is doing among us. We are not waiting for God to act. He is already at work. We want to be sensitive to God's activity so we can join Him. God is going to work through us. This should cause us to rejoice.

In his vision, the prophet speaks about a plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel and also speaks about the seven eyes of the LORD. What does all this mean? God is vigilant when it comes to the details of His work. He neither slumbers nor sleeps. If God is awake, we can rest. We are not responsible for the results of the work. God is the master-builder. We must allow God to flow through us. Zechariah asked regarding the meaning of the two olive trees (3:11-4).

The angel answered, "These are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." They represent the servants of God. Divine work requires divine power. The oil represents the Holy Spirit that flows through us to carry out the divine task.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH #4

Scripture Reading: Zechariah 5:1-4

1 Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold **a flying roll**.

2 And he said unto me, **What** seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits.

3 Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it.

4 I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof.

The Sixth Vision

In this study, we continue to deal with the visions of Zechariah. In this vision, the prophet sees a flying scroll that represents a curse that is to come upon the face of the earth. Why has the curse come? The curse has come to visit those who live contrary to God's moral law. The curse visits the house of the thief and liar. The curse brings destruction.

In this vision, the prophet encourages God's people by assuring them that God will make right the injustices of the enemy. What a man sows, that will he reap. Justice will prevail.

As the Jews carried out their divine task, the enemy was persistent in his opposition. There seemed to be doubt regarding God's judgment of the enemy. God assured His people that the curse will visit the enemy because they are living contrary to His law.

What will happen if we choose to live contrary to God's word? Isaiah the prophet spoke about the curse within this same context when he stated,

"Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left." (Isaiah 24:6)

Ezekiel stated, "Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it:" (Ezekiel 14:13)

Daniel stated, "Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that *is* written in the Law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him." (Daniel 9:11)

The prophets revealed the wages of sin. Where sin prevailed, the curse soon followed. Can a God of love send a curse? Moses informs us that God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God. (Deut. 4:24)

If obedience opens the windows of heaven, sin opens the door to the curse. We open the door to the curse when we make the choice to live contrary to God's will. God assures His people that He is at work with regard to the judgment of all who oppose His work.

The Seventh Vision (5-11)

5 Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what *is* this that goeth forth.

6 And I said, What *is* it? And he said, This *is* **an ephah** that goeth forth. He said moreover, This *is* their resemblance through all the earth.

7 And, behold, there was lifted up **a talent of lead**: and this *is* **a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah**.

8 And he said, This *is* wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.

9 Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out **two women**, and the wind *was* in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven.

10 Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah?

11 And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base.”

In this portion of scripture, we come to the seventh vision of Zechariah. The vision revealed an ephah, a talent of lead, and a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah. The angel stated the vision represented the wickedness of the people living in the land. The angel indicated that the ephah was taken to Shinar to build ‘Wickedness’ a house. Shinar was the place where the tower of Babel was build.

What is our responsibility in relation to sin? When we fall into sin, we have an attorney who pleads our case and grants us forgiveness. What is our responsibility in relation to the practice of sin? When someone calls himself or herself a believer and chooses to practice sin, we are to take drastic measures.

The apostle Paul states,

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

In this passage, the apostle calls God’s people to separate themselves from those who practice sin.

Listen to the words of Jesus,

“**15** Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”
(Matthew 18:15-20)

LESSONS LEARNED

In this portion of scripture, the writer points out that we are to separate ourselves from anyone who is unwilling to repent from his or her practice of sin. Zechariah’s vision indicates that God takes wickedness far from His people and removes those who practice it.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH #5

Scripture Reading: Zechariah 6:1-4

12 And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name *is* The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD:

13 Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

The Eighth Vision

We now come to the last vision of Zechariah. The prophet can see four chariots moving in his direction from between two mountains of brass. Zechariah provides the following details.

1. Chariot #1: Red Horses
2. Chariot #2: Black Horses – They travel into the North country
3. Chariot #3: White Horses – They follow the black horses into the North
4. Chariot #4: Grizzled and Bay Horses – The grizzled travel into the South country while the bay travel to and fro through the earth

When asked about the meaning of the vision, the angel indicated that the four horses represent the four spirits of the heavens that go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth. Commentators state the four spirits deliver judgment to the nations.

Zechariah's last vision deals with the final judgment day. All men have an appointment with the great judge. The writer to the Hebrews states, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and then comes the judgment."

The Scripture has much to say about the final Day of Judgment. Note the list of names used to describe that day.

A day of weeping

A day of gnashing of teeth

A day of wrath

A day of anguish

A day of affliction

A day of desolation

A day of devastation

A day of darkness

A day of clouds and dense fog

A day of tribulation.

Another prophet, Zephaniah, described the Day of Judgment in the following way.

“And I will bring distress upon men that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung.

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.” (Zephaniah 1:17-18)

In his eighth vision, Zechariah, warned us about the judgment that comes upon those who choose to live contrary to God's law. The angel again spoke to Zechariah and instructed him to receive an offering from the North Country (Babylon). Zechariah receives gifts from Heildai (The enduring one), Tobijah (The Lord is Good) and Jedaiah (God Cares). If you recall, only a remnant (< 1%) of the Jews returned to rebuild the house of God. Zechariah is receiving gifts from the remaining 99% of those who were unable to join those who returned to Jerusalem. God allowed the 99% to participate on the divine project through their giving of gifts. Even though, they were not able to work directly, they participated by contributing their resources.

The prophet moved on to reveal the mystery of the symbolic crowns. The angel gave instructions that Joshua, son of Josedech, receive crowns of silver and gold. The angel introduced the man whose name is The BRANCH. Commentators agree that this refers to Jesus Christ. The Branch comes and will do the following:

He shall grow up out of his place

He shall build the temple of the LORD:

He shall bear the glory

He shall sit and rule upon his throne

He shall be a priest upon his throne

The counsel of peace shall be between them both.

The angel stated that Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen the son of Zephaniah would receive crowns of silver and gold as a memorial in the temple of the LORD. The prophet encouraged those involved in the process of building by pointing out that they are not alone. The prophet stated, “You shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.”

LESSONS LEARNED

The eight visions received by the prophet encouraged those who were rebuilding the temple of the LORD. Who does the work? Ultimately, the Builder of the House is God. The

Psalmists states, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Jesus declares, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It is our privilege to participate on the divine project.

When we walk with God, not only does He provide us with the ability to carry out His will, but also stands with us and leads the way. The one who stands with us is none other than Jesus Christ, the BRANCH.

CHAPTER TWENTY

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH #6

Scripture Reading: Zechariah 7:9-10

9 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother:

10 And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, nor the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we continue our reflection of chapter seven in the book of Zechariah. Thus far, we have reviewed eight visions. This study will focus on four sermons and two tasks assigned by God.

We will briefly deal with the first sermon and focus on three points: A delegation to the temple, a question and God's response.

The Delegation at the Temple

Verse one of chapter seven informs us that the Word of the LORD came to Zechariah during a time in which a delegation arrived at the temple. Sherezer, Regemmelech and other men were visiting the temple in order to pray to God and seek the counsel of the priests and the prophet.

It was customary for men to visit God's house in order to seek His presence and direction. When we come to God's house, is it to seek His face and will?

Paul states,

“These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Paul equates the house of God to the Church. Those who have faith in Christ are living stones that make up God's temple. Paul writes Timothy about our behavior when we gather with God's people. We are the church of the living God. We are the pillar and the ground of the truth. When others come into our company, they should have a sense of being in God's presence. When they come to us, they should have the sense that the direction and truth they seek may be found among us. God's church is the pillar and ground of the truth. We must speak the truth even though it will make us unpopular.

A QUESTION AND GOD'S RESPONSE

The delegation that came to the temple had a question. “Should we weep in the fifth month, separating ourselves, as we have done these so many years?”

What are they asking? Should we continue to remind ourselves regarding the judgment that came upon us because of our sin? The fifth month included a fast that memorialized the destruction of both the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

What is so important about reminding ourselves of the fact that God judges sin? The Bible provides many examples of what happens when we fail to remember our history.

Jeremiah stated, “Can a maid forget her ornaments, *or* a bride her attire? Yet **my people have forgotten me** days without number.” (Jeremiah 2:32)

King Lemuel counsels God’s people about the results of too much wine. “*It is* not for kings, O Lemuel, *it is* not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes to drink strong drink:

Lest they drink, and **forget the law**, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. (Proverbs 31:4)

David repeatedly made the point of forgetting God in the following passages:

“The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and* all the nations that **forget God**.” (Psalms 9:17)

“...Set your hope in God, and **do not forget His works**, but keep His commandments.” (Psalm 78:7)

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and **forget not all his benefits**.” (Psalm 103:2)

Moses warned the children of Israel regarding a specific danger that they would face as they entered into the Promised Land. (Deut. 4:9)

“Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, **lest thou forget** the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them unto thy sons, and thy sons' sons; (4:9)

“**10** And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,

11 And houses full of all good *things*, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;

12 *Then beware lest thou forget* the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

13 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.”

Again, he warned the children of Israel and stated, (Deut. 6:10-13)

“**10** When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

11 **Beware that thou forget not** the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his

judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:” (Deut. 8:9-10)

Again, the apostle Paul confirmed the Old Testament message as he reviewed the history of God’s people,

“**11** Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

12 Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” (1st Corinthians 10:11-12)

The following passages warn us of the danger of forgetting. God responds to the delegation that came to the temple with a mandate to remember. He informed the delegation that their fasting and feasts during the fifth month please only themselves. God reminded them of their 70 years of slavery and called them to review their history especially the words of the prophets. God was calling his people to practice their faith, not just celebrate it.

God is speaking. It is better to live the faith than declare it. Stop talking and start walking out your convictions. God spoke to the prophet specifically about their social interactions.

“And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying,

“Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother:

10 And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.” (Zechariah 7:8-10)

The delegation was concerned about fasting and festivals. God was concerned about their practice. They approached God to inquire about their faith, God pointed to their walk. There are several examples of this principle in the Scripture.

Paul speaks to Timothy about the last days and the condition of men.

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” (Second Timothy 3:5)

Men will possess the outward signs of faith, but their practice will deny its power.

James declares,

“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” (James 2:18)

God spoke to His people in verses 11-14, but they refused to listen. The people pulled away and covered their ears. Their heart became hardened. They ignored God. Their rebellion opened the door to God's wrath. The prophet pointed out that though God had called out to them, they had refused Him. God told them that their cries would not be heard when they were in need. God scattered them among the nations and their land became desolate.

Has God changed? No! The apostle Paul confirms this when he states.

“Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows; that will he also reap.”
(Galatians 6:7)

After announcing a guilty verdict for their failure to remember God, the prophet allows the reader to peer into God’s heart in order to discover His desires. Though God judged their sin, His desire was to bless. Listen to God’s heart:

I am jealous with great jealousy over you.

I am returning unto you.

I will dwell in your midst.

You will become the city of truth.

You will become the holy mountain of the LORD.

I will extend your life.

I will blessed you with children.

I will save you from your enemies.

You will be my people.

I will be your God in truth and righteousness.

God had good intentions. Zechariah declared that God spoke these words to His people in order to encourage them to build His house. The prophet continued to outline the blessing that God would send when they did His will.

If you do my will, I will ...

Prosper thy seed

Your vines shall give their fruit

The ground will give its increase

The heavens will give their dew

I will cause you to possess all these things

You have been a curse among the nations; I will make you a blessing

God made conditional promises to his people, He stated, “I have thought to do well unto you.” God then outlined their responsibilities:

Speak the truth to your neighbor

Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates

Do not imagine evil in your heart against your neighbor

Love not false oaths

In chapter eight, Zechariah made mention of four fasting celebrations that had been established during the captivity in Babylon.

The Fast of the 4th month: A memorial of when Jerusalem was conquered

The Fast of the 5th month: A memorial of the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem

The Fast of the 7th month: A memorial of the consequences for the assassination of Gedaliah (Jer. 41:1-2)

The Fast the 10th month: A memorial of when Babylon sieged Jerusalem

Even though these traditions point to God's judgment for sin, God declares that these memorials should be occasions for joy and gladness. The people are to remember God's restoration, not their failure and sin. God's desire is that we move beyond our past and focus on our present relationship with Him. If God's people will do this, then He will cause the nations to seek their counsel.

The book of Zechariah ends with a series of prophecies regarding the judgment of Israel's enemies, the coming of the Ruler of God's people, the restoration of Judah and Israel, kinds of shepherd, Jerusalem's victory, messianic prophecies and the future of God's people. The land is to be renewed, and the Lord is to be the sole King of all the earth.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET MALACHI #1

(440 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Malachi 1:11

11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

INTRODUCTION

We come to the last book in our study of the Minor Prophets. The prophet Malachi is a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah. His name means “The Messenger.” Though he was a messenger, he also spoke of two messengers to come. The first is John the Baptist and the second is Jesus Christ the messenger of the covenant. He attacked the spiritual and moral decay that prevailed during his time.

God is speaking. The Scripture is clear regarding God’s good intention. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. He has heaped on us gift upon gift and grace upon grace. John states that we have all received of His fullness. Paul declared that God would like to fill us with the unsearchable riches of Christ and desired that we experience joy unspeakable and full of glory. He wants us to know the peace that surpasses all understanding. These are but a few benefits that we can enjoy as believers. What is the greatest gift God has granted? John states, “For God so loved that world that HE gave us His only begotten Son.” It is in and through Christ that we receive God’s fullness. God is generous.

If God has given us His best, what does He expect from us? God expects the same. Paul told the Corinthians of his time,

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (1st Corinthians 10:31)

In his letter to the Colossians, he states,

“Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men... (Colossians 3:23)

God not only deserves, but also expects our best.

In this study, we will see how God's people failed to give God their best even though God has blessed them beyond.

I would like to focus on three points: God’s declaration, God’s application and God’s invitation.

GOD’S DECLARATION

‘The chapter opens with a wonderful declaration of God’s love.

“I have loved you, saith the LORD.” (vs. 2)

God declared His love. The people expressed disappointing doubt. It is possible their doubt was the result of 70 years of captivity and hardship. God rescued them to carry out His purpose. The people were now on the road to restoration. God was rebuilding a new nation through them. Even though they were enjoying the blessing of God, they lost sight of the God of blessing.

God is speaking. We enjoy the peace of God, but often forget the God of peace. We enjoy the benefit of healing and forget the healer.

This is what happened to Israel. In this chapter, we see that **they doubted God’s love**, and dishonored His name. In verses 1-5, the people questioned God by asking,

“Wherein have you loved us? God’s response was prompt.

I declared and demonstrated my love

I loved Jacob and rejected Esau

I laid Edom’s mountains and heritage waste

I will throw down what Edom builds

Your enemy shall be called the borders of wickedness

I will be against your enemies forever

I will fight for you

God pointed to their history as evidence of His love. What action do we take when we doubt God’s love? We should review our history. When I review my history in Christ, I can see:

Multiple Miracles

God regenerating, justifying, sanctifying, and filling me with His Spirit

God brings meaning into my life

God rescuing me from the curse and wrath to come

God bringing me into a relationship with Himself

John 3:16 summarizes our history. “God so loved... that He gave us His Son...” Our history is one of receiving from the hand of God.

Israel failed to remember its history. They had become blind to the love of God. Their love for God had become cold.

Not only did they doubt God’s love, **they dishonored His name**. They offered blemished sacrifices to God and gave Him a halfhearted worship. God asked a series of questions to make them aware of their sin.

Where is my honor?

Where is my fear?

If you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil?

If you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?

Will the governor be pleased with your offering?

Will the governor regard your person if you give him your offering?

Should I accept your offering?

Because their love had grown cold, their worship had become empty. God is speaking. Are we honoring God? Do we fear Him? Are we offering our best to Him?

How did the Jews respond to God's accusations? They pled ignorance.

Listen to their questions.

Wherein have we despised your name?

Wherein have we polluted thee?

God responds immediately.

You say...

The table of the LORD is polluted

God's fruit and meat are contemptible

Behold what a weariness God's table is

God is speaking. Why do we gathered here today? We are doing divine work! We are priests that offer spiritual gifts. We give our best. That is why we take care of this building. That is why we prepare our lessons to teacher our children. That is why we serve our community.

The people to which Malachi ministered had lost their love and zeal for God. Jesus summed up the attitude when He spoke to the religious Jews of His time, "You serve God with your lips, but your heart is far from Him." God invited those giving Him lip service to do two things. - Shut the doors of the temple and forget your sacrifices.

Malachi declared,

"... from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same:

Your name shall be great among the Gentiles; and

In every place incense will be offered unto Your name, and a pure offering: for

Your name shall be great among the heathen

You are a great King,

Your name is dreadful among the heathen.”

God also reminds the Jews concerning the Gentiles who will worship Him from the heart. The nations despised by the Jews would rise up and offer Him the worship that is fit for a great King.

This is a sobering thought. God will receive praise from Israel’s enemies.

GOD’S APPLICATION

What does all this have to do with me? Scripture tells us that we are all priests! We also offer sacrifices. Peter writes,

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

What Sacrifices does a Christian Offer?

There are several types of sacrifice offered by the believer.

According to Romans 12:1, **we offer our bodies...**

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

According to Philippians 4:18, **we offer our money...**

“But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.”

According to Hebrews 13:15, **we offer our praise...**

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”

According to Hebrews 13:16, **we offer our good works...**

“But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

According to Romans 15:16, **we offer those we lead to Christ...**

“That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.”

GOD’S INVITATION

What does God invite us to do? He invites us to offer our best. He is inviting us to offer sacrifices from the heart. What should we offer?

A sacrifice of ourselves

A sacrifice of Money

A sacrifice of Praise

A sacrifice of Good Works

A sacrifice of leading others to Christ

God has given us His best. Should we not do the same?

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET MALACHI #2

(440 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Malachi 2:1-17

INTRODUCTION

We continue with our study of Malachi. The priests had lost sight of the Great King. Their worship had begun to wane. They had forgotten their history. They had lost their zeal and love. They began to offer lip service, but their heart was far from God. They were no longer doing God's work. Even though they outwardly kept up with their religious practices, their heart was not in it.

A WARNING

Chapter two of Malachi opens with a warning and a promise to the religious leaders of the time. God states, if you...

Will not hear

Will not take what I say to heart

Will not give glory to my name

THEN I will...

Send a curse upon you

Curse your blessings

Corrupt your seed

Spread dung upon your faces

God warns the priests about the judgment that would transpire unless they repented. God has no problem applying the rod of discipline to a believer's rebellion. The New Testament provides us with an example of God's discipline in the writings of the apostle Paul. Paul makes clear that disobedient Christians became weak, sick and even died because of their failure to prepare themselves to meet with God.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, **unworthily**, shall be **guilty of** the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But **let a man examine himself**, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup.

29 For he that **eateth and drinketh unworthily**, eateth and drinketh **damnation to himself**, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this cause **many are weak and sickly** among you, and **many sleep**.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, **we are chastened** of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32)

In the Old Testament, when a priest entered into the holy of holies, he would tie a rope to one of his ankles. Why did they do this? If the priest entered into the presence of God with sin, he would die and others would have to drag him out.

We have several examples of men who suffer judgment when they failed to follow God's instruction regarding worship. One man died when he attempted to move the Ark of the Covenant. One king was plagued with leprosy when he attempted to offer a sacrifice in the temple. The offering of sacrifices was the exclusive task of a priest.

It is important to remember that God is not our equal. He is transcendent. There is a great gulf of difference between the creator and His creatures. God will never be "the man upstairs" or a "chum."

God calls religious leaders to carry out their task in a righteous manner. Malachi outlined the difference between a true and a false priest

A True Priest:

- Is in covenant with God
- Enjoys the covenant of life and peace
- Fears God
- Fears before God's name
- Keeps the law of truth in his mouth
- Does not keep iniquity in his lips
- Walks with God in peace and equity
- Turns many from iniquity
- Keeps knowledge in his lips
- Keeps the law in his mouth
- Is God's messenger

The False Priest:

- Has departed from God's way
- Causes many to stumble at the law
- Corrupts the covenant

God declared the consequences of their sin, “I will make you contemptible and base before all the people.

A DANGER

What began as an inward lack of reverence for God eventually turned into a total disregard for the rights of other believers. God confronted His people about their practice. God asked, “Why do you deal treacherously with others? By doing so, you have profaned the holiness of the LORD. You have divorced your wives to marry the daughters of a strange god. You covered the altar with tears and weeping and then asked why your offering was not accepted. You covered violence with your garments. You weary me with your words. You say every one that does evil is good in the sight of the LORD. You say God delights in those that do evil. You continue to ask, “Where is the God of Judgment?”

The callous and cold heart that God’s people developed was due to their practice of sin. They had become entangle with strange women and the pagan systems of the nations. The apostle John speaks to this in his epistle when he states,

“**15** Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” (1st John 2:15-17)

The apostle Paul also speaks to the problem faced by the people in the following passage.

“**14** Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for

What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?

What communion hath light with darkness? **15**

What concord hath Christ with Belial?

What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? **16**

What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God;

God “hath said, I will...

Dwell in them, and

Walk in *them*; and I will

Be their God, and

They shall be my people.

17 Wherefore

Come out from among them,
Be ye separate, saith the Lord,
Do not touch the unclean *thing*;
I will receive you, **18**
I will be a Father unto you,

Ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (Second Corinthians 6:14-18)

Because of their entanglement, the family unit had suffered. The unit that God had joined to create godly seed was disintegrating. There was sin in the camp. God was no longer received their offering.

How does all this apply to us? We must guard our love and passion for God. Like the psalmist David, we must ask God to “restore us.” Remember, sin quenches the fire that should burn in our hearts. Paul, in one of his letters states, “Do not quench the Spirit.” (1st Thessalonians 5:19) The Scripture states the following about the work of the Spirit in us:

The Spirit gives life (Romans 8:2)

The Spirit leads us (Romans 8:14)

The Spirit testifies (Romans 8:16)

The Spirit intercedes for us (Romans 8:26)

The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:26)

He works signs and wonders in us (Romans 15:19)

He searches the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10)

The Spirit reveals God’s secrets to us (1 Cor. 2:10)

The Spirit grants us gifts (1 Cor. 12:8)

The Spirit produces fruit in us (Galatians 5:22)

He sanctifies us (Sets us apart) (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

If we quench the Spirit, we detach ourselves from the source of motivation and godly zeal for service.

The people asked, “Where is the God of Judgment? Well, He appeared to them in judgment. His heart is to turn us away from sin. Why? Sin is an enemy that robs us of God’s best. When we lose sight of our Great King, we become cold and indifferent. God warned His people about sin. When they failed to respond, they opened the door to a curse. We must guard our love and zeal for God. We must push away those systems and cultures that diminish our passion for Him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

GOD IS SPEAKING ... THE PROPHET MALACHI #3

(440 B.C.)

Scripture Reading: Malachi 3:1-3, 4:2-3

3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he *is* like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' sope:

3 And he shall sit *as* a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

4:2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do *this*, saith the LORD of hosts.

INTRODUCTION

If you recall, chapter two ends with the question, “Where is the God of Judgment?” This chapter introduces us to a prophecy dealing with two messengers that the LORD would send. The first messenger is John the Baptist. The second messenger, called the messenger of the covenant, is Jesus Christ. The appearance of Jesus Christ will delight many, yet others will reject Him.

The God of Judgment?

The people had lost sight of the Great King. Their service, love and passion had waned. They asked for the God of Judgment and He appeared. The prophet declared,

Who may abide the day of His coming? Who shall stand when He appears?

He is like a refiner's fire

He is like a fullers' soap

He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver

He shall purify the sons of Levi

He will purge them as gold and silver

The people may have had second thoughts about their questions when the prophet introduced them to the God of Judgment.

Malachi's message ends with a wonderful revelation of God's desire for restoration.

God states, "...that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

God's desire is to restore the relationship. In order to do so, He must appear in judgment first. God outlined those who would become recipients of judgment. Before the blessing can come, it is necessary to clean house. God rejects and judges the following:

The sorcerer

The adulterer

The false swearer

The one who oppress the hireling in his wages

The oppressor of the widow and fatherless

Those who turn aside the stranger from his right

Those that do not fear the LORD of hosts

God declared that His is the LORD and changes not. He desires to rescue the sons of Jacob. God fully revealed His heart. He declared,

"Return unto me, and I will return unto you."

God has not changed. His desire is to restore. Peter confirmed this in his epistle when he stated,

"**17** For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it first begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God?

18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls *to him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." (First Peter 4:17-19)

The purpose of judgment is positive for the believer. God's desire is complete restoration. It is interesting to note that when God revealed His love, the people pled ignorance. When God asked them to return to Him, they asked, "Wherein shall we return?"

It is at this point that God makes the people aware of their failure in the area of finances. God declared, the whole nation has robbed me by withholding its tithes and offerings. God declared, "You are cursed with a curse." God issued a command for repentance and outlined the action they must take in order to return to Him in this area.

God's Call to Repentance and Conditional Promise

God informed the Jews that if they would obey Him, by bringing their tithes into the storehouse, he would do the following:

I will open the windows of heaven

I will pour out a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive

I will rebuke the devourer

I will ensure the devourer does not destroy the fruit of your ground

I will ensure the devourer does not destroy the fruit of your vines

I will ensure all nations will call you blessed

I will ensure that you become a delightsome land

What a wonderful promise. Again, God revealed His desire to restore.

God was willing to forgive their harsh words. They had made allegations against God by stating,

It is vain to serve God

What profit is it that we keep His Ordinances?

What profit is it that we walk mournfully before Him?

The proud are happy

They that work wickedness are set up

They are delivered that tempt God

When we put away our sin and return to God, He grants us a new nature. The prophet identified God's people as follows:

They will fear the LORD

They will speak often to one another

The LORD will hear them

A book of remembrance will be written before God

They will think about God

God stated, "They will be mine in the day I make up my jewels and I will spare them."

Those who return to Him will be able to discern between the righteous and wicked. They will discern between those that serve God and those that do not. The chapter ends with a wonderful promise of restoration and a revelation of God's good intention toward His people.

Malachi chapter four began with a prophecy related to the judgment of the wicked. The prophet declared that a day is coming that will burn as an oven. The proud and wickedly will be burned up like stubble. They are without root or branch.

God's promise for those who fear Him is listed:

The Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in His wings

You will go forth and grow up as calves of the stall

You will tread down the wicked – they shall be ashes under your feet

This book ends with two commands and a warning:

Remember the Law of Moses with the statutes and judgments.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children

He will turn the hearts of the children to their fathers

Warning: Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

LESSONS LEARNED

Malachi calls God's people to repentance. They have failed by...

Doubting God's love

Dishonoring God's name

Profaning God's covenant

Trying God's patience

Forsaking God's ordinances

Despising God's service

If we repent, God will embrace, renew and restore. What he did for His people of old, He will do for us NOW.

OTHER BOOKS AND QUICK READS

BOOKS

The Narratives of Christ (Gospel)
Is God Speaking? (Minor Prophets)
God's Life-Changing Curriculum (An Agent of Change)
Worship (In the New Testament)

QUICK-READS

The Authority of the Believer
Transforming Power
Redeemed from the Curse (Entitled to the Blessing)
Emotional Intelligence (Models: A Brief Review)
Why He Came
The Kingdom (13 Parables)
Divine Transition
Divine Expectation
Unclaimed Wealth
Times of Refreshing
Unlocking God's Diary
The House of James
The Will of God (In James)
The Pure Gospel (Galatians)
Paul's Vision of God (Ephesians)
The Journey

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