

BNEXT BIBLE STUDY PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Major & Minor Prophets

FEATURING THE AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO SERIES

BNEXT STUDY

God's Comfort in Your Crisis : Isaiah

God's Sorrow in Your Suffering : Jeremiah

God's Hope in Your Hopelessness : Lamentations

God's Strength in Your Servitude : Ezekiel

God's Sovereignty in Your Suffering : Daniel

Before the Exile : Hosea, Joel, Amos

During the Exile : Obadiah – Zephaniah

After the Exile : Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO

▶ Eagles' Wings

▶ God's Tears

▶ Joy in the Morning

▶ Can These Bones Live

▶ The Kingdom

▶ God is in Control

▶ The Big Question

▶ Divine Jealousy

STUDY **BNEXT**

William P. Campbell



Welcome to BNEXT Amazing Journey

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. This electronic version contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and place a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the mast of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

An important component of BNEXT Amazing Journey are the videos that accompany each series. To access the videos associated with this particular series, see the link below my signature.

Also we have included, in the last pages of this digital version, a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT Amazing Journey series, I hope you will consider leading others through this study material.

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Handwritten signature of William P. Campbell in blue ink.

William P. Campbell

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And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

2 Peter 1:19

Introduction

“First” is a fitting place for Isaiah—this Old Testament book of prophecy which is the most quoted in the New Testament. “First” is a good location for Isaiah's work, which speaks more about Christ than any other Old Testament book (with the exception of David's Psalms). This first book of prophecy shines with a literary excellence that challenges Shakespeare and the classical literature of history.

Isaiah began his ministry in 740 BC and served as a prophet for more than five decades. A Biblical prophet is one who speaks under the inspiration of God. The Hebrew word for prophet, *nabhi*, is derived from a word meaning “to boil up” or “to boil forth,” suggesting a pouring forth of words through Divine inspiration. Not all prophecy is predictive. Prophetic utterances may be future-oriented or present-oriented, and often are both.

The Book of Isaiah

The name *Isaiah* means the “salvation of Jehovah.” Warren Wiersbe suggests that Isaiah deals with four different types of salvation:

- Judah's salvation from other nations
- Judah's salvation from captivity
- The Jew's salvation in establishing their kingdom
- Personal salvation for those who put their faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior

The Book of Isaiah may be outlined as follows:

God's Judgment 1-39

God's Comfort 40-66

It has been noted that the book of Isaiah is like a Bible in miniature. The Bible is composed of 66 books, and Isaiah has 66 chapters. The Bible is divided by 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books. Isaiah has a clear division between the first 39 chapters and the closing 27 chapters. The Old Testament emphasizes law, and the New Testament emphasizes grace. Similarly, the first portion of Isaiah focuses on judgment for the violation of God's law, and the second portion shows the grace and mercy of God for those who repent.

God's Judgment (Isaiah 1-39)

Isaiah lived through the stormy period in which Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Judah (the Southern Kingdom) were ransacked. The people were brought into exile for their sins, and Palestine was in the dangerous center of two great world empires, Assyria and Egypt. During King Tiglath-Pileser III's reign (745-727 BC), the Assyrian army overwhelmed Syria and Canaan. The kings of Syria and Israel pressured Judah's King Ahaz to form a coalition with them against Assyria. Ahaz decided to plead with Assyria for help, against Isaiah's counsel to trust only in God (Isaiah 7:1-9). Assyria conquered Israel in 722-721 BC. Judah was spared but became slave to Assyria. This continued until the reign of King Hezekiah, who rebelled against Assyria (2 Kings 18). Isaiah warned against trusting in politics rather than trusting in God. Hezekiah, however, was



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So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib King of Assyria and from the hand of all others. He took care of them on every side.

2 Chronicles 32:22

encouraged by others to form an alliance with mighty Egypt.

In 701 BC, King Sennacherib of Assyria threatened to destroy Jerusalem. Hezekiah bought off the attack with much gold and silver and became vassal again. Judah continued to reach south for Egyptian help and Assyria intervened, once again, threatening to seize Jerusalem (Isaiah 34, 37).

Finally, Hezekiah decided to follow Isaiah's advice fully and trust in God. The Lord then struck Assyria with a blow from which Sennacherib never recovered. Judah was free from the threat of the enemy for a peaceful season. Against this background, Isaiah 1-39 demonstrates the judgment of God against His own people when they don't trust Him (Isaiah 1-12, 24-35), and God's judgment against the nations of the world for their sins against Him and His people (Isaiah 13-23, 36-39).

God's Comfort (Isaiah 40-66)

Isaiah 40 begins with the words, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God" (Isaiah 40:1). What follows is perhaps the greatest Messianic poem in the Bible, running through three sections of nine chapters each, right to the end of the book. This second half of Isaiah can be outlined by these sections:

God's Greatness	40-48
God's Salvation	49-57
God's Peace	58-66

At the heart of this Messianic poem, we find the well-known chapter 53, with its clear explanation of the source of our salvation and the prerequisite to God's peace and comfort. Isaiah 53 is full of the wonder of God's love and the horror of God's judgment. God's love is demonstrated toward us, and His judgment is poured upon His Son.

Isaiah 53 contains a more vivid and clear description of the crucifixion than is found in the New Testament itself, paralleled in the Old Testament only by Psalm 22. Isaiah and David must have yearned "...to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Peter 1:11). It is God's clear desire that we find the comfort of promise through Christ's sacrifice. Why else would God have described these things in graphic detail some 700 years before they occurred?

In God's sovereign plan for our salvation, nothing happens by chance. Christ's birth, anointing, ministry, death, resurrection, and glorious kingly reign were all predicted by Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14-15; 9:6; 11:1-16; 25:8; 42:1-4; 53:1-12; 61:1-3). Note how many of these great Messianic promises were given in the first half of Isaiah, during the darker periods of the history of Judah (Isaiah 1-40).

In the same way, we find promise today of God's comfort through our Savior, even in this dark period of the history of the world, until God makes new heavens and a new earth (Isaiah 66:22). Our Lord not only died for us but also now lives and reigns to intercede for us until He brings us home to eternal joy and glory.

Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about Him.

John 12:41

Let us ponder the words of hope given to us by Paul: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:35-37).

Final Thought

Isaiah faced many crises in his day. The nations were in an uproar, and the kingdoms toppled around him. His was the daunting task of confronting the kings of Judah and surrounding nations and calling them to repentance.

What enabled this man of God to endure so faithfully to the end? The Apostle John gives us the answer: "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him" (John 12:41). We are astounded that a man such as Isaiah saw and spoke of Jesus so clearly, so long ago.

From Isaiah's prophetic images of Christ, we can see our Lord's glory, find comfort in our crisis, and speak well of Him. The pages of this wonderful prophecy have motivated great acts of sacrifice and obedience in the Lord's name through the ages.

The famous British preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, was converted to Christ when he heard a layman preach a sermon based on Isaiah 45:22: "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other." The layman looked at Spurgeon and said, "Young man, you are very miserable. In God's name, look, and look now!" Spurgeon responded, "I did look, blessed be God! I looked then and there, and he who but that minute before had been near despair had the fullness of joy and hope."

Spurgeon found comfort and salvation in the crisis of despair. May we find comfort whatever the crisis, as we strive to keep Christ "first" in all of life's situations. He is the Alpha—the first, the beginning; and He's also the Omega—the end, the solution.

Spending Time With God

This study, on "God's Sovereignty in Your Suffering", is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



SERIES

MAJOR PROPHETS

LESSON 1

God's Comfort in Your Crisis | Isaiah

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. All believers are gifted and called by God into some kind of ministry (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Isaiah 6 describes Isaiah's call. Read Isaiah 6:1-3. Describe what Isaiah saw. How is God described?

3. In Isaiah 6:6-7, how did God meet Isaiah's need? Compare with Isaiah 1:18. Thank God for meeting your needs as He did Isaiah's.

4. In Isaiah 6:8-13, what was the prophet's commission?

2. Read Isaiah 4-5. How did Isaiah respond?

Why would the prophet's call be especially difficult?

Compare similar responses to God's glory in Ezekiel 1:28-2:2, Daniel 10:7-10, and Revelation 1:17-18. How do you think you would respond if the glorified Savior appeared to you?

Compare with John 15:18-20. Why is our commission difficult? Review the progression of events in Isaiah 6 before God, asking God to similarly reveal His person and His call to you.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. What insights or concerns about Isaiah's call to become God's prophet, from the commentary or questions above, would you like to explore further?

6. Compare Isaiah 9:1-2 with Matthew 4:12-17. How were Isaiah's words fulfilled in Jesus Christ's first coming? Read Isaiah 9:3-5. How do these words relate to Christ's Second Coming? Read Isaiah 9:6-7. How do these words relate to both Christ's first and Second Coming?

7. Review Isaiah 9:1-7. Describe the person and purpose of Jesus Christ as revealed in these verses. Which verse most stirs your heart to worship the Lord? Why?

8. Read Isaiah 28:16. Compare with 1 Corinthians 3:11 and 1 Peter 2:4-8. How is Jesus our cornerstone? How is a life that is not grounded in obedience to Christ like a building with a faulty foundation?

9. Read Isaiah 38:1. What was Hezekiah's problem? See Isaiah 38:2-3 and 10-14. Describe the king's prayer. In Isaiah 4:7 and 15-21, how did God answer Hezekiah's prayer? Tell of people you know who have recovered from fatal illnesses and who were given a second lease on life. In what way have all believers been given a new lease on life? What should be our attitude?

10. Isaiah 53 is one of the best known chapters in this first book of the major prophets. Read Chapter 53. Which verse of this prophecy amazes you the most? Why?



SERIES

MAJOR PROPHETS

LESSON 1

God's Comfort in Your Crisis | Isaiah

11. Read Isaiah 28:14-15. How does this reflect the attitude of those who are not concerned with the afterlife?

How do these words motivate you to tell others the Good News about God's salvation in Christ?

Read also Daniel 12:1-3. What do these verses say about the life to come? How do these verses motivate you to live for Christ today?

14. See Isaiah 38: 7-8 and 22. What sign did God give to the king? See Matthew 12:39-40. What sign has God given us today as evidence of our promised salvation? Should this sign be sufficient for us today?

12. When you are telling unbelievers about the need to make Christ the foundation of their lives, do you strive to tell them the Biblical teachings about the afterlife? Should you? Tell of family and friends you hope will come to receive salvation and take time to pray for them.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. Read Revelation 20:11-21:8. Contrast the descriptions of the life to come without God, with the descriptions of life to come with God.

Scripture for Meditation

So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.

Isaiah 28:16



As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes."

Luke 19:41-42

Introduction

God chose a man with a sensitive heart to record the longest book in the Bible. This man was Jeremiah the prophet. Jeremiah had the awesome task of warning and recording God's disappointment and sorrow over Judah's disobedience and inevitable suffering.

The book of Jeremiah reveals to us much about the heart of God over the affairs of men. Even when we are rebellious, unloving, and unwilling to turn toward God, He yearns for us to call upon Him—"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3). Yet in Judah's darkest hour, she continuously turned from God despite warning after warning from God's prophet, Jeremiah. Over 40 times, Jeremiah calls for God's people to return to God, yet they continue in their rebellious state.

God's Sorrow

How it must have grieved God to see His chosen people embrace this world's system and discard His leadership. How sorrowful He must have been when His chosen prophets were ridiculed and abused. What pain He endured as day after day, year after year, these prophets faithfully proclaimed, "thus saith the Lord" and the people continued in their ungodly rituals.

And what about God's chosen prophets? Were they mighty warriors or statesmen? Were they valiantly standing in God's employment line ready to fill this position saying, "Lord, send me.?" Not quite. Yet poor Jeremiah accepted the thankless task of speaking and revealing God's regret over the inevitable suffering that awaited God's people. Judah's sin was so great that even if Moses and Samuel were to intercede before God, His judgment could not be averted.

Jeremiah is called the *weeping* prophet. God chose a man whose sensitive nature would mix with the prophetic word to express intense sorrow over Judah's spiritual defiance and decadence. Jeremiah stated, "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people" (Jeremiah 9:1). Perhaps this is the way our Savior felt as he wept (sobbed) over Jerusalem.

As a young man, Jeremiah was called during the reign of Josiah, Judah's last righteous king. His contemporaries included Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

About 80 years had passed since Isaiah lived to proclaim God's truth to a backsliding generation. Isaiah rightly described Judah as a nation "weighed down with iniquity" (Isaiah 1:4 NASB). In Jeremiah's time, they would be crushed by their iniquity. Jeremiah lived during the final minutes of that dark hour, when Judah would stumble into her ruin. Her fate was sealed and her path set during the abominable reign of wicked Manasseh (2 Kings 21:10-15). When young Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, took the throne and instituted reforms toward righteousness, God delayed the coming judgment. Josiah was the godliest king since David.

Through Jeremiah, God pleaded with His people to repent so that such delays might be mercifully allotted to each new generation. However, the next four kings did not fear God.

No doubt, there were some that claimed that the downfall of Jerusalem was simply a conse-



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"God's Tears"

Then the Lord reached out His hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put My words in your mouth."

Jeremiah 1:9

quence of the times, even as people today do not acknowledge the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men. Jeremiah made it clear that the judgment upon God's people, and eventually upon the nations, were all part of God's chastisement for sin.

The four kings to follow Josiah were:

- Jehoahaz, the middle son of Josiah, reigned for only three months. He was deposed by Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II and exiled to Egypt. He was replaced by his older brother, Jehoiakim.
- Jehoiakim (the oldest son of Josiah) reigned for 11 years. During his reign, he murdered the innocent, persecuted Jeremiah, and burned Jeremiah's prophetic scroll.
- Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's son, was brought into exile by King Nebuchadnezzar.
- Zedekiah, the youngest son of Josiah, greatly persecuted Jeremiah. Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, captured Zedekiah, executed his sons, blinded him, and carried him away. Jerusalem and the sacred temple were then destroyed.

Jeremiah's Suffering

Jeremiah was expected to serve as a priest, ministering quietly at the altar, as did his father. However, he received the call from God to serve as a prophet. In oriental society, age was honored and young men were to remain silent and learn. The young Jeremiah objected to God's call, much as did Moses, based on his incompetence: "Ah, Sovereign LORD, I said, 'I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.'" (Jeremiah 1:6). God assured him that this calling was part of His predetermined plan, and that God would be with him to deliver him (Jeremiah 1:5, 7-8). As in the case of David—others saw only a shepherd boy—God saw a great leader.

Jeremiah launched into a ministry that would cause him to be rejected by his family, the people in his hometown, the religious establishment, the kings of Judah, and finally, by the whole nation. Jeremiah attended the funeral of the godly king Josiah and after this, he no longer received a positive response to his preaching. Someone has rightly said, "So goes the king, so goes the nation."

The people so resisted the message of judgment that God commanded Jeremiah to use object lessons such as a decayed girdle (Jeremiah 13:1-11), a broken jar (Jeremiah 19:1-11), a yoke with straps (Jeremiah 27:1-2), and others. When the people ignored the prophet's warnings, he often turned to weeping (Jeremiah 8:21; 9:1, 10; 13:17; 14:17). When persecuted, this messenger of God often despaired. At times, he wanted to give up altogether. He even found himself wishing he were never born: "Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, who made him very glad, saying, 'A child is born to you—a son!'" (Jeremiah 20:14-15).

Jeremiah sounded much like Job because he suffered much like Job. He was rejected by his own people (Jeremiah 11:21; 12:6; 18:18), his life was threatened by the priests and false prophets (Jeremiah 26:7-8), he was whipped and put in stocks (Jeremiah 20:1-3), flogged, imprisoned, charged

But if I say, "I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name," His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones.

Jeremiah 20:9a,b

with treason (Jeremiah 37:11-16), and thrown into a miry cistern to die (Jeremiah 38:6). He was eventually pulled out and remained a prisoner until the Babylonians captured Jerusalem.

Jeremiah wanted to resign, (and who could blame him) but the prophetic word compelled him to continue (Jeremiah 20:9). He would live to see the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of a remnant into Babylonian captivity. The rulers of Babylon offered him high honors if he would move into Babylon, but he was also given the option of remaining in Jerusalem. Jeremiah chose to remain in the land with the poorest and least of the Jews. When this small Jerusalem contingent decided to flee to Egypt, Jeremiah warned them that they were out of God's will (Jeremiah 42:15–43:3). The Jewish remnant did not listen to Jeremiah and forced him to go with them into Egypt (Jeremiah 43:6-7), where tradition tells us the prophet was stoned to death by his own people.

Final Thought

Rather than remembering Jeremiah as "the weeping prophet," perhaps a better description of this man of God would be "the faithful prophet." During his 40-year career, Jeremiah faced challenges and obstacles that few people ever encounter. He had a gentle and sensitive nature, yet through the strength of the Lord, he did not turn away from his prophetic duties.

Meekness is not weakness. The very fact that he was so full of compassion and sympathy may have made Him God's choice for the job. How better could God show the Jews, and the watching world, that judgment hurts the heart of God before it comes down hard on the wayward souls of mankind? Jeremiah's life was a wonderful likeness to our Lord's, who perfectly suffered for us, faithful to the end. We are now called to follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21).

Jeremiah's life and message present a fitting picture of Christ, who wept over Jerusalem and still carries sorrow in His heart when we choose the path of sin and suffering. Let us choose this day to "call upon Him" (Jeremiah 33:3). He is faithful!

Spending Time With God

This study, on "God's Sovereignty in Your Suffering," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



SERIES

MAJOR PROPHETS

LESSON 2

God's Sorrow in Your Suffering | Jeremiah

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read Jeremiah 1:4-5. Compare with Ephesians 1:4.

a. What do these truths tell you about God?

b. What does this tell you about your salvation?

2. Read Jeremiah 1:6-8 and 1 Timothy 4:12. What is the main point here?

Do you seek to instill a sense of potential for God in the youth you know?

3. Compare Jeremiah 1:9-10 with Isaiah 6:6-7 and Mark 13:11. What challenge and hope do you find from these texts?

Can you recall experiences when it seemed that God gave you words as His witness?

4. Read Jeremiah 1:11-3:5. What was the spiritual state of God's people at this time?

Contemplate the great challenge that faced Jeremiah as a prophet. What challenges do you face for God that seem insurmountable? It was partly because of the clarity of God's call on Jeremiah's life (as seen in the questions above) that the prophet was faithful to follow God's will through great obstacles. Spend time in prayer and meditation, asking God to reaffirm His call on your life.



SERIES

MAJOR PROPHETS

LESSON 2

God's Sorrow in Your Suffering | Jeremiah

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. What insights or questions from the commentary or personal study section, above, would you like to explore further?

Compare with other object lessons (Jeremiah 13:1-11; 27:1-2; 43:8-13). Comment on the following statement: "God will use visual aids or any other medium necessary to get his message through to His people."

6. Read aloud Jeremiah 5:1-19. Discuss the spiritual condition of Judah, the punishment promised by God, and the mercy of God in the midst of punishment.

Some ways He has shown me to communicate the message of His love to others are:

Parallel, or contrast, the state of our country with this scenario.

8. Notice the great price Jeremiah paid to serve God in Jeremiah 16:1-4. What are some things you have sacrificed for God, that you might serve Him faithfully? Pray for each other, that you might be faithful as God's witness today even as was Jeremiah so long ago.

7. Read Jeremiah 19:1-12. What object lesson was used to highlight his message?



SERIES

MAJOR PROPHETS

LESSON 2

God's Sorrow in Your Suffering | Jeremiah

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

9. Read Jeremiah 37:21-38:13. How did Jeremiah suffer for his faithful proclamation of the prophetic word?

10. See Jeremiah 46:2-6. Here begins the prophet's stern and clear messages of rebuke to the nations. Egypt was a great world power at the time. Clearly, Jeremiah was courageous. What makes us truly courageous: trust in our abilities or trust in God? Explain.

Notice the topic of Jeremiah 39. How would Jerusalem soon suffer for not heeding Jeremiah's warnings?

Discuss the fate of those who do not trust in Christ and how much or little we suffer in our efforts to be faithful proclaimers of the truth of God to our generation.

Scripture for Meditation

"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 1:8



I called on Your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea... You came near when I called You, and You said, "Do not fear."

Lamentations 3:55-57

Introduction

If ever a book described a hopeless situation, it is the book of Lamentations. This book is written as a funeral dirge, mourning the destruction of Jerusalem. Recorded in 586 BC, Lamentations is the only book in the Bible that is composed solely of words of lament and sorrow. What strikes the careful reader, however, is that the central message of Lamentations is one of hope. In the midst of the most hopeless situation, we can find hope.

The Author

From the earliest periods of Biblical history, Jeremiah has been understood to be the author of Lamentations. While the book itself doesn't specifically mention Jeremiah's name, the Greek, Latin, and Arabic Bibles, along with the Jewish Targum and Talmud all included a preface to verse one declaring Jeremiah the author. The ancient Greek Septuagint preface read: "And it came to pass, after Israel had been carried captive, and Jerusalem became desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem and said..."

Jeremiah was the prophet who most clearly declared Jerusalem's downfall. He was the man who wept most freely for her sins. It was this weeping prophet who remained with a faithful few, to sit in the rubble and mourn the loss of Jerusalem.

The style of the book fits Jeremiah's style; many key phrases are repeated in both Jeremiah and Lamentations. (One example would be in the phrase "terrors on every side." Compare Lamentations 2:22 with Jeremiah 6:25; 20:3, 10; 46:5; 49:5, 29. The only other place this phrase occurs in the whole Bible is Psalm 31:13.)

The first challenge to Jeremiah's authorship came in AD 1712, when Herman von der Haardt wrote a commentary crediting the five chapters of Lamentations to Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and King Jehoiachin, respectively. Haardt opened the floodgate for a whole line of scholars speculating alternative authors.

One of the arguments against Jeremiah's authorship has been the writing style of Lamentations, which contains a unique and striking form of Hebrew poetry. However, many scholars feel the unique way in which Lamentations was written in no way diminishes the argument that Jeremiah authored this book. Rather, the style adds significance and emphasis to the meaning of the book.

The Book

Lamentations was written with great thought and care. The primary vehicle for expression in this book is acrostic poetry, where the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used—from beginning to end—to chronologically begin lines of the poem. At the time Lamentations was written, writers in the Middle East used acrostic poetry to bring beauty to the poem and meaning to the heart. Also, an acrostic provides supportive structure for memorization.

The writer of Lamentations, crafting the only Biblical book describing in minute detail the destruction of Jerusalem, chose one of the most effective forms of writing at the time. Research



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"Joy in the Morning"

The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Lamentations 3:25-26

has shown that for the two millennia prior to Jerusalem's destruction, acrostic compositions were common in surrounding cultures. This evidence refutes scholars who argue that Lamentations must have been written in a period later than Jeremiah's.

Lamentations is composed of five dirges. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 have twenty-two verses each. Chapter 3, the focal point of the book, has sixty-six verses. In the first two chapters, we find each verse is composed of a three-line stanza, each beginning with one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The verses connect chronologically through all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, from aleph to tau (corresponding to our "a to z").

Chapter 3 has the same acrostic form, but is given special emphasis as the prominent chapter of the book. Here, each of the three lines in every stanza begins with the same letter of the alphabet, with each triad building upon the next by carrying forward the alphabetic sequence.

The fourth chapter carries forward this acrostic device with two-line repetitions, and the final chapter drops the acrostic pattern, but maintains the 22-verse format.

The Message

The book of Lamentations was clearly written to build to a crescendo, like so many great classical overtures. The high point of this lament is its middle chapter (three), affirming the central message of the book—that we can hope in God despite our dire and hopeless situations.

Chapter 3 inscribes the word *hope* three times, which is found nowhere else in the book. The basis of our hope is the unchanging love and faithfulness of God: "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:21-23).

Chapters 1 and 2 form steps up to the great affirmations of Chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 provide steps toward their application. We can marvel at this incredibly crafted work of art! In his book, *A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering*, Walter Kaiser outlines the book as follows:

Chapter 1: The City (Outside View)

Chapter 2: The Wrath of God (Inside View)

Critical Point

Chapter 3: The Compassions of God (The Upward View)

Chapter 4: The Sins of All Classes (The Overall View)

Chapter 5: The Prayer (Future View)

The critical point in every believer's life is the upward view. Looking to God, we find His mercies never fail. Begin each day anew regardless of what happened the day before.

The Jews recognized mourning as an important aspect of a balanced and healthy life. Lamentations has long been used as the Jewish guidebook for annually mourning the destruction of Jerusalem. In fact, many of the ancient Hebrew Bibles grouped the book of Lamentations with

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Romans 15:4

four other liturgical books, each read during key Jewish calendar festivals. These books were collectively called the *Five Little Scrolls*.

1. Song of Songs (for Passover)
2. Ruth (for Pentecost)
3. Lamentations (for the Ninth of Ab: The Destruction of Jerusalem)
4. Ecclesiastes (for Tabernacles)
5. Esther (for Purim)

Final Thought

Sometimes, we need to recognize our hopelessness before we can appreciate our hope. The glowing affirmations in Chapter 3 of Lamentations regarding God's love, compassion, and faithfulness shine brightly amidst the desperate and dark situation described in surrounding chapters. Joy is mourning unmasked. If we do not know how to grieve our losses, how can we truly appreciate our blessings?

The Jews use Lamentations as a guidebook for mourning. However, to many Christians, Lamentations remains an unread and little understood literary gem, hidden by the dust of neglect.

Let us open this book anew and study its pages with a fresh appreciation. Perhaps then, by God's grace, we will find a new sense of joy in our lives and new strength to get through our periods of loss and sorrow. The critical point in every believer's life is "looking upward." God's mercies are new every day and His faithfulness is sure!

Spending Time With God

This study, on "God's Sovereignty in Your Suffering," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. **BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.**



SERIES

MAJOR PROPHETS

LESSON 3

God's Hope in Your Hopelessness | Lamentations

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

3. Read Lamentations 1:8-15. What are some of the reasons given here for the destruction of Jerusalem?

2. Read Lamentations 1:1-7. Paraphrase this section, describing Jerusalem after her desolation.

Might the same factors bring other nations, including our own, into ruin?

Why do you think a whole book of the Bible is devoted to mourning the loss of Jerusalem?

4. See Lamentations 1:16-22. Note how the author experiences personal grief and sorrow. What things cause grief in your life today? Read Psalm 77, noting how grief melts into hope as one reflects on the works and ways of God. Talk to God about your sorrows and put your hope in Him!



Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Lamentations 2 makes it clear that Jerusalem was destroyed, not by coincidence or unforeseen circumstance, but by the hand of God. Read aloud Lamentations 1-3, and discuss:

a. Why did God bring calamity on the city of Jerusalem? (see also question 3 above)

b. When tragedy or loss comes into our personal lives, is God the author of the same?

6. Lamentations 3 opens with a description of the writer's personal mourning. Read the first several verses.

a. Describe times in your life when you had reason to grieve and mourn deeply. How did God sustain you through your trial?

b. In Middle Eastern culture, people mourned (and still do) visibly and loudly, wailing and weeping to release their emotions. Do you think this is a better way to handle grief than the more subdued Western approach? Explain your reasoning. Which approach do you prefer personally?

c. What causes you sorrow and grief today? Those who are comfortable doing so may wish to share the sorrows that weigh on them. The very process of telling another may lighten the load.

7. Read Lamentations 3:19-33.

a. Here, in the midst of sorrow and pain, the author finds consolation and hope in the goodness of God. Read the verses and list the divine qualities that are here described.



SERIES

MAJOR PROPHETS

LESSON 3

God's Hope in Your Hopelessness | Lamentations

b. Which verse is your favorite? Why?

9. See Lamentations 5:21. How might this be a good prayer for the Church in our country?

c. Add to these wonderful verses your own words of praise to God for all that He has done for us through the life, death, resurrection, and present intercessions of our LORD. (You may wish to reference Psalm 103 and Romans 8:28-39.) Take time together to praise God for who He is and what He has done for us. Pray also for particular needs in the group.

What about the “days of old” do we lack today? Pray for the Church, local and national, to find times of refreshing from the LORD.

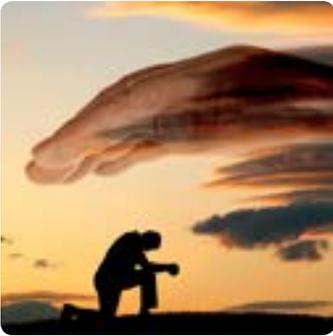
Digging Deeper (Further Study)

8. Lamentations 5 is essentially a prayer to God for aid in times of crisis. On what basis does the lamenting writer argue for God's help?

Scripture for Meditation

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:21-23



As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after My sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered...

Ezekiel 34:12

Introduction

The book of Ezekiel is the first of five prophetic books in the Old Testament, written after the fall of Jerusalem and during the period of the exile. Ezekiel's prophetic career overlapped those of both Jeremiah and Daniel, who authored two of the other prophetic books in the Old Testament canon.

The name *Ezekiel* means “God strengthens,” which is appropriate since Ezekiel wrote during the period of Judah's servitude to Babylon. Ezekiel's life and message provided enduring hope and sustaining purpose to the Jews languishing under the weight of God's judgment for the accumulated transgressions of their previous generations. As Isaiah spoke of God's salvation, and Jeremiah described God's judgment, Ezekiel reminds us of the Lord's strength.

Reading the book of Ezekiel for the first time, it can seem like a confusing maze of visions, predictions, symbols, and prophecies. With further study, however, you can find the promise of God's strength for life's challenges and temptations.

The People's Servitude

Ezekiel lived during the time of Daniel and Jeremiah—a time of subjugation to Babylon. Daniel arrived in 606 BC with the first group of exiles and obtained a position in the high court of the king. Ezekiel arrived nine years later, with the second group of captives, living with and ministering among the common people. Wherever God's people lived, God's message was kept alive. Daniel worked among the leaders, Ezekiel among the exiles, and Jeremiah among the remnant that stayed in Jerusalem. We see that even during times when God is disciplining us, He seeks to encourage us with the message of His love.

Ezekiel was 25 when he and about 10,000 Jewish citizens were carried into captivity in Babylon. Five years after arriving in Babylon, Ezekiel began writing, and he ministered to the exiles for 11 years before the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is the only major prophet to write with a precise chronological arrangement. Among the 12 authors of the books of the Minor Prophets, only Haggai and Zechariah wrote with such careful ordering of events. Ezekiel's ministry and message were tailored around the fall of the beloved city. We can see the shift in focus and the underlying message of God's strength by noting the flow of the text:

Chapters	Time	Message
1-24	Before siege of Jerusalem	Judgment on Judah (Strength through understanding)
25-32	During siege of Jerusalem	Judgment on Gentiles (Strength through justice)
33-48	After siege of Jerusalem	Blessings for Israel (Strength through hope)

Through each of these major periods of enslavement, the Jews in Babylon remembered Jerusalem. As they longed for their city, nearly 1,000 miles away, they looked for their God. He spoke to them through Ezekiel to give a sense of understanding in their current crises, of His justice



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You must speak My words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen... But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you...

Ezekiel 2:7-8a

against the nations around them, and of their hope for the future.

The Lord's Strength

The book of Ezekiel opens with a vision of the sovereign glory and power of God. Ezekiel tells us he was “among the exiles by the Kebar River,” when the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God (Ezekiel 1:1). The river Kebar was about 50 miles north of Babylon, one of the many canals carved by the Babylonians as an offshoot of the Euphrates. Ezekiel and the other exiles may have been placed at Kebar to dig and expand the waterway. While there, he saw an immense cloud of glory. Inside the cloud were what looked like four living creatures. Each creature had four faces representing strength and ability—for God is all powerful (omnipotent). Each of the faces looked intently toward the four corners of the earth—for God is all-knowing (omniscient). Each of the four creatures had four wings—for God is everywhere present (omnipresent).

While the details of the vision may have been confusing to Ezekiel (and to readers today), the fact that God is supreme Lord over all is clear throughout the narrative. Ezekiel fell face down before the Lord (Ezekiel 1:28), where he would receive his call to ministry. The God who called Ezekiel to a very difficult task commanded him not to be afraid (Ezekiel 2:6-8).

The prophet would speak to the people through symbols (laying on his side and cutting his hair in Ezekiel 4-5), parables (like that of the two eagles and the vine—Ezekiel 17), proverbs (Ezekiel 18:2), poems (Ezekiel 19), and visions (the vision of the new temple in Ezekiel 40-48). It seemed that God would spare no method or medium to communicate with His people.

Ezekiel needed God's strength because the message he was called to deliver was one the people would not want to hear. After God's judgment fell, however, Ezekiel would be called by God to preach a message of hope and consolation.

God's strength is revealed in His presence or glory. There is a wonderful progression in the book of Ezekiel, showing how the glory of God departed and how God would restore His people and appear in glory once again. The book opens and ends with a vision of God's glory (compare Ezekiel 1 with Ezekiel 40-48). In the first 11 chapters of Ezekiel, the “glory of God” is described 12 times, not to be mentioned again until Ezekiel 40.

The book opens with a startling vision of God's glory, which sets the stage for Ezekiel's prophetic call and ministry. Then, in Ezekiel 9:3, the glory begins to depart from the people because of their sin and compromise. In Ezekiel 10:4, the glory moves from the inner portion of the temple—where the ark was kept—to the threshold of the temple. In Ezekiel 10:18-19, the glory moves out of the temple to the city gates. Then, in Ezekiel 11:22-23, God's glory departs from the city of Jerusalem to a mountain east of the city. Once God withdrew His presence, His protection was also gone and the city quickly fell. However, the prophet Ezekiel was given a beatific (divine) vision of a restored temple, predicting the day that the glory of God would return (Ezekiel 43:2-6).

God's strength is also seen in His judgment of the Gentile nations. Just as Isaiah and Jeremiah have sections dedicated to God's judgment of the nations (Isaiah 13-23 & Jeremiah 46-51), so

Yet their Redeemer is strong, the Lord Almighty is His name. He will vigorously defend their cause so that He may bring rest to their land, but unrest to those who live in Babylon.

Jeremiah 50:34

does Ezekiel (25-32). These prophets focused on a variety of nations, all with the same striking accuracy of insight. Each of these prophets of God spoke of the downfall of nations that were very powerful and seemed invincible. It is astonishing to study how specifically and decisively God matched His promises with His judgments.

The same God, whose strong arm would deliver Israel, would also chasten those who contended with Israel. Ezekiel tells of judgment on Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. Would judgment also fall upon Babylon, the source of so much misery for the Jews?

Babylon was the wonder of the world in that day with palaces and gardens, temples, and bridges that were unsurpassed in the East. Yet, Babylon also became ruin, as God decreed through the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 50-51).

Final Thought

The book of Ezekiel begins with a vision manifesting God's strength and glory. God called, equipped, and strengthened Ezekiel, who became His instrument to strengthen the people through insight, instruction, rebuke, and promised blessing.

In the same way, the Apostle Paul describes himself as one who was strengthened in his trials, that he might provide comfort and strength to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). Paul reminds us that we too are called to this ministry: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up" (Romans 15:1-2).

Spending Time With God

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As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



SERIES

MAJOR PROPHETS

LESSON 4

His Strength in Your Servitude | Ezekiel

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read Ezekiel 1:1-28. This vision is difficult for us to understand; it likely perplexed Ezekiel as well. What truths about the greatness and glory of God can you draw from Ezekiel's vision?

2. Read Ezekiel 2:1-10. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, was called to faithfully proclaim God's truth at a very difficult time in history. And like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was faithful to his call.

a. What were the essential elements and challenges of Ezekiel's call?

b. In reading this book, what has inspired you to strive to be faithful to God's call on your life? Pause to ask God to enable your study of this book to inspire faithfulness to His call.

3. Read Ezekiel 3:1-3. Compare with Psalm 19:10. Does this describe your taste for Scripture? Why or why not?

4. Read the rest of Ezekiel 3, noting the difficult and challenging task faced by Ezekiel. See especially Ezekiel 3:16-21. Draw parallels with Christ's command for us to preach the Gospel of salvation to people everywhere (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15).

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. What insights or concerns from the commentary or questions above would you like to explore further?



6. Read Ezekiel 4:1-17.

a. Describe what the prophet was called to do as an object lesson for the people.

b. Do you think it was unfair of God to require such a difficult thing of Ezekiel? Why or why not?

c. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–6:10. Contemplate the sufferings Paul endured to fulfill his commission. Was Paul concerned about whether it was fair that he suffered thus?

Why or why not?

7. Read Ezekiel 37:1-14. Ezekiel gave the people messages of hope as well as judgment.

a. Describe what Ezekiel saw. What did God tell him was the meaning of the vision?

b. How might this astonishing vision be applied to Israel? To the Church?

8. Look at Ezekiel 40. This begins the description of the re-established temple of God.

a. While scholars debate exactly what this temple represents, what hope would be given the Jews in exile when Ezekiel shared his vision with them?



b. Compare with the New Jerusalem and temple of Revelation 21. Here we also find specific measurements and descriptions. Is our hope based on the measurements and details of this new city, or in the promise it symbolizes?

c. Is your witness for Christ bold and uncompromising, or rather weak and ineffectual?

What steps can you take to improve it?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

9. In Ezekiel 24:16-27, we see the prophet called to yet another unnatural expression of grief to convey the difficult message of judgment awaiting the unrepentant people of God.

a. Summarize God's command to Ezekiel, and the prophet's message to the people.

Pray together for the Spirit of God to enable your witness to be consistent and faithful, as was Ezekiel's (Acts 1:8-9).

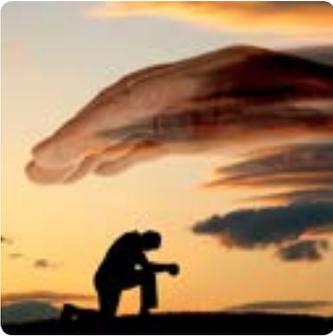
b. How does such a difficult task demonstrate the love of God?

How does a Christian who proclaims the Gospel amidst persecution today demonstrate the love of God?

Scripture for Meditation

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from Me.

Ezekiel 33:7



But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

Daniel 1:8

Introduction

The book of Daniel is the last of the Major Prophets. Daniel outlived prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but lived to see their predictions fulfilled regarding the remnant that would return to rebuild Jerusalem. Daniel was about 90 years old when this happened, and he remained in Babylon until his death. During his 70+ years in captivity, Daniel saw first-hand the great power of God—bringing salvation and deliverance in the most impossible situations. Daniel lived to see the rise and fall of great empires and was a man of conviction and character. This man of God refused to compromise His commands, no matter what circumstances faced him. His life was repeatedly on the line, and Daniel chose to trust God rather than the schemes of man. Let us consider his life and take heart in the unchanging mercy and power of our God, who also stands ready to provide salvation in our difficult situations.

Daniel Under Attack

Not only was the prophet Daniel under attack by godless men years ago, but the book of Daniel has been under attack ever since. So packed with miracles and prophecy, critics have made every effort to discredit this literary gem. The statements about the future given to Daniel are so clear and precise they seem to read more like history than prophecy. For this reason, skeptics insist that the book was not written during the time Daniel lived (sixth century BC), but that it must have been written after the fact. Porphyry was an opponent of the Christian faith and the first known skeptic to claim that Daniel did not write the book of Daniel. He claimed it was written by an unknown Jew around 175-163 BC. This view was popularized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the following arguments:

- The predictions are so accurate that they must have actually been written after the fact.
- Some of the Greek words found in Daniel would have been unknown to a sixth century Jew.
- The Aramaic used in the central portion of the book was not in use at Daniel's time.
- Some details appear to be historically inaccurate.

Answers to the Arguments

- The Bible is filled with predictive prophecy. If we cannot accept God's power to predict the future, then we have no basis for trust in the Bible as a whole.
- Recent excavations of ancient Greek cities in Egypt have demonstrated that commercial dealings between Greece and Babylon were commonplace as early as a century before the time of Daniel.
- Archaeology has uncovered Aramaic documents showing that portions of Daniel were written in a form of Imperial Aramaic, used officially in many parts of the Near East in Daniel's time.
- Alleged historical inaccuracies are falling flat before ongoing historical and archaeological discoveries.



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"The Kingdom"

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

Daniel 2:46-47

Jesus and His disciples relied on Daniel as a trustworthy, historical account of the prophet's life and of the visions given him by God. How can we do less? In the words of Isaac Newton, "To reject Daniel's prophecies would be to undermine the Christian religion."

The book of Daniel may be summarized as follows:

Chapters 1-6 Historical Stories

God's Salvation in Daniel's Situation

Chapters 7-12 Prophetic Perspectives

God's Salvation in Daniel's Visions

The Lord's Salvation

Under King Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel was about 17 when he and several friends were deported to Babylon. They were given new names and forced to learn the literature and language of the Chaldeans. They were given a new diet—some of the king's choice food—which was probably meat that was offered to idols and certainly not prepared according to Mosaic Law (Leviticus 11:44-47). It's possible Daniel had also taken a Nazarite vow, prohibiting him from drinking wine (Numbers 6:3). Unwilling to bend God's commands, Daniel asked permission to avoid the meat and wine. His commander granted this courageous believer his wishes, and Daniel and his friends soon excelled above the rest of the trainees in the king's service (chapter 1). The Lord later saved Daniel and his friends when God gave Daniel the interpretation of a dream that none of the Babylonian sages could understand (chapter 2). Again, Daniel's comrades were saved miraculously by God after they were thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow to the king (chapter 3). Faced with these clear demonstrations of the power of God, King Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the power of the God of the Hebrews but did not humble himself before God. The Lord gave the king a dream, the meaning of which only Daniel would be able to unlock. Daniel explained that the king was predicted to become insane, wandering the wilds like a beast for seven years until he humbled himself. As God promised, these events did occur. Once restored, Nebuchadnezzar gave praise to God (chapter 4).

Under King Belshazzar

For many centuries, historians questioned the fact of Belshazzar's existence. The last recorded king of Babylon was king Nabonidus. However, recent findings have authenticated Belshazzar's reign over Babylon and have shown that Belshazzar was Nabonidus' son, the fifth in line after Nebuchadnezzar over a period of only a decade. During this time of upheaval, Daniel apparently fell out of favor with the ruling elite. Belshazzar held a great feast during which he desecrated vessels of gold and silver from the Jerusalem temple by using them during drinking binges. God provided a sign of judgment to the king and his kingdom—handwriting on the wall. Again, none of the wise men or conjurers of Babylon could interpret the meaning of the writing. The queen remembered and sent for Daniel. He provided an interpretation that would startle everyone (and refused the king's offer of wealth and prestige in the bargain!). Daniel

My God sent His angel,
and he shut the mouths
of the lions. They have
not hurt me, because I
was found innocent in his
sight.

Daniel 6:22a,b

explained that the kingdom of the Babylonians was about to be given over to the Medes and Persians. That very night Belshazzar was slain by the conquering armies. Historians Herodotus and Xenophon noted that the city was conquered by the armies of Media and Persia with hardly a battle. They diverted the Euphrates River and entered through the riverbed to find the Babylonians in a drunken festival on October 11 or 12, 539 BC.

Under Kings Darius and Cyrus

“Darius the Mede” may have been the throne name used by Cyrus, but was more likely a governor who Cyrus put in charge of the newly conquered Babylonian territories. Darius appointed 120 “satraps,” or governing officials, to rule the kingdom, with three administrators over them. Daniel was one of the administrators. The king was so impressed with Daniel that he soon planned to set Daniel over the whole kingdom. The other governors became jealous and sought to discredit and remove Daniel from power. They convinced Darius to establish a decree declaring that anyone who prays to any god or man except the king should be thrown into the lion’s den. Daniel would pray anyway, fearing God more than the king. Darius had great respect for Daniel, and was beside himself when he learned that his own officials had trapped him into convicting Daniel, the man of prayer. God once again saved Daniel by shutting the mouths of the lions (Daniel 6). The remaining chapters of Daniel describe the visions given by God to show this prophet and the whole world the rise and fall of major earthly kingdoms and the eventual establishment of God’s eternal kingdom when our situation will truly become enwrapped in God’s wonderful salvation.

Final Thought

What trial, difficulty, or perplexing circumstance do you face today? Will it make you better or bitter? God sends tests our way for our growth and blessing (James 1:1-5). God does not give us more difficulty than we can handle, with His grace (1 Corinthians 10:13). Someone said that Christians are either like eggs or potatoes: when thrown into the hot water, we either become softer toward God or hardened against God. The choice is ours. We have seen how Daniel trusted God in his difficult situations and through them all, the Lord blessed and delivered him. The same Lord that helped Daniel is waiting to come to our aid. May the Lord help us become more like Daniel.

Spending Time With God

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SERIES

MAJOR PROPHETS

LESSON 5

God's Salvation in Your Situation | Daniel

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read Daniel 1:1-7. What challenges did Daniel and his friends face once they were uprooted from their homeland?

2. Read Daniel 1:8-14. The Jews were commanded by God to observe certain dietary restrictions. Note Daniel's predicament.

a. See James 1:1-6. What wisdom did Daniel apply to his situation?

b. Record at least one area in life where you are challenged toward compromise by outside pressures. Pray about and record at least one wise thing you can do to boldly avoid falling into sin in that area.

3. In Daniel 1:15-21, notice and record the ways in which God blessed Daniel's resolve toward holiness?

4. Read Daniel 2:1-49, and write down

a. How Daniel brought his predicament to God (Daniel 2: 1-18).

b. How God answered Daniel (Daniel 2:19).

c. How Daniel offered praise and thanks to God (Daniel 2: 20-23).



d. How God demonstrated his sovereignty in this nearly impossible situation (Daniel 2:24-49).

7. In Daniel 3:16-18, how did these Jewish men respond to the king?

e. What central truth from this chapter you will claim and live by today?

Fill in the blank: "If I were in the same situation, I probably would have.

8. Read about God's deliverance of these three men in Daniel 3:19-30.

a. If we remain faithful to God in the midst of subtle persecution or strong pressure, are we promised a blessing? Explain.

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. What insights or concerns from the commentary or questions above would you like to explore further?

b. In what ways are you tempted to compromise your bold witness for Christ on the job? In your neighborhood? In your home? In any way?

6. Read Daniel 3:1-15. What challenges here confronted Daniel's three friends.



9. In Daniel 4, we see a king humbled by the prophetic preaching of Daniel, and in Daniel 5, another king is replaced after Daniel's bold proclamation of truth. In Daniel 6, we find the prophet just as bold about his prayer life. Read Daniel 6:1-28.

a. Daniel is strong both as a pray-er and a spokesman for the Lord. How is our ability to speak to others about God directly linked to our time spent in speaking to God about others?

b. In what ways does Daniel's prayer life challenge or encourage you?

c. If there were one thing you would change about your prayer life it would be...

d. Tell of a recent answer to prayer. Spend time together, praying for one another, for the Church, and for God to build the character of Daniel into His people today.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. See Daniel 12:1-4, 9-10. What promises did Daniel receive long ago from God about the end of the age? Which promise most stirs your heart toward active obedience for God? Why?

11. Read Daniel 12:13. Contemplate the words "allotted inheritance." What message and meaning is packed in this phrase for your life and mine?

Scripture for Meditation

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:3



Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds.

Hosea 6:1

Introduction

The final 12 books of the Old Testament are called the “Minor Prophets.” The term minor does not reflect the books’ importance, but refers to their length. This 12-fold batch of prophetic writings may be generally grouped as follows:

Before the Exile: Hosea, Joel, Amos;

During the Exile: Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah; and

After the Exile: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

Each of these books is a treasure chest of spiritual insight, filled with practical wisdom for our time. This wisdom comes from the heart and mind of our unchanging God, whose infinitely holy character responds to the ever-changing condition of His sinful people with words of warning, comfort, and love. Through the writings of these inspired prophets in their tumultuous circumstances, we behold the wondrous attributes of God.

Hosea: The Redeeming Love of God

Hosea prophesied to the 10 northern tribes of Israel while Isaiah and Micah prophesied to the two southern tribes of Judah. Hosea's ministry began during Jeroboam II's 41-year reign over Israel. Hosea watched Jeroboam's rule fade into the dark and difficult era of Jewish captivity. Hosea preached to an uninterested people for several decades, and his heart broke as he watched the golden age of Israel's triumph turn into the dismal age of God's judgment. After the death of Jeroboam, six kings rose and fell like dominos. Four were assassinated within 20 years. In the middle of Hosea's ministry, many of God's people were carried into captivity in Assyria. Near the end of his life, he watched Samaria fall and the nation of Israel cease to exist.

If ever a book revealed the redemptive love of God, it is Hosea. In Israel's dark hour, this glorious aspect of God's character shines with blinding clarity. God's heart of love was first demonstrated through an unforgettable object lesson (Hosea 1-3), and then explained further through Hosea's forthright preaching (Hosea 4-14). When Hosea heard God's call, he also heard this command: “Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD” (Hosea 1:2).

A Picture of God's Redemptive Love (Hosea 1-3)

Hosea obeyed the Lord and married Gomer, who soon sold herself into prostitution. At God's bidding, the prophet then paid the price of a slave to purchase her back. He excluded her for a time, hoping she would turn all of her affections toward him. She had three children and their names became signs to the Jews.

Some believe these first three chapters are allegorical rather than a description of events that actually occurred; however, a plain reading of the text suggests these to be literal events. Regardless of one's view, any open mind can see the power of the analogy: God loves His people,



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And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

Joel 2:28-29

even when they fall into heinous sin, and He is willing to redeem them.

Preaching About God's Redemptive Love (Hosea 4-14)

The remainder of the book of Hosea contains powerful messages that seem to flow like water from this broken-hearted prophet. Hosea's preaching can be summarized in this way:

Israel's Sins	Hosea 4:1–6:3
Israel's Punishment	Hosea 6:4–10:15
God's Redemptive Plan	Hosea 11–14

Joel: The Renewing Power of God

Scholars consider Joel one of the earliest prophetic books written. The prophet Joel probably wrote during the days of young king Joash (2 Kings 11:21). Joel's ministry was to Judah, the Southern Kingdom of the Jews. Known as the prophet of religious revival, his message is about the renewing power of God. Joel's book shows that a broken heart is a prerequisite for blessings from heaven, and may be outlined quite simply:

Joel's Call to Ministry	Joel 1:1
God's Call to Repentance	Joel 1:2–2:17
God's Promise of Blessing	Joel 2:18–3:21

The book opens with the description of a horrendous invasion of the land by four kinds (and potentially 40 varieties) of locusts: cutters, swarmers, hoppers, and destroyers (Joel 1:4, ESV). These menacing plant predators commonly swarmed in the millions—their advances were heard for miles and sounded like a roaring fire. They filled the air like an ominous cloud and darkened the sunlight like a solar eclipse. No green plant survived their advance. Some types of locusts even stripped the bark off the trees (Joel 1:6-7). In Joel's day, people tried, unsuccessfully, to defend their crops by digging trenches, kindling fires, and beating and burning the insects which had been piled into into heaps.

After the locusts had devastated the land, it took years to recover (Joel 1:17-20). The plague of locusts affected everyone: priests no longer had a source for drink offerings; cattle and sheep had no grass on which to graze; the drunkards had no wine to drink. All the people, young and old, were affected (Joel 1:5-12). Joel called for a fast—a time of mourning and repentance:

“‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing” (Joel 2:12-14).

To the repentant, the Lord promised to pour out the early and latter rain, and that HE would restore what the locusts had eaten (Joel 2:23, 25). Additionally, He pledged to pour out a spiritual

“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.”

Amos 8:11

blessing. A description of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by signs of the “Day of the LORD” (the day of God’s great judgment upon the world), may be found in Joel 2:28-32. This promised restoration was fulfilled, in part, on the day of Pentecost. (See Acts 2:16-21, where Peter quoted these very words from Joel). There is also a sense of fulfillment that reaches yet further into the future, in which the prophet points to the blessings and judgments yet to come. It is wonderful to ponder the truth that God’s redeeming love (as found in Hosea) is coupled with the renewing power of God through the Holy Spirit (as found in Joel), which is powerful enough to restore us during the most bleak and dismal of situations.

Amos: The Righteous Judgement of God

Amos, a native of Judah, was sent primarily to prophesy to Israel. Living during Hosea’s time, Amos likely found support by ministering alongside this fellow prophet. He was not descended from a line of prophets nor was he a priest (Amos 7:14). He was a simple shepherd and dresser of the sycamore trees. However, when God’s Spirit called Amos and anointed this man of God for the task, he became one of the boldest prophets, thundering God’s messages to the people. Amos delivered warnings to the nations (Amos 1-2), sermons to Israel (Amos 3-6), and visions for all (Amos 7-9). If Hosea’s message of God’s redeeming love did not pull hearts toward God, perhaps Amos’ message of God’s righteous judgment would shock souls away from destruction. God will use any means possible to call us to Himself.

Final Thought

It is helpful to study the minor prophets together as they line up chronologically. By comparing the primary message of those who ministered before the exile—Hosea, Joel, and Amos—we have a composite message to anyone who is not right with God. God wants us to know, first, that He loves us passionately. If we are not responsive to His wooing love, He will warn us of discipline to come with the promise of restoration. If we have still not repented of our hardness before our Creator, He could bring judgment—not to destroy us but to restore us to Himself (Amos 9:11-15). Taken together, the message of these books is clear: We need to repent! God wants us to ask ourselves honestly if our hearts are right with Him today.

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series on “God’s Attributes in Focus,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. Devotion questions are for your personal study. Discussion questions are for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one important thing you learned or one question that remains unanswered for you regarding the books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos.

2. Read Hosea 1:1-11. Who was Gomer?

What object lesson was put forth in Hosea's marriage to Gomer?

3. Read Hosea 2:1-23. From this text:

a. What do you learn about God's heart of love for His people?

b. Contemplate God's perspective at times when you sin against Him. Record your thoughts, or perhaps a prayer of confession.

4. From Hosea 3:1-5:

a. What was Hosea to do now?

b. How would the prophet's actions speak to the Israelites?

Can you find application of this same message for the Church today?

5. Read the remainder of the book of Hosea (Hosea 4-14). Recognize the passion and love of God for His people and record specific insights you would like to remember about God's love.



Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Read Joel 1:1-12. The devastation and destruction described here can be applied to the fall of Jerusalem in Daniel's time. It also has prophetic significance for the backsliding and/or persecution of God's people through the ages, until the end of time. Looking at Joel 1:4, provide some personal application as well:

a. Describe an experience when locusts or other insects have destroyed your crops, garden plants, flowers, or grass.

b. Imagine if your whole livelihood and survival depended on farming. If locusts symbolize destroyers of life, what are some of the locusts in your life? Identify things that drain your hope, vitality, and sense of purpose.

7. Read Joel 1:13-20, a call to repentance.

a. Define repentance (try a Bible dictionary).

b. Can you identify some Biblical examples of repentance?

d. Can you think of a time when repentance brought refreshing and renewal in your life? If you're willing, share it with the group.

8. Read Joel 2:28-32.

a. Compare with Acts 2:16-21. In what sense has this prophecy been fulfilled already?

b. Compare with Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 6:12. In what sense is this prophecy yet to be fulfilled?



SERIES

MINOR PROPHETS

LESSON 6

Before the Exile | Hosea, Joel, Amos

c. Can you think of a time (a church service, a Christian conference, or another setting) where you have seen the Holy Spirit poured out on God's people?

Can you describe that situation?

How did it affect you?

9. Chapter 3 of Joel describes a great battle that students of the Bible often link to the "Battle of Armageddon," a final, cataclysmic war between the nations to be fought in the Middle East before the return of Christ. Have you read books or seen movies that dramatize wild and crazy "end-time events" associated with Biblical prophecy?

Do you think the Lord wants this to be our primary focus?

If not, what do you think we should focus on as we contemplate the coming end of the world?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. Skim through the book of Amos. What is the primary theme of this book?

11. How do you think people of our day would respond to a preacher like Amos?

Scripture for Meditation

And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

Joel 2:28-29



Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will be the Lord's.

Obadiah 21

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Jonah 3:10



Watch Amazing Journey Video
"The Big Question"

Introduction

Fire passing through a forest destroys life. It also creates opportunity for new growth as a path is cleared for more sunshine and fresh vegetation. So it was with the exile of God's people in the Old Testament. In God's providence, the same calamity that harmed them would create opportunities for them to know God more fully and to grow in their faith. The middle six of the twelve Minor Prophets show us how this seemingly impossible paradox occurred and how God can do it again for us as we face life's trials. Each of these six books reveals a key attribute of God to amplify an important truth: God tests us to grow us.

Obadiah: The Sovereignty of God

Obadiah, the shortest book in the Bible, opens with its theme: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says" (Obadiah 1). Obadiah wrote, above all, about the sovereignty of God to encourage humility.

God's people needed to remain humble. And so did their enemies. Writing to Edom, Obadiah says, "The pride of your heart has deceived you...you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?'" (Obadiah 3). Pride can bring down a nation (James 4:6, Isaiah 14:13-15, Obadiah 2). In the words of King Solomon, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). If we humble ourselves before God, however, he will keep us from falling (James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6).

An awareness of God's sovereignty is the surest route to true humility. When we remember how great is our God, we cannot help but realize how lowly and small we are in comparison.

Jonah: The Mercy of God

The story of Jonah is a story of God's mercy and of human repentance. God's mercy was shown not only to the wicked Ninevites, but also to Jonah. Indeed, God's mercy is available for the worst of sinners and for the best of saints. It is available even for you and for me.

Think of the story line. God commanded Jonah to preach to the Assyrians, a most wicked and evil nation. The prophet fled from God's call. Few tasks are more difficult than loving confrontation. Most of us would rather go on vacation, embarking on a voyage to a distant land, than confront a wayward sinner. Yet God calls us, like Jonah, to speak his truth and to extend His mercy to those who need it most.

When Jonah failed to obey God, the Lord showed mercy to him, providing a tempest, a fish, a vine, and a worm (Jonah 1:4, 17; 4:6, 7), all incentives for his repentance. Thus does God go before each of us, providing the motive and the means for us to learn repentance and to show mercy to others even as the Lord has done for us.

Micah: The Wisdom of God

The first words spoken by the prophet Micah, "Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who live in it, that the Sovereign LORD may bear witness against you..." (Micah 1:2). Repeat-

...they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Micah 4:3b-4

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. he cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness.

Naham 1:7-8

edly, the prophet Micah urges God's people to listen (Micah 1:2; 3:1; 6:1-2, 9). Micah, whose name means "who is like God," reminds us that no one is as wise as is our God. Therefore, we must humble ourselves before the Lord, if we are to become wise as well. We too must learn to listen.

The listening heart is fertile soil into which the seed of God's purpose can be embedded and enriched in our lives (Matthew 13:1-23). Micah summarizes God's will for us in the well-known words, "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Such a walk with God requires us to be always near to Him, listening and following the wisdom He provides.

Nahum: The Justice of God

The prophet Nahum opens his prophecy with a fitting summary of his book, "The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath ... the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished" (Nahum 1:2-3).

Nearly 150 years after Jonah had preached repentance to the Ninevites, the Israelites had become lax in their faith and were in need of repentance. Thus did justice run full circle. The Almighty allowed the Assyrians to come against His people. In Nahum, God promises that once God's people repented and turned back to righteousness, justice would be shown to Nineveh. The same justice that provoked the exile would later rebound against those who caused it.

There are times when each of us face difficulties. At such times, we may look toward heaven and cry out, "Where is justice?" Nahum provides the answer. The day will come when God will bring complete justice, judging wickedness and rewarding righteousness.

Habakkuk: The Saving Nature of God

Most of the Old Testament prophets were in the business of declaring God's decrees. But not Habakkuk. He asked God questions. He sought to understand how it would be possible for God's judgments to bring God's salvation. And he learned about the God's saving nature.

Habakkuk opens his discourse with the question, "How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? ... Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing" (Habakkuk 1:2-3a)? He concludes his book with a note of confidence in the salvation of God: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food ... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights" (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

Zephaniah: The Holiness of God

Zephaniah describes the holiness of God. Our response to God's holiness, the prophet proclaims, is to become a consecrated (holy) people. For at an unknown time, God's holiness will be fully revealed to the world. That day will be the "Day of the Lord."

This phrase, "The Day of the LORD," is repeated in Zephaniah some 20 times as the prophet urges

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my savior.

Habakkuk 3:17-18

The lord within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame.

Zephaniah 3: 5

us to prepare for day when both judgment and blessing will reach a perfect climax. He writes,

Be silent before the Sovereign LORD
for the day of the LORD is near.
The LORD has prepared a sacrifice;
he has consecrated those he has invited. (Zephaniah 1:7)

Zephaniah likely recalled a key incident in the life of his great, great, grandfather, King Hezekiah. The king had learned about his imminent death, repented, and watched God turn judgment into blessing all in a single day (2 Kings 20). And in a day yet to come, the entire nation of Israel would have the same opportunity. And so will we—on the day when Christ returns. Our call is to keep that day before us, and to live as a people set apart for God's glorious purposes.

Final Thought

Through six prophets who spoke about the exile of Israel, we perceive six divine attributes that may serve as checkpoints for our attitudes and actions. These attributes can help us trust God in all circumstances, especially when we experience life's trials. Obadiah urges us to reflect on God's sovereignty. Jonah teaches us to become vessels of God's mercy. Micah calls us to receive God's wisdom. Nahum urges us to rely on God's justice. Habakkuk emphasizes God's saving nature. And Zephaniah reminds us that the day will come when God's holiness will be revealed. Yes, it will impact humanity with the intensity of a forest fire. And there is purpose in the fire. God tests us to grow us.

Spending Time With God

This lesson, in the series on "God's Attributes in Focus," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. Devotion questions are for your personal study. Discussion questions are for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one important thing you learned or one question that remains unanswered for you.

2. Read Obadiah (a mere 22 verses) in one sweep. Why do you think pride is so destructive (James 4:6)?

3. When we hear the name Jonah, we immediately think of a big fish. A more difficult concept to swallow, however, is the idea that God expects us to reflect His character and to extend His mercy, even toward our worst enemies.

a. Who are your enemies?

b. What does the story of Jonah say about your attitude toward them?

4. The story of Jonah describes a great work of God's grace and renewing power. It is often when people are in the deepest of darkness that they become open to God's mercy and repent.

a. Why do you think this is so?

b. Does the story of Jonah somehow give you hope for your country and for the nations of the world today? Explain.

5. The book of Micah calls us to listen to God's commands and to live in a way that honors God. In your own words, what challenge are we given in Micah 6:8?



SERIES

MINOR PROPHETS

LESSON 7

During the Exile | Obediah - Zephaniah

6. God spoke to Micah not only about how God's people should live, but also about God's solutions for us when we fail to do so. One of the many great predictions about the coming of Christ is found in Micah 5:2. Compare with Matthew 2:1-6. What can we learn about the nature of God based on this promise and its fulfillment?

9. The book of Nahum reminds us that God is always just.

a. Do you believe God will bring perfect justice in the end?

b. How does Romans 2:9-10 instruct your thinking about this topic?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

7. What thought from the commentary or personal study questions would you like to explore more fully with the group?

8. Read Nahum 1. What do you notice about God's justice in this chapter? Does this chapter fill you with hope or consternation? Explain.

10. Note how the prophet Habakkuk asked God questions and thus received God's wisdom (Habakkuk 1:2-3, 13-14). What does James tell us about asking such questions of God (James 1:2-8)?



SERIES

MINOR PROPHETS

LESSON 7

During the Exile | Obediah - Zephaniah

11. If possible, describe a time when asking God for wisdom has helped you to get through life and to know God better.

12. One of God's answers to the prophet who liked to question God, Habakkuk, was: "The righteous will live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). In what three ways is this verse applied in the New Testament (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38)?

13. What does Habakkuk 2:4 mean to you personally?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

14. Zephaniah opens his book with a focus on judgment and closes it with the promise of restoration. Read Zephaniah 1 and record how many times in a single chapter the prophet uses the word "day" to warn about what is soon to happen. What does Peter teach us about that day (2 Peter 3:3-10)?

15. How does Peter suggest that we prepare ourselves for the "Day of the Lord" (2 Peter 3:11-18)? What will you do to prepare for that day? Take a few minutes to pray for all of God's people to do the same.

Scripture for Meditation

He has shown you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8



Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel...and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God...

Haggai 1:13-14



Watch Amazing Journey Video
"Divine Jealousy"

Introduction

The last three books of the Old Testament are the only prophetic books that were written after the exile. Thus the focus in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi shifts from the destruction of Jerusalem (or survival in Babylon) to the rebuilding of God's holy city.

Ultimately, however, the message of each of the prophets is on the person and purpose of God. In each of these prophetic books, we can find one or more significant attributes of God to be lifted high:

Haggai: The Encouraging Immanence of God

Zechariah: The Engaging Jealousy of God

Malachi: The Enduring Immutability of God

Jonathan Edwards was once seen walking through a park, gazing intently at a gem stone which he held toward the sky. When asked what he was doing, he explained that he liked to focus on the cut rock, with all of its brilliance, to inspire wonder about the varied attributes of God. In the same way, we can ponder these three final minor prophetic books to sharpen our focus on the marvelous facets of God's character.

Haggai: The Encouraging Immanence of God

Haggai's ministry was one of exhortation and encouragement. God called Haggai to stir up the Jews that they might rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. In 538 BC, Cyrus of Persia gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple, fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10; see also Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5). Approximately 50,000 Jews made the arduous journey home and commenced the work. In two years, they completed the foundation and had a great celebration (Ezra 3:8-10). The Samaritans and other neighboring peoples became concerned about these efforts to revive the Jewish state and began to oppose the work. They managed to force the Jews to give up their ambitions for 15 long years.

Finally, in 520 BC, two years after Darius the Great became king of Persia, Haggai arose to preach. (Haggai is the second shortest shortest book in the Old Testament. Obadiah is the shortest.) The messages of this prophet had far-reaching effects. During a short four-month interval, the prophet stirred the dying embers of hope in the hearts of the Jews and kindled a flame of enthusiasm for the plans of God. Haggai's preaching was supplemented by that of Zechariah, and the temple was completed and dedicated in the span of four years. Hosea was inspired by God to record four of his messages (Haggai 1:1; 2:1, 10, 20), each focusing on God's immanence, God's personal closeness to the people. The sense of God's nearness strengthened resolve in the people's hearts.

Should not we, who have heard the story of the Savior's love and who are offered the infilling of God's Holy Spirit, find even more encouragement through the knowledge of God's nearness than did the Jew's of long ago? The pages of this book sparkle with jewels of insight into the ever-present help of God—gems that seem wasted until they are picked up, dusted off, and treasured by us.

Then the angel who was speaking to me said, "Proclaim this word: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion...'"

Zechariah 1:14

Zechariah: The Engaging Jealousy of God

Zechariah, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was a priest called to the ministry of prophet. He began prophesying as a young man, standing along side the elderly Haggai. Zechariah began to prophesy before Haggai's four months of ministry was complete and continued to preach to the people for three years.

Not only were the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah blended, but their messages were similar. Both called God's people to complete the job of rebuilding the temple. Zechariah, however, wrote with a poetic style, and his book includes apocalyptic-style visions and revelations. More striking yet are Zechariah's descriptions of the Almighty God. In the opening vision, God informs the prophet, "I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion..." (Zechariah 1:14b). In the close of the first half of the book, God repeats and strengthens His statement: "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her" (Zechariah 8:2b).

The concept of a jealous God catches our attention. When a person is jealous, he or she may be moved to actions or measures otherwise thought improbable or impossible. What can we expect once God becomes jealous?

Our Lord Jesus, once stirred to great *zeal* (the same root word from which comes the word jealousy), purged the temple of oxen, sheep, and money changers with a whip in His hand and rage in His heart. Then His disciples remembered the words of the prophet, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (John 2:17b). If the encouragement of Haggai stirred the people to re-initiate their building program, the jealousy of God as proclaimed by Zechariah would be needed to motivate them to complete the job. We can broadly summarize the book as follows:

- The Reasons for God's Jealousy (Zechariah 1-8)
- The Results of God's Jealousy (Zechariah 9-14)

Ultimately God's jealous love for His people would be revealed in Christ, portrayed in the Bible as the Bridegroom for the Church, His bride. It is not surprising to learn that Zechariah prophesied more about the person and ministry of Christ than any other prophet, outside Isaiah. Here we find Christ the Branch (Zechariah 3:8), the Servant (Zechariah 3:8), the Good Shepherd (Zechariah 9:16; 11:11), and the Smitten Shepherd (Zechariah 13:7). Zechariah further describes our Lord's coming in lowliness (Zechariah 6:12), His humanity (Zechariah 13:7), His triumphal entry (Zechariah 9:9), His rejection and betrayal for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13), His pierced hands (Zechariah 12:10), His ministry as priest (Zechariah 6:13) and king (Zechariah 6:13; 9:9; 14:9), His glorious return (Zechariah 14:3-8), and His eternal reign of peace (Zechariah 9:9-10).

Malachi: The Enduring Immutability of God

Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, acts as a bridge into the era of the New Testament. It provides God's last word of recorded revelation before the 400 year gap of silence that preceded the appearing of Christ. Malachi, whose name means "my messenger," describes the coming of the messenger Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6). The New Testament opens with the arrival of

“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

Malachi 4:5-6

John the Baptist, in the spirit and power of Elijah, as a specific fulfillment of this prophecy (Luke 1:17). Malachi’s final statement was about God’s possible curse (Malachi 4:6). The final word of the New Testament was about God’s promised grace (Revelation 22:21).

The book of Malachi is not only last in the list of Old Testament books in our modern Bibles but is generally accepted as the last Old Testament book to be written. The temple was finished after the prophetic stirrings of Haggai and Zechariah, in 516 BC. In 458 BC, the community of faith was supported by the return of several thousand more Jews, along with Ezra the priest. Thirteen years later, the Persian king permitted Nehemiah to return as well, to guide the rebuilding of the walls (Nehemiah 2:1-8). Nehemiah also challenged the people toward holy living, demanding they end their mixed marriages, give God the full tithe, keep the Sabbath, and help the poor (Nehemiah 5:12-13; 6:15; 10:30-39). In 433, Nehemiah returned to the Persian King. During his absence, the people fell into the same sins once again. Nehemiah returned a second time to rebuke them and set things right (Nehemiah 13:7-31). We find Malachi rebuking the people for the same kinds of sin and spiritual degradation (Malachi 1:6-14; 2:14-16; 3:8-11).

It is likely that Malachi began his work sometime after Nehemiah’s second reform, more than a century after the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah. It is as though the people assumed that, given enough time, God’s attributes change. Throughout the book, Malachi addresses seven questions asked by the people—all of which call to question God’s enduring, immutable character (Malachi 1:2,6,7; 2:17; 3:7, 9, and 13). Perhaps the central message of this book is best summarized by God’s own defense: “I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6a).

Final Thought

The Jews of this time period were called to rebuild the Jerusalem temple. We are called to build up the Church, the new temple, made of living stones (1 Peter 2:5). When we lack strength and vision, we too need to remember Haggai’s message that God is with us. When we become selfish and comprise, we do well to recall Zechariah’s message regarding God’s jealousy for His church, His bride (2 Corinthians 11:2). And if we doubt the relevance of these prophetic books for our time, we need only to recall Malachi’s teachings on the unchanging nature of our God. As with God’s people of long ago, many prophetic reminders about the immanence, jealousy, and immutability of God inspire us to obey Jesus as He builds the Church, eagerly awaiting His return!

Spending Time With God

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Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

2. Read Haggai 1:1-11. How did the prophet motivate the people to get busy and build the house of God?

Do these verses challenge you in any way to be more serious about supporting the ministries and building of your local church? Explain.

3. See Haggai 2:1-9. The people were rebuilding the temple of God on its old foundation. Those who remembered the old temple wept as they realized the rebuilt version would be smaller and plainer than the original. What did Haggai promise in Haggai 6-9?

In what way might these promises point to the Church of today or to the coming kingdom of God?

4. In 1 Corinthians 16:19, Paul tells us that those who believe in Christ are God's modern-day temples. Read 1 Corinthians 16:12-20. What commands and guidelines for living do you find in this text, based on the notion that God dwells in us?

5. Pray the following prayer and record any insights you receive from the Lord: "God, I am your temple and You should be at home in me. Please reveal any dark corners in the rooms of my heart and flood every part of my being with Your light and peace."



Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Read Zechariah 1:14-17. Note God's emotions as expressed in this text.

a. In Zechariah 1:14, God is jealous. As one who is made in the "image of God," how do you think our jealousy differs from God's jealousy?

b. Do you think God is as jealous for His people today (See also 2 Corinthians 11:1-3)? Explain.

c. What other emotions are expressed by God in Zechariah 1:14-17? Do you typically think of God in this way? Why or why not?

7. The first six chapters of Zechariah contain eight different visions, rich with meaning for those who understand the context and symbolism. Chapter 4, for example, was given to encourage Zerubbabel, the civil leader for God's people as they rebuilt Jerusalem.

a. Read Zechariah 4:6. How might this verse be applied to the challenges you face in work and ministry today?

b. Can you describe a situation in which you learned the importance of dependence on the Holy Spirit?

8. The last several chapters of Zechariah speak prophetically about the future. See, for example, Zechariah 12:10.

a. Compare Zechariah 12:10 with Matthew 23:37-39. What do these verses suggest will happen among Jews when Christ returns again?



SERIES

MINOR PROPHETS

LESSON 8

After the Exile | Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

b. Do you have any Jewish friends with whom you have tried to explain the role of Christ in their destiny and salvation?

None of Christ's disciples were prefigured in the Old Testament; why do you think God highlighted this individual?

How did they respond?

b. Compare Malachi 4:5-6 with Matthew 11:11-15 and 17:10-12. Why do you think God connected these two figures?

Do you have suggestions for telling Jews about Jesus? Take a few minutes to pray for those about whom you have special concern.

Can you draw parallels between John the Baptist and Elijah? (much of Elijah's story is found in 1 Kings 17-19.)

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

9. Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, is packed with insight.

a. Compare Malachi 3:1 with Matthew 11:7-10. Who is described here?

Scripture for Meditation

This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD Almighty.

Zechariah 4:6



BNEXT Amazing Journey Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide section is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others, but of aiding them along the way. The purpose of this Leader's Guide is to aid you in your role as facilitator. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

The BNEXT Study / Amazing Journey includes a weekly video of 15–20 minutes in length. The video provided is on a flash drive, so make sure you have USB-compatible technology. Please review the video *before* each class. Here's a materials checklist:

- TV or computer with a USB 2.0 (or faster) port
- For larger groups, a projector is needed (and may even enhance a small group experience)
- Amazing Journey videos (on USB flash-drive)
- This Participant's Guide (one per participant)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The BNEXT study series' are versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1 ½ hours in length, which includes time for group discussion and video viewing. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to watch the video together. Alternately, the flash-drive videos may be made available for each small group, in which case, after the opening and welcome time, everyone can move to groups and remain there until the end of the day's session.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- A hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word.
- A commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end.
- The ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach.
- A willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Participant's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson and be thinking about how to present the questions to the class. You should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions: Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions, before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facilitator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. These lessons are designed to easi-

ly be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion," or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor, or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our Bible

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT Amazing Journey* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/.

The first class is unique in that the participant will not have anything to prepare. Use this time for getting to know one another and to introduce the BNEXT lesson format. There is an 18-minute BNEXT introduction video that accompanies this first lesson. Before showing the introduction video, we recommend:

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (10 minutes)
 - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: “Tell us something unique about yourself.” Or perhaps, “What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?” Or, “This first lesson will provide an overview of the Bible. How comfortable are you with the Bible as a whole? Do you think you can benefit by learning more about each of its books and sections?”
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Handout materials and give an overview (7 minutes)
 - a. Discuss the format of BNEXT Amazing Journey:
 - Reading of a specific book(s) or chapters of a book of the Bible.
 - Lesson commentary and questions (at least the Devotion and Discussion questions, and ideally, more) to be completed individually through the week.
 - Meet weekly to watch a 20-minute video and to go

through the Discussion questions (and if time allows, the Digging Deeper questions).

- b. Review the “Rules of Engagement” (found in the front of this Participant's Guide).
 - c. Ask if there are any questions.
3. Discuss the study you will be doing (15 minutes)
 - a. Inform class of how many weeks you will be meeting to cover the study and what date will be your last date for this study.
 - b. Ask the group, “What do you know about [insert study's Bible book(s) name(s) such as Genesis].
 - c. Ask the group, “What do you hope to have answered about (Genesis)?”
 4. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey Introduction and Overview video (18 minutes)
 5. Video discussion (5 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are one or two participants who have a comment on the video or who may have learned something new from the video.
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief to allow others to respond.
 6. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 7. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (5 minutes)
 - a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).

- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are about to watch a video on the Exodus from Israel: “Why do you think the Exodus was important?”, or “From what you know about the Exodus, how does it relate to the work of Christ on the cross?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.
 - c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” in the front of this Participant's Guide.
 2. Discuss lesson questions (20 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss. These are the questions they have been encouraged to complete on their own prior to the class.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote good discussion.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.
 3. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey video (about 20 minutes)
 4. Video discussion (10 minutes)

Ask what participants may have learned or found interesting in the video.
 5. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 6. Dismissal