

LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers



WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

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INTRODUCTION

There was a time when God spoke through chosen messengers, called “prophets.” They were His mouthpieces through which His will was communicated, and His expectations were laid out to His people.

We do not know much about most of the Minor Prophets. There were farmers, priests, possibly royal servants and maybe even royalty among them. What we do know for sure, is that each of these prophets challenged people to faithfully follow God, calling out the atrocities of the past and present and proclaiming God’s warnings and encouragements for the future.

The prophets were all different, but their different personalities and different abilities enabled them to relate to any problem Israel found herself in. Their language always fit the occasion and was directly on point. In his book *My Servants, The Prophets*, Jeff Smith says: “*The prophets spoke thunderously of judgement on sin or with tender compassion, showing forth God’s mercy in forgiveness.*”

Their message is absolutely up to date. Though they do not speak to us directly, understanding their message help us to be aware of the fulfillment of their prophecies and predictions. This helps us to understand the same sins that destroyed Israel, are in fact the same transgressions that cut off people from God today.”

In the end, each prophet was a voice crying out in the wilderness of their time. And they were voices worth listening to.

As we finish our overview study of the Ancient Believers as found in the last books of the Old Testament, we trust that this study will help you to understand God’s story for your live.

Soli Deo Gloria

Week 1

LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers

Jonah

Memory Verse:

...You are a gracious and compassionate God. Slow to anger and abounding in love...

Jonah 4:2(B)

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

PERSONAL STUDY

Opening Remarks

The book Jonah describes a part of the ministry of the prophet called Jonah. He was the only prophet that attempted to run away from God. Jonah's name means "dove". He was the son of Amittai and lived in Gath Hopher, which is just north of Nazareth, during the reign of Jeroboam II, in the eight century B.C.

We first read about the prophet Jonah in 2 Kings 14:25-27 when he gave a message of comfort to Israel, that the Lord had seen the affliction of His people, and that He would save them by the hand of Jeroboam and restore to them the border lands which they had lost through the invasion of the Syrians.

Jonah was called to not only minister to Israel, but also to the Gentiles in the surrounding countries. Some of the key truths of this book is:

- God calls His people to seek repentance and to minister to the Gentiles to also seek repentance.
- God delights in showing mercy to the repentant Gentiles.
- God's people will suffer His displeasure if they fail to extend His mercy to the gentiles.

The key purpose of the book of Jonah is to encourage all God's people to extend mercy to the nations of the world – something they are not always inclined to do.

Read Jonah 1:1-16 Jonah flees from the Lord.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Jonah 2:1-10 Jonah's prayer.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Jonah 3:1-10 Jonah goes to Nineveh.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Jonah 4:1-11 Jonah's anger at the Lord's compassion.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

...You are a gracious and compassionate God. Slow to anger and abounding in love...

Jonah 4:2(B)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Jonah 4:1-11

Introductory Remarks:

In all the Bible we scarcely find a servant of the Lord so very much out of temper as we find Jonah. He is peevish and provoking to God himself. He quarrelled with God for His mercy to Nineveh.

Jonah had just participated in the largest revival known in biblical times. He had seen the highest member of society, to the lowest in the land, repent and call on God. But instead of rejoicing, he is annoyed because God is gracious and compassionate.

Jonah wanted to die, because he lost his credibility with the Jews by preaching to their enemy. Now he also lost credibility with the Assyrians, because God showed mercy to the people in Nineveh when they repented.

God is teaching Jonah that He loves the lost and is concerned about the wicked. He wanted Jonah to do that as well. We all need to be careful that we do not forget this and have our focus blurred by things, as Jonah's was.

Discussion questions

How would you summarise the story so far (from chapter 1 to the end of chapter 3)? Do you think what happened in chapter 4 is surprising? Why or why not?

Read Jonah 4:1-5. Why was Jonah so angry? How do you think you would have responded to Nineveh's repentance if you were in Jonah's shoes?

Discuss God's question in verse 4. What do you think about it?

In verse 5 we see that Jonah goes and sits down at a place to the east of the city. What is he waiting for? What does this show us about Jonah's heart and his failure to understand God's love?

Read Jonah 4: 6-11. What was the lesson that God wanted to teach Jonah with the vine/worm and wind? What does this lesson teach us about God?

In chapter 2 we read that Jonah was rescued by the merciful Lord. Why does he think that he deserves to be shown mercy, but Nineveh not?

How might the book of Jonah be a challenge to us? Refer to Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 2:38-39.

What does the entire book of Jonah show us about the nature of God? How does it show us that "Salvation comes from the Lord"? How does this affect your dealings with God and with other people?

Close in prayer

Week **2**

LEARNING FROM

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Micah

Memory Verse:

Where is another God like you, who pardons the guilt of the remnant, overlooking the sins of his special people? You will not stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing unfailing love.

Micah 7:18

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

PERSONAL STUDY

Opening Remarks

The prophet Micah was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah (in Jerusalem) and Hosea (in Samaria). Micah prophesied between 750 and 686 BC, to both Jerusalem and Samaria.

The prophet talks about matters such as land ownership and what is going on in the business world. He also has a lot to say about the judges of his time, as well as what is going on in the religious world. However, the problem that aggrieved him the most is the leaders in society who did not do what they should have done.

The book consists of about 20 judgement and salvation prophecies. Their function is to lead God's people to repentance. Micah arranged these prophecies in such a meaningful way, that it can be grouped into three cycles. Each cycle consists of first the judgement prophecies and then the salvation prophecies. Each cycle also begins with the same Hebrew word, which can be translated to "hear" and "listen".

Read Micah 1:1-2:13 First cycle of prophecies.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Micah 3:1-12 Second cycle of Judgement Prophecies - Judgement against Israel's leaders.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Micah 4:1-5:15 Salvation prophecies.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Read Micah 6:1-7:20 Third cycle of Judgement prophecies.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

Where is another God like you, who pardons the guilt of the remnant, overlooking the sins of his special people? You will not stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing unfailing love.

Micah 7:18

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Micah 4:13, Micah 5:14 and Micah 7:1-20

Introductory Remarks:

The book Micah depicts two sides of God's character: He is just and therefore must punish sin, but He is merciful and can pardon. He hates sin, but He loves sinners. However, justice comes before mercy.

Micah warns us what will happen when priests and rulers misuse their offices. Pride, arrogance and self-directedness will cause the church to die from within. Micah told the people that the Lord called them "harlots". Things got so bad in the church that they had no one to determine boundaries. The church was no longer offering fairness, justice or truth. But as this sad narrative unfolds, the Lord's mercy and love breaks through in Micah 7.

The church should have a prophetic voice, alerting people to the evils of exploitation and providing a voice for the poor and disadvantaged. This means that people, even those close to you, will dislike what you stand for. Jesus told his disciples that just as some people hate Him, so they would hate his disciples. Christians must be prepared to walk as He did and face the consequences.

Discussion questions

Read Micah 4:13 and Micah 5:14. How does the omnipotence of God emerge from the book of Micah?

Read Micah 7:1-4. The sentence: "What misery is mine!" is a cry of sadness. What needs to be rectified in our lives?

Are there watchmen in our hearts and minds calling out to us regularly? Who are these watchmen? Do they warn us of spiritual enemies? (Refer to Ezekiel 3:17-19)

Perplexity and incoherence regarding spiritual matters are signs of the end of the church. Can you name a few examples of these happening in the church? Discuss.

Read Micah 7:5-6. The description of the family feud tells us about the feud of falsity against the truth. Discuss examples of this truth, that you know of.

Believers' actions should not differ from their words. Children of God should not be liars, cheats, exploiters and lovers of injustice. Discuss this statement and how it is visible in practice.

Read Micah 7:7-9. What assurances does the prophet give that Israel will rise again?

Read Micah 7:18-20. The Lord does not only send messages of judgment and punishment. On the contrary, what promises are recorded for us in these verses?

Close in prayer

Week 3

LEARNING FROM

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Nahum

Memory Verse:

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him...

Nahum 1:7

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The introduction to the book of Nahum is unusual in the Bible. Not only does it mention its human source (the prophet Nahum), but also its chief subject (Nineveh).

We know very little about the prophet Nahum, but he is closely linked to his better-known colleague Jonah. They both came from the 10 tribes of the north and were both sent to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, the major world power of that age. However, Nahum's message of destruction came 150 years after Jonah's time, when circumstances were very different in Nineveh.

Following Jonah, Zephaniah also spoke about the destruction of Nineveh, without specifying when it will happen. It is Nahum that finally comes to tell the Assyrians that they were finished, their time had run out.

Once God's anger is aroused, you cannot turn it away. The king of Nineveh prayed and fasted again, as at the time of Jonah, but God would not accept it. It was too late to change. This was bad news for the Assyrians, but good news for Israel and for Nahum. God not only controls nature, but also all of history. Therefore, Nahum could predict history, that Nineveh was finished, before it happened.

It seemed unbelievable because of the power and might of Nineveh, but history shows us that today Nineveh is a desert. The once great palace is completely wiped from the face of the earth. In its place live owls and hedgehogs and all the wild beasts, as predicted by Zephaniah.

PERSONAL STUDY

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

Read Nahum 1:1-15 The Lord is mighty and good, but Nineveh angers the Lord.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Nahum 2:1-13 Nineveh to fall.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Nahum 3:1-19 The Lord punishes Nineveh.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him...

Nahum 1:7

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Nahum 3:1-19

Introductory Remarks:

Nahum did not write this book as a warning or “call to repentance” for the people of Nineveh. God had already sent them the prophet Jonah 150 years earlier with His promise of what would happen if they continued in their evil ways. The people at that time had repented but now lived just as bad if not worse than they did before. The Assyrians had become absolutely brutal in their conquests (hanging the bodies of their victims on poles and putting their skin on the walls of their tents among other atrocities).

Now Nahum was telling the people of Judah to not despair because God had pronounced judgment and the Assyrians would soon be getting just what they deserved. The Lord is stronger than the mighty Assyria and they will not escape His judgment. It is precisely this judgment of Him that foresees salvation for Judah, and which encouraged the Judeans.

In his book “Unlocking the Bible”, David Pawson explains that God is not judging the Assyrians for breaking the Ten Commandments, because they do not know them. He is punishing them for crimes against humanity that they know instinctively are wrong. Those who have never heard of the Ten Commandments still know that it is wrong to be barbaric and cruel. God judges people by what they know.

Discussion questions

Read Nahum 1:2. What is the difference between envy and jealousy? Why is it appropriate for the Lord to express jealousy in His relationship with us?

Read Nahum 3:1-7. Why did God judge Nineveh? Discuss in the group.

Read Nahum 3:8-11. How had Nineveh treated Thebes?

Read Nahum 3:12-19. Why were Nineveh's defence efforts useless? What was the ultimate destiny of Nineveh? How would people respond to Nineveh's destruction?

How do the sins of our nation compare with Nineveh's pride, cruelty, selfishness, and lies? What makes us safe in the Lord?

The name Nahum means comfort. How can you be sure that God will protect and comfort you in the face of hardship? How can Christians be a comfort to others in troubling circumstances?

What can you do to warn an individual or group that is in danger of God's judgment? Discuss in the group.

Close in prayer

Week **4**

LEARNING FROM

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Obadiah

Memory Verse:

The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you...

Obadiah verse 15(a)

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

PERSONAL STUDY

Opening Remarks

The book Obadiah is the shortest in the Old Testament, as it consists of just 21 verses. We do not have a lot of information about Obadiah, except that his name means “The Lord’s servant”. This gives us an indication that his parents must have been followers of God to give Obadiah his name.

Obadiah spoke to Edom, one of Israel’s neighbours, a region south-east of the Dead Sea. This is the only prophecy by Obadiah that we have, and it may very well be the only one that he gave.

Esau was the founding ancestor of Edom (see Genesis 36). It was part of the land that the Lord promised to Israel but was never actually occupied by them. When king David’s empire began to break up, Edom sought its own freedom and rebelled against Israel.

Obadiah says they were full of pride. They believed that nothing could defeat them, not even God. They went on to mistreat their relatives, the people of Judah. Now God calls them to account. God also speaks to all nations that act against His people.

This short book can be divided into two parts:

- a) Edom will be judged (verse 1-14)
- b) All nations will be judged (verse 15-21)

Read Obadiah verse 1-9 and Isaiah 63:1-6. The nations destroy Edom.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Obadiah verse 10-14 and Amos 1:11-12. Edom despises Israel.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Read Obadiah verse 15-18 and Ezekiel 30:3. God punishes the nations.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Read Obadiah verse 19-21 and Psalm 22:27-28, Revelation 11:15-18. Israel possesses Edom.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you...

Obadiah verse 15(a)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Obadiah verse 1-21

Introductory Remarks:

The Edomites are the descendants of Esau and therefore relatives (brothers) of the Israelites. But when the Babylonians took the people of Judah into exile, the Edomites rejoiced over the disaster of their brothers. They even added to the humiliation by killing refugees, extraditing survivors and stealing some of the people's property.

God's honour was violated when His own followers no longer honoured Him, therefore He allowed them to be carried away into exile. But it is no excuse for the nations they humiliated to be haughty and defiant.

When God's people's punishment is fulfilled, He will restore them to glory. But He will also avenge their humiliation, which was also His own humiliation. This is the day when God will judge the nations.

The Lord's Day of Judgement will not only bring judgement upon the enemies of God and His people, but will also bring blessings upon those who follow God's ways.

Discussion questions

How do you understand the judgment of the day of the Lord that would come upon the Edomites, as well as the salvation it would bring to Judah?

Can you name cases where people are or were in need and others gloated about it, like what the Edomites did with the Judeans? Discuss what happened.

The people of Edom relied on their "secure fortress". What aspects of false reassurance can you list; things that believers wrongly rely on in our own time?

On the day of judgment, there will be a significant difference in the outcome for people who followed God's ways and those who chose to disregard His will. What is the most important part of this day of Judgement, according to verse 21 – who will reign supreme? (Also refer to Revelations 11:15)

What is the message of this book for our time? Discuss in the group.

Close in prayer

Week 5
LEARNING FROM
the ancient believers

Habakkuk----

Memory Verse:

The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to tread on the heights.

Habakkuk 3:19

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The prophet Habakkuk wrote his book between 612 BC and 589 BC before the fall of Judah. Like a lot of books in the Old Testament, the Book of Habakkuk is a short one and delivers God's message of judgment to His people.

In *The Message*, Eugene H Petersen write the following about Habakkuk: "*Living by faith is a bewildering venture. We rarely know what is coming next and not many things turn out the way we anticipate. It is natural to assume that since I am God's chosen and beloved, I will get favourable treatment from the God who favours me so extravagantly. That God-followers do not get preferential treatment in life, always comes as a surprise. But it is also a surprise to find that there were a few men and women within the Bible who show up alongside us at such moments.*

The prophet Habakkuk is one of them. Most prophets, most of the time, speak God's Word to US. They are preachers calling us to listen to God's Word of judgement and salvation, confrontation and comfort. They face us with God as He is, not as we imagine Him to be. They are in-your-face assertive, not given to tack, not diplomatic, insisting that we pay attention to God. But Habakkuk speaks our word to GOD. He gives voice to our bewilderment, articulates our puzzled attempts to make sense of things, faces God with our disappointment with God.

Habakkuk insists that God pay attention to us, and he insists with a prophet's characteristic no-nonsense bluntness."

PERSONAL STUDY

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

Read Habakkuk 1:1-5 Habakkuk's first complaint.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Habakkuk 1:5-11 The Lord's answer.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Habakkuk 1:12-2:1 Habakkuk's second complaint.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Habakkuk 2:2-20 The Lord's answer.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Habakkuk 3:1-19 Habakkuk's prayer.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to tread on the heights.

Habakkuk 3:19

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Habakkuk 1:1-3, 5-7,13 and Habakkuk 3

Introductory Remarks:

The prophet Habakkuk realised that God was going to use the godless to bring God's judgement on God's people. Using a godless nation to punish a godly nation did not make sense, and Habakkuk was quick and bold to say so. He dared to voice his feelings to God!

But this prophet does something even more important. In *The Message*, Eugene H Petersen describes it as follows: *He waits and listens to hear what the Lord says. It is in his listening and waiting – which then becomes praying – that he found the large world of God's sovereignty. Only there did he eventually realise that the believing-in-God life, the steady trusting-in-God life, is the full life, the only real life.*

Habakkuk started out exactly where we often start out with our own complaints and accusations against God. But he did not stay there. He ended up in a world where every detail in our lives of love for God, is worked into something good. Only then can he move on from lament to song.

Discussion questions

Read Habakkuk 1: 1-3, 5-7 and 13. The "Why Lord?"-question is as old as the Bible. What do you learn from the situation Habakkuk finds himself in? What do you think he expected from the Lord in such times, and what is he experiencing instead?

What does he do about it according to these verses?

Read Habakkuk 3:16. Calamity was coming. What was the general spirit of the Jews according to this verse?

Read Habakkuk 3:1-4, 13. How did Habakkuk react? What was his solution to this imminent and life-threatening danger?

What does it mean that God is radiant? In what way does God hide His power? Why does He sometimes do this?

Read Habakkuk 3:6. What do you learn from verse 6 about God's relationship with nature? How then should we react in the middle of natural disasters?

Read Habakkuk 3:8-9. Does God ride on horses? Does He ride on a chariot? Does He have a bow? What does Habakkuk mean with these expressions? What imagery does he bring to mind? Discuss.

Read Habakkuk 3:17-19. Picture and describe the extent of Habakkuk's faith against the background of the most dire situations imaginable. Rewrite verse 17 in your own words with examples that are relevant in your life.

Read Romans 8:28 and 39(b). Now pray and thank God for His goodness to you.

Close in prayer

Week **6**

LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers

Zephaniah

Memory Verse:

Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near...

Zephaniah 1:7(a)

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Zephaniah might possibly be one of the least known prophets of the seventh century. It appears that he is the great, great grandson of someone called Hezekiah. This could possibly be a reference to Hezekiah, king of Judah (715-686 BCE). In that case, Zephaniah would have been of royal status. We have no additional information about Zephaniah, nor are scholars certain about the meaning of his name. It could either mean "to hide" or "to watch," and has been variously rendered, "Yahweh has hidden," or "watchman for the Lord."

Zephaniah was a prophet during the reign of King Josiah. The voice of prophecy was silent for 70 years, ever since the death of Hezekiah and the murder of Isaiah. The kings before Josiah, namely Manasseh and Amon, helped the people from the proverbial bank into the ditch. The people's religion and morals were at an absolute low point. Zephaniah's message is a hard, straight message about the wrongness of sin and the need to turn back to God. He especially emphasizes humility and dependence on God.

Zephaniah prophesies that God's anger is simmering, but that the day of wrath will come, when God cannot hold it in any longer. We must put off this day by repenting.

PERSONAL STUDY

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

Read Zephaniah 1:1-18 Judgement for the whole earth on the Day of the Lord.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Zephaniah 2:1-15 Calls to repent and to wait for God.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Zephaniah 3:1-8 The lamentable state and fate of Jerusalem.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Zephaniah 3:9-20 Lasting joy as motivation for Waiting on God.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near...

Zephaniah 1:7(a)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Zephaniah 1

Introductory Remarks:

Zephaniah called the people to silence because he knew that the Lord will imminently judge Judah and the whole world. He calls on the people to persevere in their trust in God. He calls them back to the basics.

What we hope for or fear tomorrow, changes who we are today. Zephaniah motivates his audience with hope and dread as basic training for finding satisfaction in the Lord.

Discussion questions

Read Zephaniah 1:2-3. What did God predict that He would do? How thorough would this destruction be?

Read Zephaniah 1:4-6. God lists the various groups that He said He would cut off. What can we learn from this list, regarding the type of sins that that we should avoid? Discuss in the group.

Read Zephaniah 1:7,14 Isaiah 13:6 and Joel 7:15. What would God do on “the day of the Lord”? What is the significance of the day of the Lord?

Read Zephaniah 1:10-13. Who will weep on that day. And why? Explain the sin for which these people were guilty. Discuss how this is applicable today?

Read Zephaniah 1: 14-16. Make a list of the descriptions used to describe the day of the Lord. Explain the significance of these descriptions.

Read Zephaniah 1:16-18. What will happen on the day of God's wrath? What should we learn from this prophecy?

Read Romans 8:1-2. What assurance do you have on the day of the Lord? How does this affect your way of live? Discuss in the group.

Close in prayer

Week 7

LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers

Haggai

Memory Verse:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways."

Haggai 1:7

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The book of Haggai is a tiny prophetic book nestled between Zephaniah and Zechariah in the Old Testament.

In 539 BC king Cyrus decreed that the Jewish exiles in Babylonia could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Haggai's prophetic ministry began in 520 BC, almost 20 years after the first exiles returned.

This period was a time of great hardship for God's people and Haggai understood that the temple is central to God's restoration. He speaks God's words of rebuke, challenge and comfort to get the construction of the temple back on track.

Haggai also speaks of the future work of God to establish His kingdom. This encouraged the people but also challenges all readers to ensure that their priorities in life line up with God's.

PERSONAL STUDY

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

Read Haggai 1:1-11 A call to build the House of the Lord.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Haggai 1:12 - 15 Obedience, Assurance and Action.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Haggai 2:1-9 The promised glory of the New House.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Haggai 2:10-19 Blessings for a Defiled people.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways."

Haggai 1:7

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Haggai 1

Introductory Remarks:

Haggai's central message was the importance of putting first things first. He understands that the temple is central to God's restoration purposes.

His single mission, carried out in a three-and-a-half-month period, was to get God's people to work at rebuilding God's Temple. Compared to the missions of other prophets, it might not sound very spiritual. But in God's economy, it was.

Haggai keeps us in touch with those times in our lives when repairing the building where we worship is an act of obedience and every bit as important as praying in that place of worship.

Discussion questions

Read Haggai 1:1-4. How does the message of verse 2 differ from the one in verse 4? If you were an Israelite, how might you have responded to the prophet's message in verses 2 and 4?

Read Haggai 1:5 and 7. The same words are used in these verses. Write it in your own words.

Read Haggai 1:6. In verse 6 we find five actions, followed by surprising results. What does it mean to you and all believers in respect to verse 5 and 7? Discuss in the group.

Read Haggai 1:8. What is God's solution to eliminate disappointing expectations?

Read Haggai 1:9-11. Why has the sky withheld its dew and the earth its produce? Some people get very upset when they hear that God brings trouble on the land. What would your answer to that comment be?

Read Haggai 1:12. What three groups or individuals are mentioned? How did each of them respond to the Lord?

Read Haggai 1:13-14. How did the Lord motivate the people to serve? What is it exactly that they did?

Obedience is sweet. Have you ever been in a situation where a whole church, family or society saw their sins and repented at the same time? Share in the group.

How is obedience related to repentance? Do you think that their associating of God's Word with the prophet's word had anything to do with their obedience? How does our belief about the pastor's sermon affect our responses?

Close in prayer

Week 8

LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers

Zechariah

Memory Verse:

Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion! Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you!

He comes triumphant and victorious, but humble and riding on a donkey— on a colt, the foal of a donkey...

Zechariah 9:9 (GNT)

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai and shared the prophetic task of getting the people of Judah to rebuild their ruined Temple.

The tone of his prophecy is one of encouragement. It was given to a people who were discouraged, and it cures that discouragement by focusing their attention on the glory of God. Zechariah had primary and secondary purposes in delivering his prophecy. The primary purpose was to encourage the people to continue to rebuild the temple and to see that task through to its completion. His secondary purposes, which serve as motivators behind the primary purpose, are to announce God's prophetic program as it concerned the Gentiles. To predict the blessings of the millennial age for Israel, and to outline the events leading up to it.

Zechariah has more messianic prophecies than any other "minor" prophet and makes frequent mention of both the first and second coming of the Messiah. The Angel of the Lord is more prominent in Zechariah than in any other of the prophetic writings. Zechariah is also one of the most devotional of the prophetic books, dwelling more completely on the person and work of Christ than any other of the prophetic writings. Except for the apocalyptic sections (the eight night visions, which we are not going to study this week), its basic language and style are simple and direct.

PERSONAL STUDY

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

Read Zechariah 1:1-6 A call to Return to the Lord.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Zechariah 7:1-8:23 From Fasting to Feasting.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Zechariah 9:1-17 The Lord returns.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Zechariah 10:1-11:17 The Lord will care for Judah.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Zechariah 12:1-14:21 The Second prophetic message.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion! Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you!

He comes triumphant and victorious, but humble and riding on a donkey— on a colt, the foal of a donkey..

Zechariah 9:9 (GNT)

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Zechariah 9

Introductory Remarks:

Zechariah 9-14 forms the third major portion of the book. Chapters 1-6 took place in the second year of Darius and contain Zechariah's eight night visions. Chapters 7-8 took place two years later and give the prophet's answer to a delegation from Bethel concerning some Jewish fasts. But chapters 9-14 occur perhaps 40-50 years later.

The temple has long been completed. Zechariah is now an old man. Israel is still weak and vulnerable, under foreign domination. Nehemiah had not yet returned to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Powerful and aggressive neighbours still surrounded the weak remnant. The people worried and feared what the future might hold for their families and their nation.

To these people Zechariah delivers the message of chapters 9-14, which prophesy of Israel's future. It consists of Israel's coming king, the Messiah, emphasizing His first coming and rejection and then finally being delivered by the second coming of her Messiah and King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Zechariah ends his book with attention towards proper worship and the role of the priesthood in bringing people to God. In this messianic age, the temple will play a bigger part in the lives of everyone. Knowing that God is in the temple will inform every detail of their lives.

In a deep way, this understanding of the temple fulfils Haggai's prophecy that this temple will surpass all others. It might not have the material splendour of Solomon's, but in Zechariah's view it will be spiritually superior because it will assure the people that their entire city is sacred – as well as the world beyond it.

Everything will be sacred. This sacred canopy will also extend over Gentiles as they come to the city to worship. From the Jerusalem temple, then, God is reaching out to bless the whole world. God will simply be All in all.

Discussion questions

Read Zechariah 9:1. What is it that is against the enemies of Israel? What is the significance of this? Discuss.

Read Zechariah 9:9. Describe the day of the king's coming! Why should the daughter of Zion rejoice? Why is He riding on a donkey? How far will the king's dominion reach?

Read Zechariah 9:11-12 and Isaiah 42:7. Why does the Lord say that He has set the prisoners free from the waterless pit (a reference to the exile)? Who were the prisoners? Where will the prisoners return?

Read Zechariah 9:13-15. What will God do with Judah and Ephraim? Who defends God's people against the enemy?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:10. Sometimes God delivers while we do nothing (Exod. 13-14). At other times, we must act while trusting God (1 Sam. 23:2). How can we know the difference? How can we determine the balance between doing all that we can and yet depending on God's strength.

Read Zechariah 9:16-17. What imagery is used to describe what the Lord will do in that day? Write it in your own words.

How do these words of comfort in Zechariah 9 help you to have hope at times when all seems to be lost and in a world that has forgotten about God? Discuss.

Close in prayer

Week 9

LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers

Malachi

Memory Verse:

I am the Lord, and I do not change. ... Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

Malachi 3:6-7

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

Minor Prophets

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The book of Malachi is God's warning through Malachi to tell the people to turn back to God. Malachi wrote the words of the Lord to God's chosen people who had gone astray, especially the priests who had turned from the Lord.

Priests were not treating the sacrifices they were to make to God seriously. Animals with blemishes were being sacrificed even though the law demanded animals without defect (Deuteronomy 15:21). The men of Judah were dealing with the wives of their youth treacherously and wondering why God would not accept their sacrifices. Also, people were not tithing as they should have been (Leviticus 27:30, 32). But in spite of the people's sin and turning away from God, Malachi reiterates God's love for His people (Malachi 1:1-5) and His promises of a coming Messenger (Malachi 2:17-3:5).

As the final book of the Old Testament closes, the pronouncement of God's justice and the promise of His restoration through the coming Messiah is ringing in the ears of the Israelites. This is followed by four hundred years of silence.

PERSONAL STUDY

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

Read Malachi 1:1-5 Israel doubts God's love

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Malachi 1:6-2:9 Breaking the Covenant through blemished sacrifices.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Malachi 2:10-16 Breaking the Covenant through divorce.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Malachi 2:17-3:5 Breaking the Covenant through injustice.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Malachi 3:6-12 Breaking the Covenant through withholding Tithes.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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Read Malachi 3:13-4:6 The coming day of Judgement.

Scripture: (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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Observation: (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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Application: (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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Prayer (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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GROUP DISCUSSION

Prayer

Memory verse:

I am the Lord, and I do not change. ... Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

Malachi 3:6-7

Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

Scripture Reading:

Malachi 3:13 – 4:6

Introductory Remarks:

Eugene H. Petersen says the following about the book of Malachi: *Most of life is not lived in crisis – which is a good thing. Not many of us would be able to sustain a life of perpetual pain or loss or ecstasy or challenge. But a crisis has this to say for it: In a time of crisis everything is important and significant. Life itself is on the line. No word is casual, no action marginal and almost always, God and our relationship with God is on the front page.*

The prophecy of Malachi is made to order for just such conditions. He wakes us up to the crisis of God during the times when the only thing we are concerned with is us. He keeps us on our toes, listening to God, waiting in anticipation for God, ready to respond to God, who is coming to us.

The last sentences of the Old Testament are built around the two greatest men in the Old Testament – Moses and Elijah. This is God’s last appeal to his people in the Old Testament – his last words for 400 years, before the opening of the New Testament.

Discussion questions

Read Malachi 3:13. What charge does the Lord make at the beginning of this verse? What was the response of the people to this charge?

Read Malachi 3:14-15. God describes how the people have spoken against Him. Put the thought of these verses in your own words. Discuss in the group.

Read Malachi 3:16. Who spoke to one another here? How did the Lord respond to those who spoke?

Read 3:17-18. On the day that He acts, God will spare His people. How does God see His people? What is the message of verse 18?

Read Malachi 4:1. What is in store for the proud and wicked in the coming day of judgement?

Read Malachi 4:2-3 What is in store for the righteous on the day of the Lord? What promises are made to those who fear the Lord?

Read Malachi 4:4-6. What exhortation is given in verse 4? Discuss the meaning of this exhortation in the group.

Who would come before the “great and dreadful day of the Lord”? Who do you think this refers to? What would this one, who was to come, do? Discuss the importance of this for your spiritual life.

Close in prayer

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Several resources from <https://www.preceptaustin.org>

