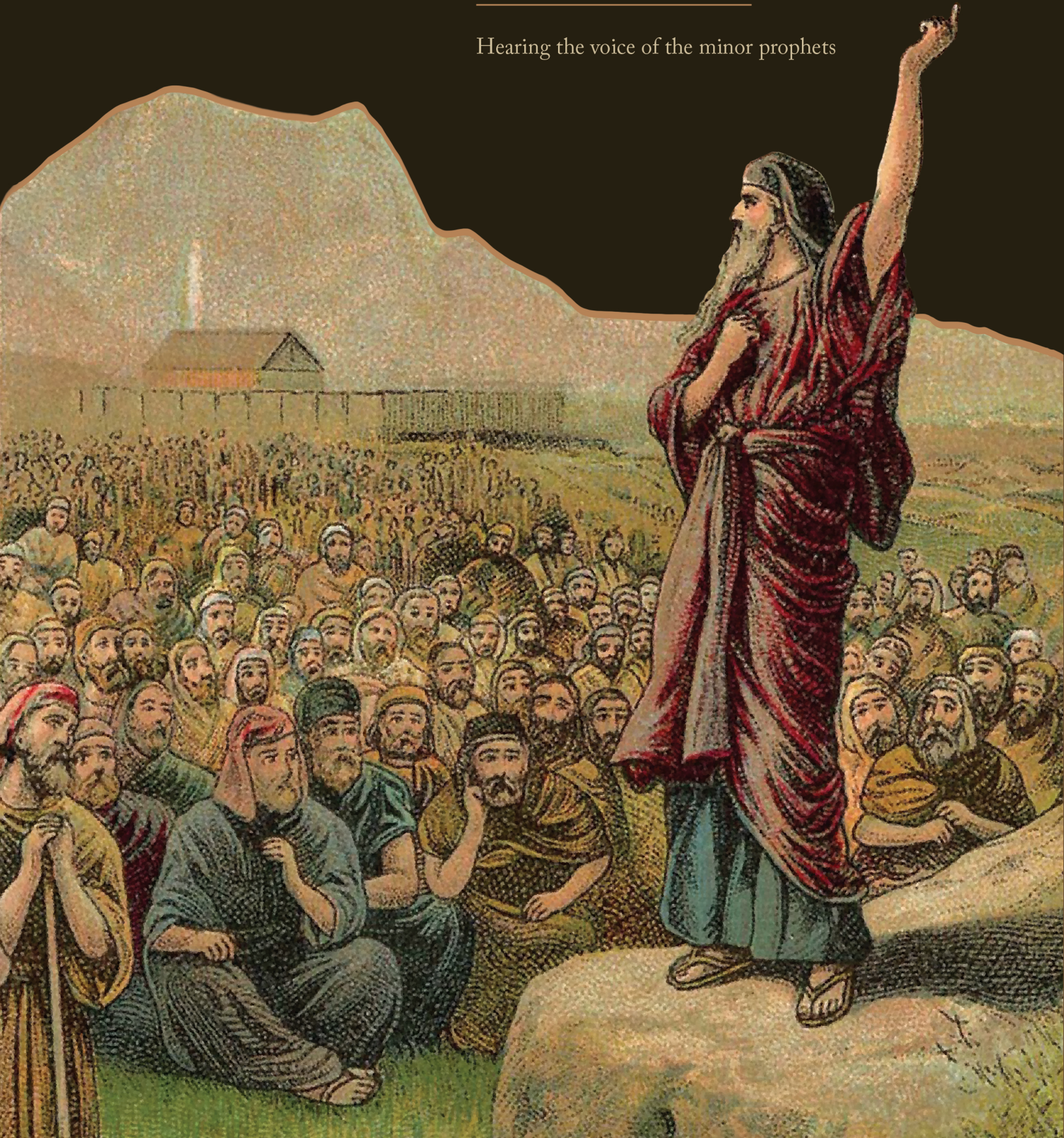


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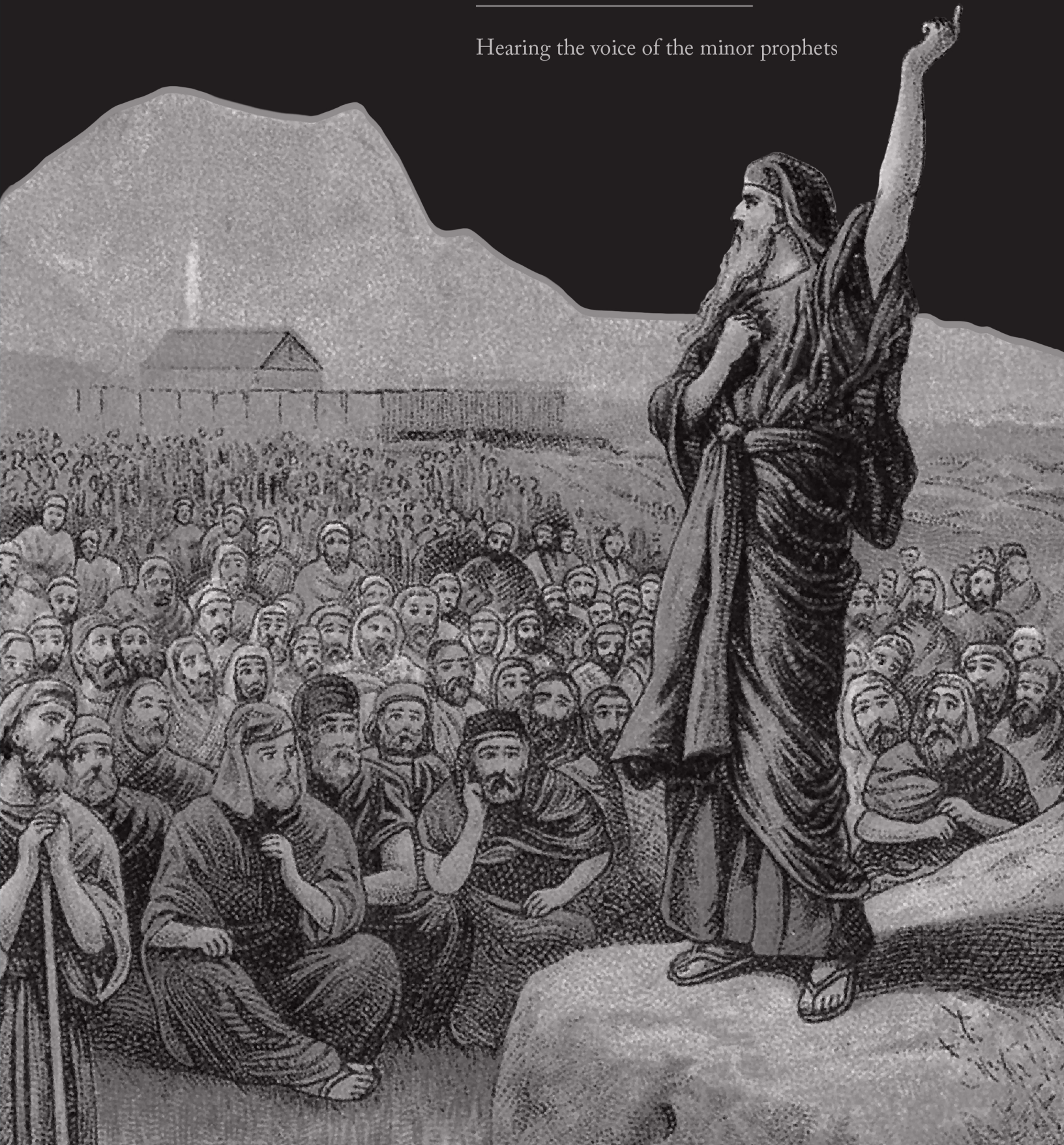
Hearing the voice of the minor prophets



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Hearing the voice of the minor prophets





BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

In the Bible, God reveals His truth about how to have eternal life by becoming a believer in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The believer is a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a true child of God, and one who has been saved by God according to God's grace (undeserved favor). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How does one become a Christian?

- The Bible, God's word, says that eternal life (salvation) is a free gift of God which cannot be earned or deserved (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- However, we also find in God's word that all people are born sinners and cannot save themselves from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death and separation from God. God's requirement is perfection and no one is perfect (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:3-23; Ephesians 2:1-4).
- God tells us in His word that He is holy, meaning that He is perfect and that He is also just, meaning that He gives to sinners what is deserved, and because of His holiness and justice He must punish sinners. But thankfully, the Bible also says that God is loving and merciful and does not take pleasure in punishing sinners (Exodus 34:6-7; Ephesians 2:4-5).
- God has mercy on sinners by not giving them what they deserve. This is only possible because He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the God-man, to be the substitute for sinners bearing the penalty for their sin and satisfying God's justice (John 1:1,14; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 5:8).
- Jesus said that in order for anyone to have eternal life there must be repentance of sins and faith placed in His substitutionary death on the cross to pay for the penalty of one's sins. This faith must be in Jesus Christ alone, not depending on anything else including "good works" (Mark 1:15b; Acts 20:21; Ephesians 2:8-9).

What then is the response to these things if one desires to have eternal life and become a Christian?

1. Pray and ask God to forgive you. The Bible says that you must repent of your sins, being ashamed of them, genuinely regretting and grieving over them, and firmly deciding to make an about-face and turn away from sin and your old lifestyle (Acts 3:19-20).
2. Pray and tell God that you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you. The Bible says that for you to become a Christian, you must place your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to become your substitute and who took the penalty for your sin upon Himself once and for all (John 3:36).

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ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

July 31, 2022 | *Enduring Shame, Trusting God (Obadiah)*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

What counsel would you give someone who planned to exploit others in a time of weakness?

Read Obadiah.

Ask God to use Obadiah to help you understand the struggle of the people of God today.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The victory of sinful nations will not last when God appears in judgment.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our hope must rest in the kingdom of God rather than the temporary victory of man.

MEDITATE

“Will I not on that day, declares the Lord, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of Mount Esau? And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter” (Obadiah 8–9).

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the book of Obadiah and establishes the needed connections between us and his audience that enables us to apply Obadiah’s message today.

Q: *Who was Esau? What was his relationship with the people of Judah?*

Q: *Why would the people of Edom have taken pleasure in Judah's suffering?*

If you read commentaries or Bible dictionary articles on Obadiah, you will quickly discover that most scholars admit we cannot be certain when this book was written. Unlike most of the other prophetic books, Obadiah did not identify the king under whose reign he prophesied. Although he referred to the actions of Edom against Judah, he did not provide enough detail for us to be certain when they took place. Even the name “Obadiah,” which means “servant or worshipper of Yahweh,” offers no help because several Obadiahs are mentioned in the Old Testament.

What we can be certain of is what the book tells us. The nation of Edom saw an opportunity to exploit the people of God at a time of weakness. Judah had been ransacked by a foreign power, and the Edomites saw an opportunity to antagonize them. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's older brother. As was the pattern in Genesis, God chose the younger son of Isaac and Rebekah to be the focus of the covenant promises first made to Abraham (Genesis 25:19–34). Thus, the Old Testament follows the descendants of Jacob, who became the Israelites. Nevertheless, there was a kinship between the Edomites and the Israelites even though there was frequent hostility between them.

Although we cannot be certain when Obadiah was written, there are some indicators that the message of the book transcends a particular event. Whenever the events referred to occurred, it seems as though the author understood them to establish a pattern that would continue into the future and extend to other nations as well (Obadiah 15). The nations are hostile to the people of God. Thus, it is not the specific event or the dating of it that are important but the pattern it establishes.

Q: *What are some differences between the people of Israel, of whom Obadiah is a part, and the church and modern Christians?*

Q: *Why is it important to recognize the differences between Israel and the church when drawing applications from the Old Testament?*

APPLICATION POINT – In the Old Testament, the people of God were generally synonymous with the people of Israel. There were people from outside of Israel who believed in the God of Israel, but not many. And even though

many Israelites were not faithful, including many of the kings, Israel was still God's unique covenant people. In the new covenant, all believers in Christ become part of true Israel, Jews who confess faith in Christ, to form a new people of God (Ephesians 3:6). The church is like Israel in that it is comprised of the people of God who have a covenant relationship with Him, but it is different in that the people of God in the New Testament cannot be described in nationalistic terms. This will be important to remember as we identify and apply principles from Obadiah to our situation. Much of Obadiah concerns Edom's actions against the nation of Israel. To properly apply these principles to ourselves, we must recognize the importance of these principles for the church.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Obadiah's purpose is to describe Edom's sin and God's response. In widening God's response to include all nations (Obadiah 15), the description of Edom's particular sin becomes a warning to all nations who oppose the people of God.

1. EDMO'S SIN

2. 2. GOD'S RESPONSE

GOING DEEPER

+Obadiah highlights four elements of Edom's sin: They were prideful, showed no mercy, refused to stand up for their "brother," and were opportunistic. God's response is twofold. He will judge wicked nations, and He will establish His kingdom.

1. EDMO'S SIN.

■ OBADIAH 1-14

Q: Verse 3 says, "The pride of your heart has deceived you." What were the Edomites prideful about?

Q: Obadiah described Edom with terms indicating height, such as "lofty" and "soar." Why do you think he used this terminology?

Edom was located across the Jordan River and the Dead Sea from Judah. The terrain there is higher and more rugged, which made it harder for invading armies to control the area. It appears the Edomites found prideful satisfaction in being able to defend their territory. Their pride was stoked when they witnessed armies invading Judah. Thus, when Obadiah described the Edomites in “soaring” terms (Obadiah 3–4), there are literal and figurative elements to his words. The Edomites lived higher than the surrounding territory, and they also thought highly of themselves.

Although the Edomites took pride in their territory and its natural defenses, their pride deceived them. No matter how high their dwellings—even if they soared like an eagle or reached the stars—nothing is beyond the reach of the Lord. When the Lord determined to bring Edom down, their dwellings would amount to nothing more than anthills.

Q: *What is pride? How is it deceptive?*

Q: *What does pride reveal about our hearts?*

APPLICATION POINT – Pride is misplaced praise. Human beings are wired to praise. A prideful person directs his praise toward himself. Directing our praise inward distorts reality. The more we praise ourselves, the harder it becomes to find anything worthy of praise outside of us. The less we find worthy of praise outside of ourselves, the more we are offended when others do not share our admiration of ourselves. Pride also creates an inner trust that fails to correspond to reality. The Edomites believed their settlements could not be conquered even though they had been subjected to other nations before and would be again. We allow even minor successes to feed our egos until we are ready to redefine our lives by them because our pride deludes us into trusting ourselves. The only solution to pride is to rediscover the God who is worthy of our praise and allow Him to define us.

Q: *Why did Obadiah mention thieves and grape gatherers?*

Q: *Why would grape gatherers leave gleanings behind?*

In Obadiah 5–7, the prophet fantasized about the destruction of Edom but in a way that also condemned Edom’s actions. As will be discussed later, when the Edomites saw Judah in shambles, they made raids into the land to sweep up anything left. Obadiah condemned the Edomites for showing no mercy to Judah. Thieves only take what they can turn a profit on. Grape gatherers do not concern themselves with securing every last grape from the field.

But Edom lacked even the mercy of thieves and grape gatherers. When Edom raided Judah, they took everything they could get their hands on. They showed no mercy. That is what Obadiah foresaw for the Edomites.

Q: *In what ways do Christians seek the mercy of the world?*

Q: *How does seeking the mercy of the world make us abandon the mercy of God?*

APPLICATION POINT – The world is increasingly hostile to Christian beliefs. Biblical beliefs about life, salvation, sexuality, and even gender are seen as arcane and passé, and those who have no respect for God want Christians to fall in line. The temptation for Christians is to compromise their beliefs in an attempt to gain the mercy of the world. But Obadiah shows that the mercy of the world is cruel and short-lived. If believers compromise on one issue, before long they must compromise on another. Instead of seeking the world's mercy, believers must endure the world's anger and trust in God's mercy. God's mercy, unlike the world's, is unconditional. It does not run out. It takes away sin rather than increasing it.

Q: *Why would Obadiah believe Edom had an obligation to help in Judah's time of need?*

Q: *Instead of coming to Judah's aid, what did Edom do?*

In Obadiah 10–12, the prophet continued his indictment against Edom. As the attack on Judah was carried out, the Edomites looked on from a distance as foreigners forced their way through city gates and pillaged all that was inside. They could have stood up for their relatives, but they stayed far away and let it all happen. Not only did they not intervene, they gloated over Judah's destruction. The downfall of their distant relatives created satisfaction in their hearts. When Judah's need was greatest, Edom applauded instead of intervening. In Obadiah's mind, the familial relationship between the two nations increased Edom's guilt, revealed by the way he frequently referred to Edom as "Esau," their progenitor, and by using the term "brother" (Obadiah 10). Edom had a familial obligation to help Judah. Instead, they stood at a safe distance and applauded.

Q: *Who are you obligated to help in a time of need?*

Q: *Who is your church obligated to help in a time of need?*

APPLICATION POINT – Obadiah believed Edom’s guilt was multiplied because of their familial history. They had an obligation to help their relatives in their time of need. Who are we obligated to help in a time of need? This question is much like the one the lawyer posed to Jesus in Luke 10:25–37. Jesus responded with the parable of the good Samaritan. His point was that we have an obligation to help others in need when we encounter them. Since everyone is made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), we have an obligation to care for anyone we see who is in need. This should be our general disposition. Helping people, however, can be complicated by sin in the world. There are people who look to exploit the generosity of others, much like Paul described in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12. In Thessalonica, some people had stopped working because they believed the return of Jesus was imminent. They spent their time telling others to prepare for His return and claimed their “work” obligated others in the church to meet their needs. These people were capable of meeting their own needs. They were only stirring up descension. Paul did not believe the Thessalonian Christians were obligated to help those who were stirring up trouble (2 Thessalonians 3:10). To do so only serves to hinder the work of God. Paul alluded to a related situation in 1 Timothy 5:3 and 16. The church must care for widows in need, but the obligation of the widow’s family supersedes the church’s. The church cannot allow itself to become a tool to be used by relatives who do not want to care for the widow as they should. Both these situations pertain to issues within the church, but it is reasonable for us to conclude Paul would follow a similar line of reasoning concerning those outside of the church. Although Christians should always have a disposition to help others in need when they can, they must also be cautious of perpetuating sinful behavior by their generosity.

Q: *What actions underlie the prohibitions in Obadiah 13–14?*

Q: *Who were the fugitives and survivors Obadiah described in verse 14?*

In Obadiah 13–14, the prophet made the final accusation against the Edomites, which again comes in the form of a prohibition. The prophet was forbidding them from doing the very things they had already done. The rhetorical effect is to say, “The wrong nature of this behavior should have been obvious.” He condemned the Edomites opportunistic offense against the Judeans. The Edomites had used the desolation caused by another larger nation as an opportunity to do things they would never have dared to do had Judah been at full strength. The Edomites

entered the Judean cities and looted what remained after the invading army had left. They gloated over Judah's sorrows. They set up check points to find survivors who were attempting to return to their ruined cities and fields. They essentially behaved as the big bully's sidekick. After the bully did its damage, the sidekick taunted and demoralized the helpless victims.

Q: *How are we conditioned to say "yes" to every opportunity that comes our way?*

Q: *How should our commitment to God guide the opportunities we consider?*

APPLICATION POINT – The Edomites saw an opportunity for personal gain at Judah's expense, and they would not miss it. Their behavior is a good reminder for us that just because an opportunity presents itself does not mean we should take it. We are trained to think that the easiest or quickest path is the right one. Such a pragmatic outlook can cause us to overlook or compromise God's holy purposes. If an opportunity does not match the holy purposes of God, it is not one we should take. It doesn't matter if you can find a better paying job if it pulls you away from the role God has made for you in your family. It doesn't matter if you get all As in school if you have to sacrifice your prayer and devotional life to do it.

2. GOD'S RESPONSE

■ OBADIAH 15–21

Q: *Why did Obadiah broaden his focus to include all nations in verses 15–16?*

Q: *What did the judgment of the nations mean for the people of God?*

Obadiah's prophecy takes an unexpected turn at verses 15–16. Condemnation at the day of the Lord is expected, but the broadening of that condemnation from Edom to the nations is not. So far, Edom had been the focus of the prophet's attention. He had condemned Edom's actions against the people of God. But now he anticipated the destruction not only of Edom but of all the nations at the day of the Lord. He even attributed the wicked actions of Edom to the nations. The nations shall be repaid in like manner for what they have done, but the book only

focuses on the actions of Edom. The nations are said to have invaded God's holy mountain and drunk from its plunder, but it is only Edom who has done so in this prophecy. All will drink God's judgment poured out from His holy mountain. Obadiah's prophecy against the nations for what only Edom had done seems unfair until his reasoning is understood. Obadiah saw a pattern between what Edom did on this occasion and what the nations who oppose God's people will continue to do until the day God arrives in judgment. As he looked to the future, Obadiah foresaw not only the destruction of Edom but that of everyone who opposes the people of God.

When the nations are judged, the people of God will not only escape God's judgment, but they will become the means by which the nations are judged. Verse 18 calls Jacob a fire and Joseph a flame. Jacob and Joseph are a way of referring to the whole house of Israel. Esau is called stubble that will be consumed by the fire that is Israel, or the people of God. Modern readers should not overlook the rest of the Old Testament story when thinking about these verses. Wayward Israel will not act on their own initiative but will become instruments in God's hands. This judgment will be complete. Unlike the people of God who suffered at the hands of their enemies, there will be no survivors of God's judgment.

Q: *In what ways are the nations opposed to the people of God today?*

Q: *How is God's judgment of the nations a comfort to the people of God?*

APPLICATION POINT – The nations opposed the people of God in Obadiah's time and continue to do so today. But there is a key difference between Obadiah's time and ours. In Obadiah's time, the people of God were essentially synonymous with the people of Israel. They were a political as well as a spiritual entity. Today, the people of God is a spiritual reality, not a political one. The people of God includes everyone who confesses Christ as Savior. No nation can claim to be the people of God in the manner Old Testament Israel did. So, the nations cannot oppose the people of God by invading a specific land or laying siege to a certain city. But the nations still oppose the people of God to the degree that they oppose God's reign over the earth. By opposing God, they oppose God's people. God's coming judgment against those who oppose Him should give comfort to the people of God who are currently enduring the hostilities of the nations. The nations will not be able to protest righteousness forever. They will not be able to deny the reign of God forever. There will be a day when all opposition to God and His people is brought to an end. The people of God must only endure until that day.

❖: *Verse 19 describes the people of Israel receiving their own lands and the lands of the surrounding nations. Why is this important within the context of Obadiah?*

❖: *Verse 20 mentions exiles. Who are these exiles? Why is it significant that they possess the land of Israel?*

Although Obadiah is a book mainly about judgment, it ends with a note of hope for the people of God. The Israelites will return from their exile, and the land that was taken away from them will be regained. The people of Israel will obtain control over the surrounding nations, including Edom, all of which will comprise a kingdom that will be recognized as God's. Although Judah lay in shambles and the Edomites exploited the fallen nation, a day will come in which the people of God will find themselves under God's rule in His kingdom.

❖: *How has the vision of the kingdom of God expanded beyond what is reported in Obadiah 19-21?*

❖: *Why was it important for Obadiah to mention exiles returning when there may not yet have been any exiles from the land?*

APPLICATION POINT – The final sentence is crucial for understanding Obadiah's entire prophecy because it focuses the attention on God. The kingdom described at the conclusion of the book is God's kingdom. It will be gained by God's power. The judgment leading to this kingdom is His judgment of the nations. It is not the role of the people of God to bring judgment on the nations or to establish His kingdom. The people of God must simply endure through the hostilities of the nations until the time when God will intervene.

NEXT STEPS

Obadiah is a book about enduring sorrow while waiting for God to act. That is the challenge you need to think about over the next week. We now live in a culture that looks on Christian belief negatively. It is not just that people do not believe. They see Christianity as an obstacle to society moving to where they want it to go morally, spiritually, and politically. As this sentiment spreads, Christians will encounter more and more hostility. The challenge now is to engrain the core beliefs of Christianity so that as opposition rises, believers may endure until God arrives in judgment. Focus on understanding the core features of the Christian faith, such as the exclusivity of the gospel and the inerrancy of God's Word. Gain a firm understanding of the implications that Christian belief has in a culture that is becoming more hostile to it.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Father, help me to endure opposition. Help me make my convictions firm. Help me seek refuge in your coming.

-Lord Jesus, your resurrection has inaugurated the kingdom Obadiah foresaw. Help me to trust in the power of your resurrection in the face of opposition to my faith.

-Father, open my eyes to the ways in which I act like Edom. Help me to treat others with justice.

-God, fill my heart with mercy for those who are in need. Help me to be discerning.

ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

August 7, 2022 | Seeking Repentance, Finding Reconciliation (Joel)

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

How would you define repentance?

Read Joel.

Pray that this lesson in Joel helps you see the judgment and mercy of God in a new way.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Israel was facing judgment, but if they repented, God would reconcile them to Himself.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

God is always willing to forgive us if we are repentant.

MEDITATE

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:12–13).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the main theme of Joel, helping to set the context for the remainder of the lesson.

Q: *Why would a locust invasion be a sign of God's wrath?*

Q: *Why would it be harder for modern audiences to understand the fear of a locust invasion?*

It was like a shadow covering the earth, but there were no clouds overhead. This is a description of the cataclysmic plague of locusts that is the backdrop of the book of Joel. It can be hard for modern audiences to appreciate how frightful a locust invasion was for ancient peoples. Most of us are far removed from the production of our food. Gardening is a hobby. If our garden is eaten by bugs, we are sad that it did not work out and then go to the store to buy what we need. But ancient peoples knew that the difference between a good crop and a poor crop was the difference between life and death.

The locust invasion described in the book of Joel was the worst in living memory. The locusts covered every field, leaving nothing behind. Israel was already enduring a devastating drought and consuming fires (Joel 1:19–20). Now a massive swarm of locusts threatened to devour what little crops remained. In the midst of it all, the prophet Joel declared this to be only a hint of the devastation to come if Israel persisted in her sin. The locust invasion was not a random occurrence. It was a judgment sent by God upon a sinful and rebellious people. If they continued to sin, the armies of locusts would be replaced by invading armies seeking to destroy Israel and claim the land for themselves. They had only one hope. If they repented of their sin, God would relent and bless rather than condemn them. The locusts were only a harbinger of things to come if Israel refused to seek God in repentance.

Q: *What is the difference between repentance and being sorry?*

Q: *How is repentance different from regret?*

APPLICATION POINT – Joel featured the theme of repentance in his prophecy. If the people would repent, God was ready to be reconciled with them. Understanding repentance, then, is crucial for understanding Joel. Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin and a determination to not continue in it but to walk in obedience to God. It is important to understand the theological character of repentance and how it is distinguished from more familiar concepts. For example, if you were to say “sorry” to someone, you are acknowledging the wrongness of

your actions, as you would in repentance, but “sorry” does not imply you need to change the course of your life. “Sorry” acknowledges a mistake that caused some harm to the other person. But after the matter is resolved, you plan to continue along as before, just with more consideration of others. “Repentance,” on the other hand, is part of a theological narrative that assumes the existence of a holy God to whom we are accountable. It assumes our sin and our need for God’s forgiveness. Words such as “sorry” and “regret” do not contain these theological underpinnings.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Joel contains three chapters. The first part of each chapter contains a warning of approaching judgment, either for Israel (chapters 1 and 2) or the nations (chapter 3). The second part of each chapter calls for repentance and anticipates a restoration and reconciliation of Israel. This lesson traces several key theological themes for understanding Joel’s message.

1. THE SOVEREIGN AND POWERFUL GOD
2. THE WRATHFUL GOD
3. THE GRACIOUS GOD
4. THE RESTORING GOD
5. THE SPIRIT OF GOD

GOING DEEPER

+This section explores each of the theological themes above, which illustrate the need for and the blessing of repentance.

1. THE SOVEREIGN AND POWERFUL GOD

Q: *How do the locust invasions illustrate God’s power [Joel 2:25]?*

Q: *How is God’s control over the nations apparent in Joel [Joel 3:1–16]?*

Everything that happened in the book of Joel can be traced back to God's power to rule over His creation. The drought and fires occurred because God withheld rain, but if the people repented, God would send the rain needed for abundant crops (Joel 2:23–24). The locust armies that destroyed Israel were sent by Him as a warning to repent (Joel 2:25). God decides the destiny of the nations (Joel 3:1–16). We may be tempted to see these things as mere chance, but Joel emphasized God's control over all the seemingly random occurrences in creation. Even the heavens can be manipulated for His purposes. He can darken the sun and turn the moon to blood as a sign of His coming judgment (Joel 2:31). If Israel just repented, God would do wondrous works among them and protect them from shame (Joel 2:26–27).

Q: *How does God's work in the seemingly random events of life give you the confidence needed to live in holiness and endure in faithfulness?*

Q: *How would you approach life differently if God had no control over His creation?*

APPLICATION POINT – From our perspective, the world often seems random. Major global events develop from the whims of governments and dictators. They seemingly could have made different decisions just as easily. Day-to-day occurrences are completely unpredictable. We do our best to make plans, but they are always subject to change and rarely take shape the way we anticipate. It is easy for us to think we experience life this way because this is the way life is, but Joel, and the rest of the Bible, emphasizes God's hand in directing every part of His creation. Things may seem random to us, but nothing is random to God. He is in control of the unexpected job offer you receive. He is in control of the unexpected cancer diagnosis you don't want. This should give us immense comfort and confidence in His purposes as long as we realize one thing. God's goal for your life is not maximum comfort and freedom from difficult challenges. God's goal is to conform you into the image of Jesus Christ, whether through blessings or trials. Just as God used a locust plague to push Israel to repentance, it is possible that the biggest challenges you face are intended by God to push you further into trusting Him for your sanctification. Although we cannot always see God's purposes clearly, we can know He is in control of our lives to transform us into the image of Jesus.

2. THE WRATHFUL GOD

Q: *What is the “day of the Lord” that is coming near [Joel 2:1]?*

Q: *How are the locust swarms an instrument of God’s wrath?*

God’s wrath and His grace are the two themes at the center of the book of Joel. Everything else wraps around them. The locusts swarms are an obvious sign of God’s wrath. The invasion is first described in Joel 1:2–12. The swarms had invaded and destroyed Israel’s crops. It appears that this swarm was unusual in that it contained four types of locusts (Joel 1:4), making it particularly severe. This first description focuses on its severity. Nothing connects the locust invasion with God’s wrath until the call to repentance in Joel 1:13–20, but that call reveals that the locusts were a warning of an even greater judgment to come.

The second description of the locusts is from Joel 2:1–11, and it immediately links the locusts with God’s coming wrath by referencing “the day of the Lord” (Joel 2:1). This expression is frequent in the Minor Prophets and alludes to a day of terrible destruction. Since we are in Christ, we typically think of God’s coming with hope, but God’s coming will be a day of agony and sorrow for those who have rebelled against God. Joel also speaks of the wrath of God against nations (Joel 3:1–16). Israel faced God’s wrath because they broke God’s covenant, but non-covenant peoples will face God’s wrath as well.

Q: *What can Christians learn from the wrath of God in Scripture?*

Q: *Why is God’s wrath an important attribute?*

APPLICATION POINT – Most people prefer to think of God’s love or grace instead of His wrath, but all of God’s attributes are interconnected. If an attribute such as wrath is denied or neglected, our appreciation for all of God’s attributes will suffer. We cannot appreciate God’s holiness apart from understanding the justice of His wrath upon that which is not holy. We cannot appreciate God’s grace apart from understanding that His grace saves us from His wrath. God’s wrath shows us that He takes sin seriously, so we must also take sin seriously. We should never think sin is not a big deal or that some sins are “little.” God’s wrath against sin keeps us from ever presuming upon His grace. We can never think it is okay to sin because we are

covered by the blood of Jesus. Such an attitude mocks the agony Christ endured on the cross. God's wrath is a crucial attribute for understanding who God is and the basics of what it means to believe in Him.

3. THE GRACIOUS GOD

Q: *Where else are the statements in Joel 2:13 found (with few alterations)?*

Q: *God was in the midst of judging the people with a locust plague, but He was ready to forgive them "even now" (Joel 2:12). What does this reveal about the nature of God's grace?*

Since God's wrath is real, God's grace is precious. Even as Joel emphasized the coming wrath of God, he also drew attention to the grace God makes available upon repentance. Each passage of judgment is followed by a plea for repentance and an affirmation that God's grace is available to those who repent. Even as God dispensed judgment in the form of the locust plague, He was prepared "even now" to receive the Israelites in repentance (Joel 2:12).

The most remarkable statement of God's grace comes at Joel 2:13. This passage contains a series of statements frequently repeated throughout the Old Testament, appearing first in Exodus 34:6–7. Moses was renewing the covenant between God and Israel after Israel quickly fell into sin following their commitment to the previous covenant. The passage goes on to describe the certainty of God's wrath upon the guilty. But Joel omitted this element of the statement. He was not denying or ignoring what Exodus says about God's judgment but was holding up the possibility of God's grace for those who repented of sin (Joel 2:14). Joel wanted his audience to know it is in God's character to show grace to repentant sinners.

Q: *How does Joel 2:13 present a view of God that is different from what many people anticipate from the Old Testament?*

Q: *Although the locust plague was underway, the people could still repent and receive relief. When is it too late for people to repent of sin?*

APPLICATION POINT – Many people describe God in the Old Testament as a God of wrath, but this is an incomplete picture of how the Old Testament reveals God’s character. The Old Testament does frequently warn of His judgment, but it also reveals His concern and grace for those who call upon Him. No one is beyond God’s grace. The Israelites were already enduring God’s judgment through the locust plague, but He was prepared to show His grace in the midst of it. We should never think of ourselves or anyone else as being beyond God’s grace.

❓: *Why did Joel tell the people to “rend your hearts and not your garments” (Joel 2:13)?*

❓: *Joel described the absence of the grain and drink offerings in Joel 1:9. Why was God angry at the people if they were still making these offerings?*

Although Joel yearned for the people to repent and receive God’s grace, he warned them not to mistake outward signs of religious devotion without authentic repentance. “Rend your hearts and not your garments” (Joel 2:13). In the Old Testament, tearing one’s clothes was a sign of deep turmoil and distress. Such actions were a fitting sign of repentance, but Joel knew the people had become adept at performing outward signs without the accompanying inward conviction. Such outward signs are useless without an underlying change of heart.

There are other signs in Joel that the people had become adept at outward signs of religiosity but without the accompanying heartfelt affection for God. In Joel 1:9, Joel said the grains and produce needed for the grain and drink offerings were consumed by the locusts. The people had persisted in making sacrifices to God, but even in keeping the sacrifices, they were failing to keep the covenant. Making sacrifices did not save the people from the locusts. Their sacrifices had become empty symbols because they were not accompanied by hearts committed to God. Such behavior reveals the callousness of sin.

❓: *Why are people prone to emphasize visible displays of affection for God even when their hearts do not truly seek obedience?*

❓: *How do you show outward signs of repentance and devotion to God? How could these outward signs become a cover for the absence of inward repentance?*

APPLICATION POINT – Just like the Israelites, it is easy for us to put confidence in our outward displays of religiosity even while the needed inward change remains absent. It is not even that we are trying to deceive others while we know the truth of our unrepentance. We are willingly deceiving ourselves! At the day of the Lord, many will point to their religious practices and external performances as evidence of their internal commitment only to realize they have been deceiving themselves (Matthew 7:21–23). There is no way to test the authenticity of outward actions. But you can examine the condition of your own heart. As you do so, it is important to keep the gospel of grace in mind. None of your outward actions earn your salvation. Everything you do outwardly must come from a heart that already knows it is forgiven. It is also crucial for you to ask God to reveal areas of unrepentance in your heart. We cannot even examine the condition of our own hearts apart from His grace.

4. THE RESTORING GOD

Q: *How did creation [the locusts and beyond] work against Israel in the book of Joel?*

Q: *How did Israel's repentance change this?*

In Genesis 1–2, God created both humanity and the natural world and gave humanity dominion over the natural world. In Genesis 3, humanity's sin not only created separation with God but also created hostility between humanity and the natural world. In Joel, we see the outworking of this hostility. Israel was continuing in sin, and nature worked against Israel as a judgment for their sins. The locust plague was the immediate concern, but the devastation the locusts brought upon the land further illustrates how creation had become hostile toward Israel. The fruit trees were striped and barren (Joel 1:7, 12) and the fields were destroyed (Joel 1:10). The destruction obliterated Israel's food supply and the means by which they worshipped God. They were not able to make the regular grain and drink offerings required in the Pentateuch (Joel 1:9). Joel imagined the land of Israel as a vast wasteland unfit for habitation or worship (Joel 1:19–20).

But this was not the end of Joel's message. If Israel repented, God might relent from the disaster He had brought upon the land and from His judgment of Israel. God would not merely cease the devastation. He would restore the land to its former productivity. He would leave the people's grain and drink offerings for worship (Joel 2:14). The land would regain all its prior productivity and more (Joel 3:18). Even what was lost in the years of the locust invasion would be returned (Joel 2:25). What Israel had lost due to the judgment of their sin they could regain when God restored their land after their repentance.

Q: *How does Joel's vision of restoration provide hope in a sinful world?*

Q: *God did not merely relent from Israel's punishment. He restored their land. What implications does this have for our redemption?*

APPLICATION POINT – Joel concludes with the people of God dwelling in God's land forever. The pain and despair brought by the locust plague were no longer remembered and even undone. This is an Old Testament picture of what eternity with God will be. He will restore humanity to what He created them to be. The effects of sin will be undone. There will be nothing sin has taken away in this world that will not be replaced a thousand times greater in the next. God's people will no longer live in fear of His judgment but will live in obedience to His will.

4. THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Q: *Where is Joel 2:28-32 quoted in the New Testament?*

Q: *How is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit linked to repentance?*

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came on certain individuals to perform specific tasks, such as when Bezalel constructed the Tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-5). Moses longed for a day when all of God's people would be given the Holy Spirit (Numbers 11:29), but that day did not come during the Old Testament times. Joel anticipated the arrival of the day when God's Spirit would rest on every person who follows Him (Joel 2:28). This day will be a prelude to the "great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). During this time, those who have received the Spirit and called upon the name of God will be saved (Joel 2:32). Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21 to explain what happened at Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples received the Holy Spirit. They did not receive the Holy Spirit temporarily but permanently. Pentecost is the fulfillment of what Joel prophesied. Paul also quoted Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:12-13 to show that in salvation there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. Since the Spirit is poured out on all flesh, Paul reasoned that both Jews and Gentiles can receive saving faith.

Q: *How does receiving the Holy Spirit change how believers under the new covenant relate to God versus those under the old covenant?*

Q: *How does the Holy Spirit promote unity within the church?*

APPLICATION POINT – Since new covenant believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they are able to recognize the love of God to a far greater degree than those under the old covenant. The love of God leads new covenant believers to a greater obedience because their obedience is based upon a full revelation of Jesus Christ as Savior (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit helps us submit to God's Word, exercise our gifts for the church, and worship Him with whole-hearted devotion.

NEXT STEPS

This lesson has examined key theological themes in the book of Joel. Repentance is closely tied to each one. It is crucial for believers to consider areas of their lives that are in need of repentance. Persisting in unconfessed sin stifles spiritual growth and obedience. Take some time this week to reflect on actions or attitudes from which you need to repent. Confess these sins to God and ask Him to draw you into closer obedience to Him.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Father, you hold all things in your hands. Nothing takes you by surprise. Nothing is too hard for you.

-Lord, help me to understand your wrath. Help me to have an appropriate fear of it. Help me to rejoice in the Savior who took your wrath upon Himself for my sake.

-God, help me see when I mistake outward signs of religious devotion for an inward change of heart. Change my heart so that all that I do flows from a heart that seeks to know you more.

-God, I confess my sins to you. Help me to repent so I may be conformed to the image and likeness of your Son.



ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

August 14, 2022 | Offended by Grace (Jonah)

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Write down some ways in which God's grace is evident in your life. How has God been better to you than you deserve? Think of both spiritual and physical blessings.

Read Jonah.

Ask God to use Jonah, in its simplicity and complexity, to transform your understanding of grace.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jonah was offended when the grace shown to him was shown to those he believed were not worthy of it.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

If we are offended by God's grace to others, we do not understand grace, why we need it, or why we receive it.

MEDITATE

"And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11).

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the main theme of Jonah and how the book's message speaks to modern audiences.

Q: What do we learn about Jonah from 2 Kings 14:23-25? Was the king under whom Jonah ministered a good or a wicked king?

Q: *How does the genre of Jonah differ from most other prophetic books?*

Jonah is unique among the Minor Prophets. The other books in the Minor Prophets are collections of prophecies and oracles made by those prophets. The book of Jonah, however, recounts a significant episode from the prophet's life. The prophet Jonah is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 as ministering during the reign of Jeroboam II and predicting that God would allow Israel to regain control over contested lands.

As an historical narrative, Jonah's message is slightly more difficult to ascertain than the other prophets. When reading historical narratives, we are supposed to either learn the same lessons learned by the characters or look for clues concerning the author's main point in writing the story. For the book of Jonah, we cannot be certain whether the prophet ever understood the message of the book that bears his name. The book ends by commanding Jonah to consider the same message it wants us to consider. Is God not free to show mercy to whomever He wishes? We do not know how Jonah would have answered this question, but at the end of his book, he had not yet arrived at the answer God sought.

The key to understanding the book of Jonah is to understand its structure. It is divided evenly into two halves, each highlighting how Jonah responded to God's grace, at first to himself and then to the Ninevites. Jonah was thrilled to receive God's grace, but he was offended when God offered grace to the wicked Ninevites. Jonah's attitude toward God's grace reveals several deficiencies in his understanding of it. Reading the book of Jonah gives us an opportunity to examine our own lives for these deficiencies.

Q: *Why was Jonah offended by God's grace to the Ninevites?*

Q: *What is the key element of God's grace that Jonah either had forgotten or never knew?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jonah's reaction to God's grace reveals that he did not understand it. He believed he was worthy of God's grace but hated the thought of God being gracious to the Ninevites. He deemed them unworthy of God's grace. He believed God's grace was earned by righteous deeds or ethical living. The narrative of his book, however, reveals there is nothing anyone can ever do to earn God's grace. God is free to show grace to whomever He will. This is crucial for Christians to understand. We do not receive God's grace because we were

the most worthy candidates. We can never presume God would refrain from showing grace to those who have failed to meet His holy standard. If we truly understood ourselves, we would understand that we failed to meet this standard.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The main idea of Jonah is God's freedom to be gracious whenever and to whomever He wills. This theme, and Jonah's resistance to it, occurs throughout the book. This study will consider each chapter of Jonah in light of this theme.

1. MISUNDERSTANDING GRACE RUINS OUR WITNESS TO THE WORLD.
2. WE CAN HAVE RIGHT THEOLOGY AND STILL MISS THE POINT OF GRACE.
3. GOD'S GRACE IS THE FOUNDATION OF MISSIONS.
4. SELF-CENTEREDNESS KEEPS US FROM CELEBRATING GOD'S GRACE.

GOING DEEPER

+This section will go through each of the four points listed above and draw applications from them for living grace-centered lives.

1. MISUNDERSTANDING GRACE RUINS OUR WITNESS TO THE WORLD.

■ JONAH 1

Q: What other prophetic figures resisted God's call? How are they different from Jonah?

Q: How did Jonah's resentment diminish his capabilities as God's prophet?

The book of Jonah begins like so many other prophecies. The word of the Lord came to the prophet. But then the book takes an unexpected turn. Jonah was told to go and prophesy against Nineveh, but instead, he boarded a ship headed for Tarshish, effectively as far away from Nineveh as possible in the ancient world. Other prophets and leaders resisted God's calling on their lives. Moses didn't believe he could speak well enough to become a leader of God's people (Exodus 3:11–4:17). Gideon didn't think he was strong enough (Judges 6:11–18). Jeremiah thought he was too young (Jeremiah 1:6). Though they resisted for a time, they all eventually submitted to God's call. But not Jonah! Jonah headed out of town, yes, but in the opposite direction of where God had called him. The book that bears his name doesn't even suggest that he debated with God as the others had done.

Jonah's reason for fleeing God's call is not immediately clear, but by the end of the book, we discover why. He could not bear the thought of God showing grace to a people he hated (Jonah 4:1–2). His resistance to God's command reveals the main theme of the book. He misunderstood the nature of God's grace. We will discover more about Jonah's misunderstanding as the book progresses, but what is immediately clear is that misunderstanding God's grace ruined Jonah's capacity to be God's witness to the world. This is evident enough in that Jonah fled from the place God had called him to witness. But in the remainder of chapter 1, we see this theme unfolding further.

To thwart Jonah's escape, God sent a life-threatening storm upon the ship he was fleeing in (Jonah 1:4). The sailors were in danger and saw their need for divine intervention, but Jonah was asleep (Jonah 1:5). He was not even awake to plead for the sailors' lives before God. Even when the captain awakened him (Jonah 1:6), he did not offer any prophetic words to the sailors. They had to resort to casting lots to discover that Jonah was the reason for the storm (Jonah 1:7). Old Testament prophets typically confronted others with moral and covenantal failures, but it was the sailors who confronted Jonah's failure to obey God's word (Jonah 1:8–10). As God's prophet, he should have known God's capacity to relent in response to human repentance better than anyone, but it was the captain who suggested the possibility of divine mercy (Jonah 1:6). Perhaps the most shocking element of this episode is the solution Jonah proposed. He told the sailors to throw him overboard to find relief from the storm (Jonah 1:12). He suggested the sailors make a human sacrifice to appease the wrath of God, preferring to die rather than repent of his disobedience. Jonah was a pathetic prophet, and his witness to those who were in need of a word from God was severely compromised because he refused to come to terms with God's grace.

Q: *How can you avoid becoming like Jonah in your witness?*

Q: *Why must God's grace always be central to your testimony?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jonah had nothing to offer the sailors because he did not understand God's grace. Apart from God's grace, we have nothing to offer those who struggle with sin, believers and non-believers alike.

If we are not fixed in God's grace, our testimony will always be laced with legalism, and legalism offers no hope to those who desperately need the grace of God. If, like Jonah, you struggle to understand the importance of God's grace and allow it to remain central in your life, your ministry will always fall short of the gospel. Of course, God is able to work even through your failures, as he did with Jonah and the sailors. But if you are a follower of Christ, you want God to work through your witness, not in spite of it.

2. WE CAN HAVE RIGHT THEOLOGY AND STILL MISS THE POINT OF GRACE.

■ JONAH 2

Q: *What did Jonah get right in his prayer inside the fish?*

Q: *What did Jonah's prayer lack?*

After the sailors threw Jonah overboard, he was swallowed by a great fish. As horrific as this sounds, the fish proved to be an agent of God's grace for Jonah. Regardless of whether it was by natural means or divine intervention, Jonah was kept alive inside the fish, where he recognized his need and prayed to God. His prayer is recorded in Jonah 2.

Jonah's prayer demands careful attention. In his time of need, we see the prophet addressing God and declaring his confidence in God's salvation. And then, God did indeed rescue him! Jonah 2 concludes with the fish vomiting Jonah out on the land. Our instinct is to assume Jonah saw the direness of his situation and prayed to God out of a changed heart, and then God responded to Jonah's prayer and saved his life. It is possible that Jonah thought this too! When God's call to Nineveh came a second time, Jonah obeyed immediately (Jonah 3:1–3). Many people reading Jonah 2 conclude that the prophet had repented, and all was well.

A closer examination of Jonah's prayer, however, reveals some concerning matters. Although Jonah did say some wonderful things in his prayer, what is absent is perhaps most revealing of his heart's true condition. He never explicitly repented for his refusal to go to Nineveh. He never admitted to having done anything wrong at all. He merely acknowledged the direness of his situation and looked to God for salvation. He may have even insinuated that God was to blame for his predicament. "You cast me into the deep ... all your waves and your billows passed over me" (Jonah 2:3). Furthermore, Jonah's prayer reveals continued confidence in the religious structures already in place in his life. He longed to look upon God's temple (Jonah 2:4). The temple remained

central in his hope for deliverance (Jonah 2:7). We should not forget that the temple was in Jerusalem, and the people often regarded it as a sign of God's unwavering commitment to them (Jeremiah 7:4). Finally, Jonah also put down those he saw as unworthy of God's love. He derided the members of other nations as worshippers of "vain idols" who had neglected God's love (Jonah 2:8). Of course, Jonah's words are true, but what do idolaters have to do with Jonah's predicament? He was essentially saying, "Look at me! When I'm in trouble I cry to God! I don't worship idols!" as if to say, "I deserve God's forgiveness because I am not an idolater." This is why he did not want to go to Tarshish in the first place. Those idolaters did not deserve God's grace.

This isn't the only time Jonah said wonderful, true things about God, but we have to wonder if he truly realized what he was saying. When the sailors asked Jonah about his God, he responded, "I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9). What wonderful theology! But the man saying it had fled to the sea to get away from his God! When asked why he was angry, Jonah said, "Because I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Jonah 4:2). What wonderful theology! But these qualities of God made Jonah angry? They certainly did not make him angry while he was in the fish. Jonah is a man we expect good theology from, but we might wonder if he really believed everything he said.

❓: *How can someone have good theology without understanding God's grace?*

❓: *How can you ensure that good theology leads to understanding God's grace more fully?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jonah shows us it is possible to have good theology and say all the right things about God but still miss the point of His grace. This is a tragedy we don't want to be true of our own lives. We don't avoid it by disdaining good theology. We should want to think rightly about God. We should want to know as much as we can about Him. The key is, however, to ensure we always keep God's grace at the center of what we know and think and believe about Him. We can never make the mistake of thinking our good theology is what is most important or what will save us. Only God's grace, mediated to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, can do that.

3. GOD'S GRACE IS THE FOUNDATION OF MISSIONS.

■ JONAH 3

Q: *What is the content of Jonah's message in Nineveh?*

Q: *Would you expect this message to have much impact? Why or why not?*

When God told Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh, he obeyed. He visited about a third of the city, and declared “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). Jonah’s message was hardly eloquent. It is only five words in the original Hebrew. Nor was his message aimed at repentance. But the sparseness of the message did not hinder the Ninevites’ response. They heard Jonah’s warning and turned from their evil ways. One of the main points of Jonah 3 is to capture the extent of the people’s response. They repented universally. Everyone from the lowest peasant to the king repented of the evil they had done. Their repentance was both ritual and ethical. All the people and even the animals donned sackcloth, a garment for people in spiritual and emotional turmoil (Jonah 3:8). They also turned from their evil ways (Jonah 3:8, 10). The third chapter of Jonah concludes by saying that when God saw the people’s response, He relented of the disaster He intended to do. Nineveh, at least for the moment, was spared God’s judgement. This does not mean the Ninevites were saved or that they converted to Yahweh-ism. There is no evidence for this, but whatever the scope of their response, it was enough for God to delay His judgment of the city. The Ninevites turning from their evil ways was enough to find God’s temporary grace.

Q: *How can your church maintain a balance between strategically engaging in local and foreign missions and recognizing that the success of those missional endeavors rests in God's hands?*

Q: *How is it comforting to know that God's mission does not ultimately rest in our hands?*

APPLICATION POINT – Missions is a central concern for all Christians and will be until Christ returns. Although Jonah was no missionary, the book of Jonah does reveal God’s concern for those outside of His covenant people. The sailors and the Ninevites appealed to God’s grace for salvation from their situations. Again, we cannot be certain they became believing converts to Yahweh. This seems unlikely. But God sparing them from the calamity they were facing anticipates the way God will draw followers of Christ from all nations (Matthew 28:19; Revelation 5:9). The book of Jonah reveals that God’s actions on behalf of the nations ultimately rests in His grace. Jonah’s message could hardly have warranted such a response from the Ninevites, and as we will see clearly in chapter

4, he certainly didn't want it to. But the Ninevites responded to his message anyway, hoping for God's grace, and God gave His grace in response to the Ninevites turning away from their evil deeds.

This informs our missional endeavors today. Churches should plan to strategically engage their communities and the world. We should develop methods of evangelism and intentionally engage the lost around us with the gospel. We should send missionaries to foreign countries where the work of God is either absent or impeded, and believers remaining here should give generously to these efforts. But we should never think the mission of God rests on our efforts. We are the means by which God accomplishes His mission, but the mission rests on the grace He gives to all who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. We can pursue our role in God's mission knowing that the results ultimately depend on Him, not us. We are only called to be faithful.

4. SELF-CENTEREDNESS KEEPS US FROM CELEBRATING GOD'S GRACE.

■ JONAH 4

Q: *Why did Jonah wish to die?*

Q: *What lesson was God trying to teach Jonah with the fig tree?*

If you are unfamiliar with the story, Jonah's reaction to Nineveh's repentance and God's grace must come as a shock. We should think Jonah, of all people, should rejoice at God's grace toward those who opposed His will. He was God's prophet, after all. Jonah certainly pleaded for grace and rejoiced at the idea of receiving it in the belly of the fish, but God's grace upon the Ninevites drew his resentment instead of his joy. He had hoped Nineveh would be obliterated in forty days, as he had warned. There was no room for God's grace to the Ninevites in Jonah's world.

After expressing his discontent with God's mercy on the Ninevites, Jonah sat down outside the city to see what would become of it (Jonah 4:5). Perhaps he held out hope that the city's new attitude would be short-lived, and God would, in fact, bring about the city's sudden destruction. This provided an opportunity for God to reveal what was wrong with Jonah's attitude about grace.

The climate of the arid ancient Near East could turn harsh quickly and become unpleasant and even dangerous to anyone who could not find shelter. Jonah was in a precarious situation outside of Nineveh. To help shield him from the harsh midday heat, God appointed a plant to grow over him for shade. The plant made Jonah glad (Jonah 4:6). He was happy to have relief from the heat of the sun, just as he was happy to have been delivered from drowning in the sea and from the fish. God then appointed a worm to eat and kill the plant and a “scorching east wind” to overwhelm Jonah (Jonah 4:7–8). Jonah was angry that God’s protection had been removed from him. The object lesson with the plant and the scorching wind illustrates that Jonah had not objected to God’s grace when he was the recipient but only when it was given to those he thought did not deserve it. It also reveals Jonah’s inconsistent view of God’s grace. He didn’t do anything to make the plant grow (Jonah 4:10). He did not deserve that grace, but he was happy for it and angry when it was removed. His response shows how self-centered he was and how callous his heart was toward Nineveh. Jonah cared more about the desert plant he had nothing to do with than human beings created in God’s image.

❓ *Why does self-centeredness keep you from finding joy in God’s grace in the lives of others?*

❓ *Why does the book of Jonah end with a question? What impact does the question have on us?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jonah’s self-centeredness kept him from celebrating God’s grace. When our focus is only on ourselves and the slightest deviation from what we want turns us into a tailspin, we cannot appreciate God’s grace in the lives of others. In fact, we will resent God’s grace for others because we think we are more deserving of it than anyone else. Your reaction to God’s grace in the lives of others is a good indication of the condition of your heart. If you resent God’s grace rather than celebrate it, you, like Jonah, have replaced God as the center of existence.

We also must be prepared to ask the question with which Jonah concluded the book. “Shall I not pity Nineveh, that great city?” (Jonah 4:11). God did not ask this question because He needed an answer. It is rhetorical. It is meant to say that since God pities the nations, so should we. Just as God left Jonah to ponder this question, He leaves us to ponder it as well.

NEXT STEPS

Identify an area of your life in which you need to practice more self-control. What do you always say yes to when the opportunity arrives? How is this lack of self-control disrupting your walk of faith? What steps do you need to take to say no when the next opportunity arrives? Saying no to yourself is extremely hard at first. You are battling years of unrestraint. But every time you show self-control, the easier it becomes. In God's grace your life can be defined by self-control and an unrestrained love for His glory.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-God, help me to love you more than anything else in this world. Make it easy for me to say no to the things that used to tempt me. Give me more self-control

-Jesus, thank you for being the ultimate example of self-control.

-Father, show me where I need to practice more self-control.

-God, help me to prioritize your glory over my personal comfort.

ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

August 21, 2022 | A Metaphor for a Message [Hosea]

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Do you find it easier to be devoted to God during times of prosperity or times of need?

Read Hosea.

Pray this lesson in Hosea will open your eyes to any unfaithfulness to God in your life..

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Israel had committed spiritual adultery by neglecting its covenant commitment to God.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our commitment to God must be able to endure times of prosperity.

MEDITATE

“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God’” (Hosea 1:10).

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces Hosea’s ministry context and connects it to our own.

Q: *In what ways are you tempted during times of plenty that you are not during*

times of need?

Q: *Why is prosperity often more dangerous for your faith than need?*

Hosea was a prophet to the nation of Israel during the eighth century B.C. He ministered during a time of political and economic prosperity in the nation of Israel, at least during the early years of his ministry. The major superpowers of the ancient Near East, such as Assyria and Egypt, were experiencing declines because of internal strife, which opened an opportunity for Israel to recover much of the territory they had previously lost and offered the stability needed for the nation to thrive for several decades. Israel was experiencing a sort of golden age.

Israel's political and economic resurgence was not, however, accompanied by a resurgence in the people's loyalty to Yahweh. Instead, in their prosperity, they neglected their relationship with Him. They found security in their wealth rather than in the faithfulness of God. They wanted to secure their influence among the other nations, and this meant leaving their covenant with Yahweh behind. This is the context into which Hosea spoke. The prophet warned the people that their time of prosperity would be short-lived because God's judgment was on the horizon.

Q: *How has your faith been challenged during times of need in the past? How has your faith struggled during times of prosperity?*

Q: *What spiritual habits do you maintain to help grow your faith?*

APPLICATION POINT – Often, what we want the most is what we need the least. No one wants to face challenges or times of need. We all want to prosper financially and emotionally. Like the ancient Israelites, however, times of financial and emotional prosperity often coincide with a decline in faith. We lose focus on our need for God during such times. We gain confidence in our ability to hold things together and fail to recognize our need for God's sustaining grace in every part of our lives. As we will see in Hosea, times of plenty can be the most spiritually dangerous times of our lives.

We cannot always control our circumstances, and it would be silly not to seek personal prosperity. The solution to this problem is not forgoing prosperity but ensuring that our faith is strong enough to endure the times when our need for God is not as apparent. Spiritual disciplines keep us from indulging the lie that we can get by

without Him. Like an athlete who is always ready to compete, spiritual disciplines keep us ready to face times of prosperity and times of need.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Hosea 1–3 sets up a metaphor that compares Hosea and his wife to God and His people. After this metaphor is established, the remainder of the book is a collection of accusations, judgments, and oracles of hope.

1. A METAPHOR FOR A MESSAGE
2. ACCUSATIONS
3. CALLS FOR REPENTANCE

GOING DEEPER

+This lesson will begin by explaining the metaphor created in Hosea 1–3. It will then look at three primary accusations Hosea made against Israel and conclude by considering his call for repentance and hope.

1. A METAPHOR FOR A MESSAGE

■ HOSEA 1–3

Q: *Why did God tell Hosea to marry a woman who would become unfaithful to him?*

Q: *Why did Hosea give his children such strange names?*

Hosea's life characterized the heart-breaking message he had to proclaim to the people of Israel. The book begins in a typical fashion. The word of the Lord came to Hosea. What follows is anything but typical. God did not give Hosea a message to proclaim but a metaphor to live. Hosea must marry a "wife of whoredom." It is unclear whether Gomer, Hosea's wife, was a harlot before she married him or would become unfaithful afterward. Whatever the case, she ultimately proved to be unfaithful to him. The wording of Hosea 1:6 and 8 suggests the second two children she bore were not Hosea's.

God's purpose in calling Hosea to marry an unfaithful wife was to create a metaphor. Hosea's marriage to Gomer symbolized the relationship between God and Israel. By entering into a covenant relationship, God had "married" Israel. It is evident throughout the book of Hosea that Israel failed to keep the covenant it had committed to enter with God, and that unfaithfulness is symbolized by Gomer's unfaithfulness to her husband.

Hosea's marriage is not the only metaphor within Hosea 1–3. The children Gomer bore each were given a metaphorical name. The first child was named Jezreel (Hosea 1:4). The boy's name is a reference to Jehu's revolt against the Omride dynasty, which contained some of the most wicked figures in Israel's history, such as King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. To judge the Omride dynasty, God called Jehu, a commander in the army, to massacre every member of Ahab's family, including Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal, whom the family worshipped. Jehu then became king over Israel (2 Kings 9:1–10:28). He succeeded in putting to death all the members of the Omride dynasty in Jezreel, but he did not succeed in following God and instead led the nation further into idol worship. Thus, Jehu's house would be punished for the blood he spilt in Jezreel even though he did so under God's command (Hosea 1:4). His idolatry was no better than Ahab's Baalism, and God would soon bring an end to his dynasty just as he did Omri's. Jeroboam, the son of Israel's current king, (Hosea 1:1), would be the final member of Jehu's dynasty to reign.

The names of Gomer's other two children are much easier to understand but no less daunting for the people of Israel. Hosea called the second child, a daughter, No Mercy because God would have no mercy on Israel because of their sinfulness (Hosea 1:6). The name of the third child was Not My People (Hosea 1:9). This child's name was perhaps the most harrowing of all because it entailed a denial of the covenant relationship between Israel and God. God's covenantal commitment to the people and their commitment to Him was often summarized by the phrase, "I will be their God and they will be My people" (Exodus 6:7). Now, God was denying the very foundation of His commitment to the people.

Q: *Why is the comparison of Hosea's marriage to Israel's unfaithfulness so effective? How can you gain the attention of an affluent culture with the message of the gospel?*

Q: *The name of Hosea's first son references the massacre that took place in Jezreel. What did Hosea's condemnation of this event reveal about God's character?*

APPLICATION POINT –Hosea was speaking to an affluent culture that had forgotten God, but he could not tell them that their affluence made them forget God. They would not have believed him. Instead, he used his own

life to illustrate the people's sin. Hosea's prophetic ministry was unique. God is not calling us to an unfaithful marriage. Nevertheless, we can learn from Hosea about confronting an affluent culture through our lives. A life of self-denial and sacrifice for the sake of the gospel will catch the eye of people who seemingly have everything. When they see you denying yourself the luxuries or pleasures they feel entitled to, they will want to know why you are different. That is your chance to tell them they are looking for joy in the wrong places. True joy cannot be found in anything money can buy but only in knowing Jesus Christ as Savior.

Q: *What verses reveal the hope Hosea had for Israel in Hosea 1-3?*

Q: *Who is the one head under whom the people would return [Hosea 1:11]? Since this is long after David's reign, who is "David their king" [Hosea 3:5]?*

Hosea's marriage and the names of his children painted a bleak picture for the future of Israel. They had been unfaithful to their covenant with God, and God had in turn rejected them. As bleak as the situation was, there was reason for hope throughout Hosea 1-3. Although God had rejected Israel for a time, there would come a time when God would again extend His grace to them. He would remember the covenants He formerly made with them by multiplying their number (Hosea 1:10; Genesis 15:5). The people God once rejected would once again be made His. No Mercy would receive God's mercy, and Not My People would be God's people again (Hosea 2:23).

Hosea's own life again becomes a metaphor for God's plan for His people (Hosea 3). We are not given the details, but Gomer, Hosea's unfaithful wife, had somehow become enslaved to her lovers. Hosea found her and bought back his own wife. She would now dwell with him faithfully for many days. Just as Gomer would return to Hosea and live in faithfulness, so Israel would return to live in faithfulness to God.

At two points, Hosea centered Israel's hope upon an individual. In Hosea 1:11, he spoke of "one head" the people would appoint as their leader. In Hosea 3:5, he spoke of the people returning from exile to seek "David their king." David had been dead for more than two hundred years at the time of Hosea's ministry, so the prophet was obviously not referring to the historical David. Instead, it is likely he envisioned Israel's throne returning to one of David's descendants.

Hosea's words created a profile or a pattern that was fulfilled by two individuals. God's rejection of the people of Israel ultimately led to their exile from the land and the dissolution of the nation. Years later, the people returned from exile under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of David (Matthew 1:12-13) and served as a governor among those who returned from exile and reconstructed the temple in Jerusalem. The other individual who fulfills the profile envisioned by Hosea is Jesus.

Q: *How is the restoration Hosea envisioned ultimately fulfilled in Jesus?*

Q: *How does Romans 9:24–29 relate Hosea’s vision of Israel’s restoration to the work of Jesus?*

APPLICATION POINT – Paul saw the connection between Israel’s experience in the Old Testament and the story of all humanity. Just as Israel sinned and failed to keep the covenant, everyone has rebelled against God and failed to live in righteousness. Thus, humanity lives with consequences of its sin just as Israel lived with the consequences of rejecting God. But God has the last word for the people of Israel in Hosea and for humanity.

Paul used Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 in Romans 9:25–26 to describe the inclusion of the Gentiles into Israel’s story. Just as God once called Israel “not my people” but later committed Himself to them by calling them “my people,” He also calls the Gentiles “my people” even though they were not originally part of His covenant people. He went on in Romans 9:27 to allude to a prophecy of Isaiah stating that Israel would be “as the sand of the sea,” which is nearly identical to what Hosea said in 1:10. When you read Israel’s story in Hosea, understand that Israel’s story is our story as well. We have broken the covenant and deserve God’s wrath, but God has made His grace available to us in Jesus Christ.

2. ACCUSATIONS

■ HOSEA 4–10, 12–13

Q: *How is the theme of spiritual adultery continued throughout the rest of Hosea?*

Q: *What is the connection between idolatry and spiritual adultery?*

Hosea and Gomer’s story has been popularized in the last several years and is likely the aspect of the book you are most familiar with, but it makes up only a small portion of the book. Hosea is like Job in that respect. After the saga between Hosea and Gomer concludes in Hosea 3, the remainder of the book focuses upon Hosea’s prophetic indictment of Israel. His personal life is not mentioned again.

Although the metaphor comparing Hosea and Gomer to God and Israel is absent from the rest of the book, the main idea illustrated by that metaphor continues to pervade the book. Israel had committed spiritual adultery. Their covenant with God demanded allegiance to Him, but their affluence led them to compromise their commitment. Hosea's accusations of spiritual adultery focus upon three primary elements: idolatry, forgetting God, and pandering to the nations.

Israel's spiritual adultery is perhaps most clearly seen in their practice of idol worship. The tragedy of idol worship is how utterly foolish it is. The people worshipped wooden idols. Hosea sarcastically suggested they should ask their walking sticks for a word from God. They were the same substance (Hosea 4:12). In the same verse, Hosea identified idolatry as spiritual adultery. For the northern kingdom of Israel, idolatry was part of its worship since its split with the southern kingdom of Judah. King Jeroboam was concerned that although the people were politically divided from the southern kingdom, they were still under the southern kingdom's influence because the temple was located in Jerusalem. In an effort to entrench their independence from the southern kingdom, Jeroboam inaugurated the idolatrous worship of foreign calves (1 Kings 12:25–33). In Hosea's time, the people had continued to worship the calves Jeroboam set up (Hosea 10:5). But this idol would eventually be carried off to Assyria as a trophy of their victory over Israel (Hosea 10:6). This is the sad reality of idol worship. The people worshipped what would eventually become a trophy of a foreign king's victory over them. There would never have been any chance of this if the people had remained faithful to Yahweh.

Israel found idolatry attractive partly because they sought to appeal to other nations. Since the surrounding nations were experiencing a period of declining influence, Israel saw this as a time to form alliances and gain leverage among them. But how could they do this while refusing the common religious practices of their day? In seeking to appeal to foreign nations, Israel compromised its most fundamental beliefs. And so, these “strange” nations were draining Israel of its unique relationship to God (Hosea 7:9). Hosea patronized Israel's flirtation with the nations by referring to her as a dove. “Ephraim [Israel] is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria” (Hosea 7:11). Although he belittled Israel, their obsession with foreign nations was no laughing matter. The little dove would eventually be caught in a net spread out and brought down by God (Hosea 7:12).

Israel's unfaithfulness to God can be traced to the loss of knowledge of Him. Without knowing God, the people had little chance of remaining faithful to Him. Hosea emphasized the failure of Israel's leaders, especially the Levites, to preserve the knowledge of God (Hosea 4:4). Their failure to preserve the knowledge of God placed the people in danger of His judgment (Hosea 4:6).

Q: *Why does affluence make spiritual adultery harder to recognize?*

Q: *In what ways do you see spiritual adultery at work within your church?*

APPLICATION POINT –The worst way for Christians to respond to Hosea’s message is to think it only applies to non-Christians. We may be tempted to think that by confessing Christ as Savior we could never be in danger of committing spiritual adultery, which is a dangerous mistake. Hosea’s accusations against Israel demand that we examine our own faithfulness to God. God said through Hosea, “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). Hosea knew the people were doing all the “right things” and going through the motions but did not love God. This could be true of people in our churches as easily as it was true of the people Hosea addressed. There are no magic tests that can yield definitive results in this matter, but the important thing is that we consistently examine ourselves, identifying things in our lives that could easily become idolatrous loves. Israel “idolized” her position among the surrounding nations. Perhaps you need to be wary of how much you value the opinion of others over God’s opinion of you. Find people you can trust to help you examine yourself. Our idols have a way of blinding us to their existence, which makes spiritual idolatry difficult to recognize. But others can help us recognize our idols if we are willing to trust them.

3. CALLS FOR REPENTANCE

■ HOSEA 11, 14

Q: *How does God’s roar in 11:10 differ from His roar in 5:14 and 13:7-8??*

Q: *Why did Hosea describe repentant Israel like a fruitful garden in 14:5-8?*

Most of Hosea dwells on God’s accusations against Israel and the judgment they face. There are moments, however, when the prophet called for Israel’s repentance and anticipated God’s forgiveness if they did. Hosea introduces a new metaphor in Hosea 11:1. For most of the book, Hosea portrays Israel as an unfaithful wife. In Hosea 11, however, Israel is portrayed as God’s beloved son. The shift in metaphor coincides with a shift in subject. Hosea does not speak of Israel’s spiritual adultery but of God’s devotion to His people. It depicts God as a lioness calling her cubs (Hosea 11:1). When He roars, his people return to Him with trembling. This roaring lion metaphor in Hosea 11 differs from how it is used elsewhere in Hosea. In Hosea 5:14 and 13:7–8, Hosea declared that God was roaring, but the roar was that of a predator about to destroy its prey. It symbolizes God’s judgment. This roaring lion metaphor in Hosea is remarkable for the way it showcases the difference the people’s

repentance would make. God did not want to punish Israel. His roar of judgment could just as easily become a roar of endearment if the people would only turn back to Him.

Hosea concludes with words of hope. If Israel would return to God (Hosea 14:1), He would gladly heal them (Hosea 14:4). He would make them like a well-watered garden (Hosea 14:5–8), symbolizing the fruitfulness of a life of faithfulness to Yahweh. Israel would no longer be a dry and barren wasteland (Hosea 9:16).

🔗: *What does God's eagerness to forgive repentant sinners mean for you?*

🔗: *Why is it easier to trust ourselves rather than God when seeking personal prosperity?*

APPLICATION POINT – In Hosea, Israel's forgiveness begins with God's yearning to forgive repentant sinners. There could be no better news for those who are willing to acknowledge and repent of their sins. We need never wonder whether God will forgive us if we return to Him in repentance. We need never fear that our sin is too great. We never have to earn His forgiveness. It is given freely to all those who confess Jesus Christ as Savior. God's yearning to forgive gives us the freedom to pursue Him out of love instead of fear. Hosea's vision of God's forgiveness rests at the foundation of the gospel.

NEXT STEPS

The concluding verse in Hosea (14:9) seems like it was ripped from the book of Proverbs rather than being part of a prophetic oracle. The book ends with a wisdom saying. If anyone is wise, let him understand the things written within this prophecy. It takes wisdom to recognize the signs of spiritual adultery in your life and in the lives of others. Since Hosea concluded his book with an exhortation to be wise, it is appropriate for this lesson to conclude by encouraging you to seek wisdom. It takes great spiritual discernment to recognize the ways we are being unfaithful to God. Ask Him to give you the wisdom necessary to do so (James 1:5).

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Father, thank you for illustrating the truths found in your word. Help me to appreciate how the Bible communicates the message you have for the world.

-Lord, give me the wisdom I need to recognize when I am being unfaithful to you.

-Jesus, thank you for the forgiveness you secure for me. Help me to always trust in the sufficiency of your work on the cross.

-God, keep me from pandering for the approval of others. Help me to rest secure in my relationship with you.

ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

August 28, 2022 | *Pernicious Prosperity [Amos]*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Why does prosperity sometimes make it more challenging to meet the needs of others?

Read Amos.

Ask God to help you use your resources to fulfill His purposes.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The people of Israel falsely believed their prosperity was a sign of God's goodwill toward them.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Prosperity can distract us from God's greater purpose for our lives.

MEDITATE

"He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name" (Amos 5:8).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce Amos and one of the primary themes addressed in his book.

Q: *Hosea and Amos were contemporaries who ministered in the same context, but Hosea focused on how prosperity contributed to the brokenness of the people's*

relationship with God while Amos focused on how prosperity contributed to the brokenness within society. What can we learn from this difference between these prophets?

Q: *Amos was concerned about the wealthy's exploitation of the poor, but instead of addressing the situation directly, he sprinkled this concern throughout his major oracles. Why do you think he approached one of his main concerns in this manner?*

Amos ministered during approximately the same time as Hosea. The major nations surrounding Israel were struggling with internal difficulties, so Israel enjoyed a period relatively free from the dangers of foreign powers. This freedom allowed Israel to regain much of the territory they had lost to these nations and created a time of economic prosperity for the wealthy of the nation. But this economic prosperity also created spiritual challenges for Israel. Hosea focused on the challenge of spiritual adultery. The people's prosperity led them away from God and to idolatry. The book of Amos focuses on the challenge prosperity created between the wealthy and poor in society. The wealthy used their abundant resources to exploit the poor and gain more wealth for themselves (Amos 2:6–7; 5:11; 8:4). No one chapter in Amos explores this theme exclusively or exhaustively. Instead, the prophet consistently mentioned it throughout the book, revealing his understanding that this was a fundamental problem in Israelite society. The exploitation of the poor was at the root of almost every problem facing the nation. At times, Amos's condemnation is quite biting, such as when he called wealthy women a bunch of cows (Amos 4:1). At other times, he simply focused on the excesses the wealthy provided for themselves while leaving the poor destitute (Amos 3:15; 6:4). If Israel were to return to God, it would require reassessing the interaction between the wealthy and poor in its society.

Q: *Why does rebellion against God often coincide with social crises?*

Q: *What are some neglected social consequences of rebellion against God in our society?*

APPLICATION POINT – Amos knew his society was rebelling against God, and their rebellion led to the wealthy's exploitation of the poor. This is of course a perpetual problem. Jesus believed poverty was part of life in

a fallen world (Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7). It is just one example of the social ills caused by humanity's rebellion against God. Drug abuse, violence, broken families, and elder neglect are just a few others. Part of the church's responsibility, as God's redeemed community on the earth, is to work against these corruptions of human society with the power of the gospel. The gospel is the key to understanding everything that is wrong with our society. Governments may come up with policies to dampen the effect of these social crises, but believers must remember that because these problems stem from sin, only the gospel will be able to ultimately address them. We must be committed to confronting the effects of sin with the power of the gospel.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The book of Amos contains recognizable parts, such as the oracles against the nations in Amos 1–2, but it lacks much meaningful structure. This lesson will discuss the oracle to the nations, Israel's false sense of security, a short biographical narrative, and Amos's hope for a remnant.

1. ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS

2. FALSE SECURITY BLINDS US TO COMING JUDGMENT

3. AMAZIAH'S REBUKE

4. HOPE FOR A REMNANT

GOING DEEPER

+This section will discuss each of the points above in more detail and draw application points from them.

1. ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS

■ AMOS 1–2

Q: Why would oracles against other nations give Israel hope?

Q: How did Amos use the oracles against the nations to highlight Israel's moral failures?

Isaiah (13–23), Jeremiah (46–50), and Ezekiel (25–32) each contain a section made up of oracles against the surrounding nations in their prophetic books that provided some hope for the nation of Israel. If God was going to judge these other nations, it would be for their benefit. Most of the Minor Prophets do not contain oracles against the nations, but Amos does at the beginning of his book. Amos's goal, however, differed significantly from the other prophets. He proceeded through Israel's various neighbors but concluded with the sharpest condemnation for the nation of Israel itself. You can imagine the disbelief among his audience. Every time Amos finished with one nation and moved to the next, the crowd cheered louder and louder, but when he turned his attention to them, he was met with silence. Israel condemned themselves. They recognized the failures of other nations but refused to recognize their own.

Amos levied multiple indictments against them (Amos 2:6–8). They exploited the poor, they committed sexual sins, and they defiled God's temple. What made their sin worse was that they knew better than the nations that surrounded them (Amos 2:9–11). They had seen God defeat their enemies. They knew God had delivered them from Egyptian slavery. They had seen God work in their midst by raising up prophets and Nazirites, but instead of recognizing how God was working in their midst, they worked against Him. So, Amos condemned them along with all the other nations.

❧: *How can you protect yourself from believing you are more godly or righteous than others?*

❧: *In what ways have you seen God act in the past that should lead you to greater faithfulness in the future?*

APPLICATION POINT –Israel had witnessed God work in mighty ways in their past. They naturally believed this entailed God's enduring favor. But somehow they never made the connection between recognizing what God had done for them and the implications it had for their lives. They believed their history with God somehow made them more righteous in His sight than the surrounding nations. This is a mistake we can never make. Never assume your history with God makes you more righteous than others. Your righteousness does not rest upon anything you have done. It rests only on the declaration God makes on you because of what Christ has accomplished on your behalf. Your righteousness does not stem from anything you accomplished or on how "spiritual" you were in the past.

2. FALSE SECURITY BLINDS US TO COMING JUDGMENT

■ AMOS 3:1–7:9, 8:1–9:10

Q: *How are the questions in Amos 3:3–8 intended to reveal Israel's need for repentance?*

Q: *What kind of disasters are alluded to in Amos 4:6–11? How are they related to the questions in Amos 3:3–8?*

Israel had a false sense of security concerning their relationship with God. They counted His past actions on their behalf as signs of His present affirmation. Their false security led them to overlook the warning signs of His encroaching judgment. They ignored the warnings of their prophets. This is the point of the questions in Amos 3:3–8. As Amos 3:7 shows, God had revealed His plan to judge Israel to His prophets. The prophets prophesied, but the people failed to hear. Amos's questions were pleas for them to pay attention. Just as a lion would not roar without having caught its prey, the prophets would not declare Israel's approaching judgment unless it was so. The people were ignoring the divine authority behind the prophets' words and ignoring their need for repentance.

They were also ignoring signs from nature of their impending judgment. Amos 4:6–11 alludes to a famine, a drought, and plagues. The Israelites should have recognized these as signs of God's impending judgment, but instead, they overlooked them. The people consistently overlooked all the signs God was using to call them to repentance.

Q: *What kind of signs does God use to call us to repentance today?*

Q: *In what ways do you see people today ignoring signs of God's encroaching judgment?*

APPLICATION POINT – Amos believed Israel had overlooked the signs of God's impending judgment. We no longer need prophets to warn of God's looming judgment. We have the full revelation of God's Word. The Bible frequently alludes to a future judgment in which God will condemn all those who do not trust in Christ for the

forgiveness of their sins. Today, many people ignore this warning. Our role as Christ's followers is to point people to this coming judgment. Our role is like Amos's in that we take the revelation we have been given, which for us is the Bible, and use it to confront people in their sin and warn them of God's coming judgment. We should not neglect to address people in our churches with the truths of God's Word. We can never assume someone understands the gospel, the depravity of sin, the work of Jesus, and the implications this all has for their lives just because they regularly attend church. This was certainly the case for Amos. He confronted people who thought God was on their side simply because they were Israelites. There are people who attend churches today simply because they think it is the right thing to do, but they have not understood and received the gospel.

❓: *Why would the people desire the day of the Lord [Amos 5:18]? What assumption were they making?*

❓: *Since the Old Testament law commanded offerings and feasts, why did God hate them [Amos 5:21-23]?*

One of the more alarming aspects of Amos is how self-deceived the people to whom Amos ministered had become. Their sin and corruption were visible for all to see, including themselves, yet they were looking forward to the arrival of the day of the Lord (Amos 5:18)! The day of the Lord in the Old Testament refers to a time of Yahweh's unmistakable intervention into human affairs to judge the nations and vindicate the righteous. The people to whom Amos prophesied looked forward to this day thinking they would be among the vindicated. Amos warned them that they were gravely mistaken. He gave a series of analogies illustrating the folly of their behavior (Amos 5:19). Their anticipation of the day of the Lord would be like fleeing from a lion only to run straight into a bear or seeking shelter in a house only to be bitten by a snake within it. Amos's point about the day of the Lord is clear. It will not be what the people think. It will be a day of sorrow, not joy.

Correcting the people's understanding of the day of the Lord also provided an appropriate opportunity to correct their understanding concerning the feasts and offerings they practiced. God had commanded the people to make sacrificial offering to Him and conduct several feasts throughout the year for purposes related to remembering what He had done for them in the past. These offerings and feasts are described in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The people Amos addressed followed these practices faithfully. The problem was that they believed merely following these practices was sufficient to earn God's favor. As long as they went through the rituals, they didn't have to worry about how closely the rest of their lives followed biblical principles. Amos knew that keeping the feasts and sacrifices without concern for the moral and ethical matters of the law was an insult to God. It was

as if they believed God to be as blind as they were. In response to the people's neglect of God, Amos declared, "Let justice roll down like waters" (Amos 5:24).

Q: *In what ways are you in danger of substituting ritual obedience for real obedience?*

Q: *The people found satisfaction in the judgment of the wicked, but they were the ones in danger of being judged by God. How can we avoid the same mistake?*

APPLICATION POINT – Like the Israelites, we often focus on our obedience to the things we want to do and disregard our disobedience to the things we don't want to do. Such an outlook reveals a flawed understanding of God and the gospel. We have no right to compartmentalize God's commands into the things we want to obey and the things we don't. When we do, it reveals that we have replaced what God thinks about these matters with what we think. This is true even for the areas of our lives in which we are obedient! We sometimes obey not because God has said it but because we've decided it is the right thing to do. We think our obedience in one area excuses our disobedience in another. This is nothing more than a disguised form of salvation by our good deeds. We think we are obedient in the things that really matter so He will excuse our disobedience in the things that don't matter as much. God has called us to complete obedience to His will and moral standards. We cannot be content with partial obedience, because partial obedience is a refusal to let God be God in your life.

Q: *In what ways did Amos describe the people's ease in Amos 6:1-7?*

Q: *Why did Amos condemn the people's luxury?*

The people's lifestyle also revealed their false sense of security from God's judgment. In Amos 6, the prophet described a lavish society more concerned with pampering themselves than living in obedience to God's Word. They felt secure in their prosperity (Amos 6:1). They thought their expensive beds and lavish meals meant God was pleased with them (Amos 6:4, 6). They sought entertainment and fine arts (Amos 6:5). Their pursuit and indulgence in these luxuries while they were drowning in sin reveals the callousness of their hearts, both toward God and their fellow man.

Q: *How do you see the condition Amos condemned present in our society?*

Q: *Was it wrong for the people to appreciate the nicer things in life? Why or why not? If not, why did Amos condemn them?*

APPLICATION POINT –The people’s willingness to overlook their sin while pursuing every luxury they could afford shows that they had misdiagnosed their main problem. They thought their biggest problem was hardship and discomfort in this life, but Amos revealed that their biggest problem, and the biggest problem for the rest of us, was sin. When we misdiagnose the problem, we look for the wrong answer. They did not need to be saved from hardship and discomfort. They needed to be saved from their sins. They were looking for the wrong savior. The connection between our time and Amos’s could not be easier to spot. Today, people are also obsessed with comfort and a life of ease. They too are looking for the wrong savior because they have misdiagnosed their biggest problem. They believe their biggest problem is their job or old furniture. Or they worry they will run out of entertainment, so they buy the largest cable package and subscribe to every streaming service available. People today, as in Amos’ day, fail to see that sin is their biggest problem, and so they fail to understand that Jesus can be their only Savior. There is nothing inherently wrong with a nice car, a comfortable couch, or retiring early. The problem comes when we make these things the big solutions to relatively minor problems and fail to recognize our biggest problem is sin and Jesus is our only hope.

3. AMAZIAH’S REBUKE

■ AMOS 7:10–17

Q: *How did Amaziah respond to Amos’s message?*

Q: *How did Amos respond to Amaziah’s rebuke?*

The book of Amos mainly consists of oracles delivered against the nation of Israel. We are reading the words Amos spoke to the people. Amos 7:10–17 breaks from these oracles and describes a biographical episode during the prophet’s ministry. Amos’s message offended a priest named Amaziah, who reported Amos to the king. Amaziah

claimed Amos was conspiring against Israel by proclaiming the king would die and the people would be exiled (Amos 7:10–11). He was referring to the words of Amos 7:9, although adding a few details, perhaps to further enrage the king. Amaziah hoped Amos would be silenced by the king, one way or another. But Amos refused to backdown. He reaffirmed his prophecy and added a judgment against Amaziah and his house (Amos 7:17).

Q: *Can you describe a time when you resented the truth? What made you respond in this way?*

Q: *What can we learn from Amos's response to Amaziah?*

APPLICATION POINT – One of the purposes of the church is for believers to hold each other accountable to the Word of God (Galatians 6:1–2). Even after repenting of sin and confessing Christ as Savior, we are still susceptible to sin. Sometimes our sin is so deceptive that we fail to recognize it ourselves. Being part of a local church provides opportunity for other believers to call our attention to our sin and hold us accountable. Amaziah demonstrated two possible responses to being confronted by sin. We can humbly acknowledge it and seek repentance, or we can deny it and respond with hostility. As Amaziah's story reveals, denying sin does not make it go away. Denying sin only increases its destructive power in our lives.

We should also notice that Amos refused to back down from his message even when Amaziah reported him to the king. As we seek to engage the world with the gospel, we must be prepared for the world to react with hostility. Even in the face of hostility, we can never back down from or compromise the message God has given us. Like Amos, we are called to be God's faithful messengers regardless of whether the message is received or not.

3. HOPE FOR A REMNANT

■ AMOS 9:11–15

Q: *How did Amos end his message?*

Q: *How would you put the picture Amos creates of the plowman, the reaper-treader, and the sower into your own words?*

Amos concluded his message with a remarkable shift. Although God's wrath was coming, He would preserve a faithful remnant from His people to fulfill His commitment to David. This remnant will "raise up the booth of David" (Amos 9:11), referring to the promises God made to King David to give him an enduring kingdom (2 Samuel 7:13). This remnant will include a remnant from the other nations as well (Amos 9:12) and will form a kingdom that will be known for its abundance. Fields will be plowed during the spring of the year and reaped during the harvest. But Amos described a future of such abundance that before the reapers can finish, it will already be time to start plowing again. Although God's faithful may now be suffering from the oppression of the wealthy, after the day of the Lord, the faithful remnant will enjoy the abundance only God can provide.

Q: *Who ultimately fulfilled God's promise to the "booth" of David?*

Q: *How would this prophecy comfort the people struggling from the oppression of the wealthy?*

APPLICATION POINT – Amos's concluding vision was ultimately fulfilled in the person and final work of Christ. Jesus is the descendant of David who will restore David's fallen house and fulfill the covenant God made to Him. Christ is the one who will create a kingdom of all nations who will enjoy the abundant blessings of God forever (Revelation 22). In this way, the hope Amos gave to people in his day is the same hope we enjoy. We look forward to the time when Christ will return, fulfill all of God's promises, and reign over a remnant from every nation.

NEXT STEPS

Perhaps the main difficulty Amos faced was addressing a people who were good at keeping up religious appearances but were nevertheless spiritually dead inside. This remains one of the greatest dangers facing Christians today. What religious practices does your faith in Christ lead you to do? How can you maintain the authenticity of these practices and not allow them to cover for a heart that does not want to submit to God? Write down your responses.

PRAY

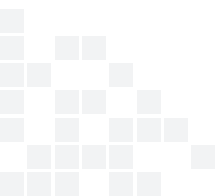
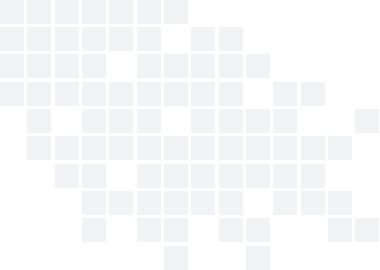
+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, forgive me for ever thinking that keeping up outward appearances is more important than the inward condition of my heart.

Jesus, you are the one who restored David's fallen booth. My hope is in you and in the kingdom you will create when you come again.

Father, help me to keep the gospel central in my life. Never allow me to find false hope in the comforts of this world.

God, help me to faithfully proclaim your Word to those who need it. Help me to remain faithful when I encounter opposition, no matter the cost.



ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

September 4, 2022 | Sorrow Fading into Hope [Micah]

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Micah's name means "who is Yahweh." How would you answer the question posed by Micah's name?

Read Micah.

Ask God to help you understand the horrible reality of sin and the wonderful freedom of hope.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The people of Israel faced certain judgment, but a hope for the future remained.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Although we are guilty of sin, trusting in Christ provides us hope for the future.

MEDITATE

"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it" (Micah 4:1).

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the prophet Micah and considers the purpose of his book.

Q: *Some of the historical detail behind Micah's ministry is provided by 2 Kings 15:32-16:20 and chapters 18-20. What are some of the most important details these chapters give for understanding Micah's message?*

Q: *Why would Micah's message be difficult to deliver when the nation faced threats from outside?*

Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. He witnessed some of the most significant moments in the Old Testament. He witnessed the fall of the northern kingdom, Israel, to the Assyrians in 722 (2 Kings 17) and the near collapse and miraculous deliverance of the southern kingdom, Judah, about twenty years later. More than a hundred years after his ministry, he appears in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah predicted doom for the nation of Judah. When Jeremiah's prophecy was not immediately fulfilled, some people wanted to put Jeremiah to death for false prophecy, but others pointed to Micah 3:12, which also was not immediately fulfilled and even still awaited fulfillment, and argued that Jeremiah should not be killed since Micah was not.

Micah's prophecies shift between two extremes. On the one hand, he foresaw the absolute devastation approaching the people because of their wickedness. On the other, he maintained hope that after judgment God would gather a remnant from His people for whom He would fulfill all His covenant promises. The book of Micah is structured in three parts, each beginning with judgment and ending with hope.

Q: *Why is it crucial to hold God's judgment of sin and His mercy on repentant sinners together?*

Q: *How does the structure of Micah's book point us to the death of Christ?*

APPLICATION POINT – The shifts between judgment and hope in Micah illustrate two aspects of God's character that we must constantly hold in tension. God cannot tolerate sin and will judge sinners, yet He also desires to show mercy to sinners who repent. Although we may prefer to focus on His mercy for sinners, we can never completely exclude God's judgment. In the same way, we can never become so consumed with His judgment that we miss God's grace for ourselves and for others. These shifts in emphasis in Micah's message ultimately point us toward Christ. In Christ's death on the cross, we see both God's judgment poured out on sin and His mercy provided for sinners.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Most people believe the book of Micah has been arranged into three sections—chapters 1 and 2, chapters 3–5, and chapters 6 and 7. Each section begins with a command to “hear” or “listen.” In this arrangement, oracles of doom are followed by oracles of salvation and hope.

1. HOPE AFTER JUDGMENT

2. HOPE IN THE MESSIAH

3. HOPE OF VINDICATION

GOING DEEPER

+This part of the lesson will examine each section of Micah in further detail, beginning with the judgment Micah foresaw and concluding with the hope he prophesied.

1. HOPE AFTER JUDGMENT

■ MICAH 1–2

Q: *How is God’s coming described in Micah 1:3–4? Why is God’s coming foreboding?*

Q: *What reasons for God’s judgment did Micah give in these chapters?*

Micah wasted no time in getting to the main point of his message. God was coming in judgment (Micah 1:2–4). Micah described God’s arrival in catastrophic detail. The whole earth was being undone as God approached. The undoing of the earth matches the destruction God brought upon the nation. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, was made into a heap of rubble. The destruction was so widespread that even the foundations of the city were visible. If the city was in shambles, what of the people in it? They were ushered into exile, which meant they had lost the land God had promised them as an inheritance (Exodus 3:8), doomed to live in upheaval in a foreign land with no prospects for a better future.

Why had God's destruction come against this people? Micah briefly mentioned idolatry (Micah 1:7). Idolatry was a recurring problem among the people. Although it is explicitly forbidden in the second commandment (Exodus 20:4), the people could not keep themselves from following the sinful practices of the surrounding nations. They wanted to worship how they wanted rather than following the law of God. Micah also alluded to injustice among the people. It appears, in concurrence with Isaiah 5:8–10, that wealthy landowners were exploiting the poor to increase their fortunes. In the law of Moses, the people were told to behave generously to their fellow Israelites (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 15:7–11). Furthermore, they were to take measures to ensure that every family maintained its inheritance from God and thus could not become stuck in perpetual poverty (Leviticus 25:23–28). In Micah's day, the wealthy overlooked such prohibitions on their way to trample those in need. God would not endure this disobedience forever.

❓: *Why does Micah 2:6 say “do not preach”? Who is speaking?*

❓: *Can you put Micah 2:11 into your own words?*

APPLICATION POINT –Micah declared that God's judgment was imminent for the wicked people, but they would not listen! Rather than confront their sin, they sought either to silence the messenger (Micah 2:6) or to find another messenger (Micah 2:11). How often do we do the same thing? One of our biggest problems is that we do not weep enough over our own sins. We think God only cares about “big sins” and is unconcerned with our “minor transgressions.” We want preachers who make us smile rather than those who bring us to tears with the reality of our own wickedness. The problem, of course, is that ignoring our sin and seeking a more pleasant message does not change the reality of our sinful hearts. We are just as foolish as Micah's audience. If we were truly convinced of what the gospel says about us, we would not have a cavalier attitude toward our sin or God's holiness. Rather than thinking we are the last person the preacher is talking about, we would know he is speaking directly to us. Rather than seeking the message that makes us laugh the hardest, we would listen to the one that makes us mourn the most.

❓: *Although Micah 2:12–13 anticipates an optimistic future, many people recognize an element of judgment in these verses. What are they seeing?*

❓: *What metaphors does Micah 2:12–13 use for God?*

Although Micah 1 and 2 primarily focus on the people's sin and God's ensuing judgment, these chapters close with a word of hopeful expectation. God's judgment would come. The people would go into exile, but God would call a remnant of His people from exile to return to Him so that He might fulfill the promises He made to them. Micah centers his hope on God Himself. God would be like a shepherd who finds His flock and gathers them under His protection. He would be like a king who leads His people in battle. Nothing would keep God from preserving His remnant. Like other Old Testament authors (2 Samuel 5:2; Psalm 78:70–72), Micah combined these images to describe God as the people's Shepherd-King.

❖: *How does Israel's experience [exile and restoration] mirror what God would do for His people in the new covenant?*

❖: *Why is it crucial that Israel's restoration is accomplished by God?*

APPLICATION POINT – Just as God rescued a remnant of Israel from exile, He will also rescue a remnant of humanity from exile. When Adam and Eve were expelled from God's presence in the garden, they were exiled from the land God had given them (Genesis 3:23–24). In Christ, God rescues a remnant of humanity from exile and brings us back to Himself. Israel's story is a model of what God is doing for all of humanity. This means that even as we participate in the same kind of sins Micah described in chapters 1 and 2, we also have the same hope Micah described in Micah 2:12–13 if we repent of sin and turn to Christ. Christ is our Shepherd-King who protects His flock (John 10:1–18).

2. HOPE IN THE MESSIAH

❑ MICAH 3–5

❖: *For what did Micah condemn the rulers and prophets?*

❖: *How did Micah describe the judgment coming upon these leaders?*

In Micah 3, the prophet continued his onslaught against the rulers and prophets. In gruesome fashion, Micah declared that the rulers of the people sustained themselves by consuming the people (Micah 3:2–3). Both the

rulers and prophets were for sale (Micah 3:5, 11). A favorable word or decision was available for money, not justice. Sin had infiltrated every part of Israelite society. There was nothing left but for God to raze it to the ground (Micah 3:12).

❓: *What does Jeremiah 26:19 reveal about Micah's message of doom?*

❓: *How does corruption enslave even those who profit from it? How does this contrast with Micah's words concerning his own prophetic ministry [Micah 3:8]?*

APPLICATION POINT – Micah 3:12 predicts the destruction of Jerusalem because of the wickedness of its leaders. Micah did not mention any possibility of God relenting, but according to Jeremiah 26:19, this is exactly what happened. Hezekiah and the leaders of Jerusalem heeded Micah's words and repented of their wickedness. In response, God relented from the disaster He had planned to bring on the people. Jeremiah 26:19 is remarkable for several reasons. It demonstrates that God is always ready to respond to repentance. No matter how deeply you are caught in sin, if you repent, He is ready to forgive. It also demonstrates the kind of legacy that repentance provides for coming generations. The men of Jeremiah's time recognized that Hezekiah had responded to Micah's message with repentance and that they were not responding similarly to Jeremiah's message. Ultimately, disobedience won out against Jeremiah, but what a legacy Hezekiah left! Of course, a legacy of repentance requires us to acknowledge our sin rather than ignore it. It also means we are open and remorseful about our sin for the future generations. It is possible that what future generation need most from us is not perfect role models who never sway but examples of repentance even in the midst of terrible sin.

❓: *How does the hopeful vision described in Micah 4:1 correspond to the devastation anticipated in Micah 3:12?*

❓: *How does the ruler anticipated in Micah 5:2 contrast with the rulers described in Micah 3:1?*

At the center of the book of Micah stands a remarkable message of hope. Whereas Micah foresaw a time when the temple mount would be a heap of ruins (Micah 3:12), he also foresaw a time when the mountain of the

Lord would become the epicenter of a new humanity to which all the nations would flow, not to conquer but to worship! Where the leaders during Micah's time sustained themselves by exploiting the people (Micah 3:2–3), the people in Micah's vision of the latter days would flock to God to learn of His righteousness (Micah 4:2). Furthermore, the future leader of God's people would not feed off the people (Micah 3:3) but shepherd them (5:4). As dire as the situation was in Micah 3, the prophet looked forward to a future in which God would act on behalf of His people and set up an enduring kingdom that would not fall to foreign siege.

Q: *How do the reversals described in chapters 4 and 5 illustrate God's power to reverse the influence of sin in your life?*

Q: *Micah said the coming of the ruler coming from Bethlehem, whom we know to be Jesus, "is from of old, from ancient days" (5:2b). What implications does this have for Jesus's reign?*

APPLICATION POINT – Sin brings enormous sorrow and grief, and its consequences are often cyclical. One sin leads to consequences that invite additional sin, and before long, a person has become so wrapped up in sin and devastation that escape seems impossible. But Micah shows us that nothing is impossible with God. There is no situation so dire that He cannot bring redemption. There is no sin so wicked that He will refuse to save. Anyone who repents of sin and yields to the ruler "whose coming forth is from of old" can discover the wonderful blessings of God's forgiveness and restoration.

3. HOPE OF VINDICATION

■ MICAH 6–7

Q: *Why did Micah mention Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (Micah 6:4)?*

Q: *What was Micah describing in Micah 6:6–7?*

In Micah 6, God indicted the people for their failure to keep the principles of the covenant with Him. God had kept His covenant promises. He delivered the people from slavery. He provided them with competent leadership.

He rescued them from those who sought to do them harm (Micah 6:4). But the people miserably failed to keep God in the place He demanded. Israel evidently believed they could appease Him with sacrifices and that He did not really care about their moral and spiritual lives. Micah directly confronted their erroneous view of God. In Micah 6:6–7, the prophet described a series of sacrifices, each escalating in value, even concluding his list with child sacrifice. (Micah did this for rhetorical purposes. The Old Testament prohibits child sacrifice [Leviticus 18:21; 20:2–5; Deuteronomy 18:10]). These sacrifices, however, were worthless apart from a heart that seeks justice and godliness.

Q: *In what ways do you exchange rituals or outward displays of religiosity for true godliness?*

Q: *How must Christians respond when it seems as though godly people are disappearing from our society [Micah 7:2–3]?*

APPLICATION POINT – The people’s error may seem obvious to us. Of course, God cares more about the spiritual condition of our hearts than He does empty outward gestures, but we can often be guilty of the same mistakes. This is what happens when we point to our church attendance, tithing record, or volunteer work at church to excuse the areas of our lives we refuse to bring under God’s control. We substitute the righteousness we want for the righteousness God demands. It is good for us to remember that we never set the terms by which we are obedient to Him. God never settles just for the righteousness we want to give. He requires us to submit to His rule in every area of our lives, not just the areas we are comfortable with.

Q: *How does Micah 7:12 pick up the theme started in Micah 6:4?*

Q: *What did Micah base his hope of God’s salvation on?*

Micah concluded by shifting one last time from God’s judgment to His salvation (Micah 7:8–20). Although God would hold the people accountable for their sin and send them into exile, this would not be His last word for His people. God would restore His fallen people and humiliate the nations that devastated them. Micah based his belief in God’s salvation on God’s character as expressed in Exodus 34:6–7. God is compassionate to those who seek after Him. He is willing to forgive sin.

Q: *Micah witnessed the declining godliness of the society around him. What challenges and temptations emerge from such a context?*

Q: *How does God's grace give you the courage to stand firm when your faith is challenged?*

APPLICATION POINT – Micah believed the godly were perishing from among his people, but rather than joining the wicked, he resolved to look for God's salvation (Micah 7:7). Today, as people have less and less regard for God, Christians will face a constant demand to conform to the godlessness of society. The appeal of the majority and the yearning to be part of the crowd can be powerful. But believers must follow the example of Micah and look for the salvation of God. When God arrives in judgment, it will not matter what the majority thinks of us. It will not matter how harshly we have been ridiculed for our beliefs. All that will matter is our faithfulness to Him and our commitment to walk in His ways, whatever the cost.

NEXT STEPS

Micah held God's judgment and His salvation in constant tension. After looking at his message, we must resolve to do the same. Take some time this week to write down a prayer of confession. Acknowledge the sins you are struggling with to God. Acknowledge that you deserve to receive God's wrath because of your disobedience. Conclude your prayer by rejoicing in the salvation you have in Christ. Praise Him for the plan He put into place to forgive sinners. This plan is evident in Micah and was initiated long before (Ephesians 1:4).

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Father, forgive me for the ways in which I have failed to act in godliness and righteousness.

-Lord Jesus, the salvation Micah foresaw ultimately finds its fulfillment in you. Thank you for giving your life so that sinners may receive forgiveness.

-Father, bring people like Micah into my life who will tell me the things I need to hear rather than just the things I want to hear.

-God, forgive me for thinking I can obey you in the ways I want in place of the ways you require obedience.





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