

# A Study of the Minor Prophets

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Welcome to a course studying the Minor Prophets. In the Hebrew Bible, the “Twelve Minor Prophets” is the eighth and last “book” in the second section of their Bible called “Prophets.” It is, as its name implies, not a unified whole but a collection of 12 independent books, by 12 different prophets.

“Minor” refers not to their importance but to their length: All were considered important enough to enter the Hebrew Bible, but none was long enough to form an independent book. One of these, Obadiah, is only a single chapter long, and the longest (Hosea and Zechariah) are each 14 chapters. They range in time from Hosea and Amos, both of whom date to the middle of the eighth century B.C.E., to parts of the books of Zechariah and Malachi, which are probably from the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E.

One theme that unifies the 12 prophets is Israel’s relationship with God. What does God demand of humans? How do historical events signify God’s word? These are questions that appear throughout Biblical prophecy. But nowhere in the Bible does a single book present as wide a variety of views on these subjects as does the collection of the Twelve Minor Prophets.

To fully understand the works of the Minor Prophets, it is important first that we get a good grasp of the history and culture of Israel during the time of their writings. We also need to know about the major empires or countries which are referenced in these short books and to whom Israel interfaced. Therefore, to begin, let’s review the political empires of their day, as well as a short history of Israel during the time these prophets wrote.

## **Egypt (3150 BCE – 30 BCE)**

Ancient Egypt was a nation located east of North Africa along the coastline of the Nile River. It was composed of two kingdoms; Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. The nations were headed by their pharaohs whose regencies depended on the godly rights of the kings. The concept of “afterlife” and gods could have started from the early Egyptians, a corruption of the religious teachings know by Ham, Noah’s son.



The two kingdoms had their own unique languages, separate beliefs and traditions and lived their lives differently. Even though the people could communicate and understand each other, conflicts between the two kingdoms arose from time to time.

Eventually, the king of Lower Egypt named Narmer or Menes (north part of Egypt) overpowered the Upper Kingdom (South) leading to the unification of the two kingdoms. He became the first pharaoh of the unified kingdoms. He built its capital city, Memphis in an area at the middle of the two old kingdoms.

As you might know from Biblical history, Joseph son of Israel, was an important ruler in Egypt. He became second in authority to Pharaoh Djoser in 1885 BC. Joseph’s possible name in the Egyptian historical writings was Imhotep who came to Pharaoh Djoser in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. Djoser reigned for 29 years. According to the ‘Famine Stele’ located on the Island of Sehel, Imhotep came to



Djoser in the 18th year of his reign. Given that there were 7 good years before the famine started, it can be calculated that Djoser would have died in the 4th or 5th year of the famine. The Egyptians attributed Joseph / Imhotep's achievements to Ra but in fact it was Yahweh or Jehovah who was behind it all!  
[\(https://josephandisraelinegypt.wordpress.com/category/correlation-of-egyptian-history-with-the-bible/page/2/\)](https://josephandisraelinegypt.wordpress.com/category/correlation-of-egyptian-history-with-the-bible/page/2/).

Jacob (Israel) moved his family of 77 people to Egypt in 1875 BC. In the 430 years that the Hebrews were living in Goshen, the best land in Egypt, their population grew to almost 2 million. They left Egypt in utter ruin during the 11<sup>th</sup> dynasty.

Egypt (a former vassal of Assyria) was allied with the Assyrian king Ashur-uballit II, and marched in 609 BC to his aid against the Babylonians. The Egyptian army of Pharaoh

Necho II was delayed at Megiddo by the forces of King Josiah of Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar, as crown prince, was given command of the Babylonian army harrying the remainder of the Assyrians in northern Syria. Early in 605 B.C. he met Necho, the king of Egypt, in battle and defeated him at Carchemish. A few months later Nabopolassar died, and Nebuchadnezzar hastened home to claim his throne in Babylon.

Egypt ceased to be a significant power following its defeat to Babylon. Eventually Egypt was conquered by the Romans led by Caesar Augustus in 30 BC.

### Assyria (2500 BCE– 609 BCE)

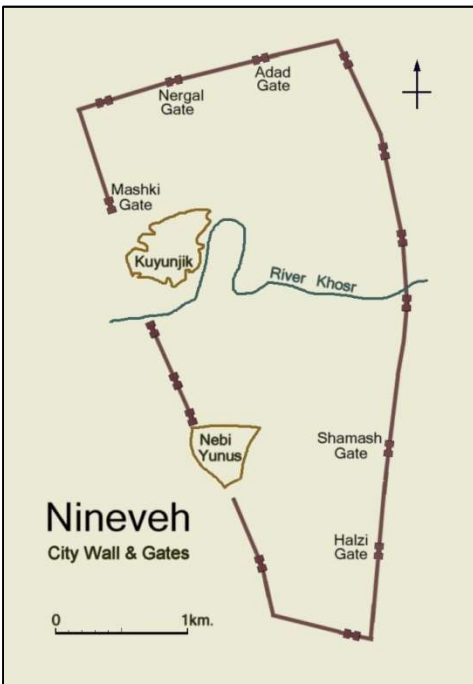
<https://www.bible-history.com/biblestudy/nineveh.html>

Assyria, kingdom of northern Mesopotamia that became the center of one of the great empires of the ancient Middle East. It was located in what is now northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was an Iron Age Mesopotamian empire, in existence between 911 BC and 609 BC, and became the largest empire of the world up till that time.



The Assyrian empire became extremely great and powerful with Nineveh as its center, all the way until its final destruction by the Chaldeans and the Medes. Nineveh was located in a very desirable place, east of the Tigris River in a very fertile plain. Today the ancient ruins are located just opposite of the present day city of Mosul. Nineveh was also famous in the ancient world because it was a center for the worship of Ishtar (Astarte) the fertility goddess. The size of Nineveh is revealed in the Bible, in Jonah 3:3 and 4:11 (A 3 days journey in breadth with over 120,000 people). The classical writers describe Nineveh as being over 60 miles around the city walls. The city of Nineveh is described in Genesis 10:11 as having been founded by Nimrod, the hunter who built the tower of Babel and led the world into a rebellion against God. The Old Testament also mentions Nineveh in relation to the prophet Jonah who preached judgment against Nineveh, and afterward the city repented.



Nineveh took its turn as one of three cities to be the capital of Assyria, whose rule over Mesopotamia dates back to 2400 BC and was an incredible civilization that rose from humble beginnings into a fearsome empire that ruled much of known world until its fall in 612 BC. Because we read of the judgments upon Assyria we might tend to look upon them as some demon-possessed frothing people of whom nothing comes but evil. But the truth for Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire is true of every nation on earth. They had many kinds of people, subject to the cultural norms of the time, and doing the best they can to raise their children, survive and prosper. God through Jonah showed great mercy on its people because they repented hearing the word of God. (8th Century BC ) The Assyrians brought many scientific, philosophical and practical advances to humanity including many inventions that we take for granted today. Everyday most of us lock our doors when we leave the house, locks and keys were invented in Assyria. They also invented a system that kept time and ascribed 360 degrees to a circle. They are given credit for inventing paved roads, the first postal system, the first use of iron, the first libraries, the first plumbing, flush toilets and aqueducts. They came up with the first governmental administration of dividing of territories ruled by local governors reporting to a central authority.

The Book of Jonah, set in the days of the Assyrian empire, describes it as an "exceedingly great city of three days' journey in breadth", whose population at that time is given as "more than 120,000". The city wall was probably around 60 miles in circumference with 15 magnificent gates and surrounded by a moat of water. The Assyrians considered the city impregnable.

The occupants of the city worshipped false gods and lived totally immoral and debauched lives. Their life style was considered as evil as the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. As a result, they were considered a detestable people to the Hebrews.

The military rulers, as in many other nations, could be a brutal breed. They ruled their empire and subdued nations with absolute terror. Here is a quote from an ancient writing from an Assyrian military officer:

"I destroyed, I demolished, I burned. I took their warriors prisoner and impaled them on stakes before their cities. I flayed the nobles, as many as had rebelled, and spread their skins out on the piles [of dead corpses]. Many of the captives I burned in a fire. Many I took alive; from some I cut off their hands to the wrist, from other I cut off their noses, ears and fingers; I put out the eyes of many of the soldiers."

I slew two hundred and sixty fighting men; I cut off their heads and made pyramids thereof. I slew one of every two. I built a wall before the great gates of the city; I flayed the chief men of the rebels, and I covered the wall with their skins. Some of them were enclosed alive in the bricks of the wall, some of them were crucified on stakes along the wall; I caused a great multitude of them to be flayed in my presence, and I covered the wall with their skins. I gathered together the heads in the form of crowns, and their pierced bodies in the form of garlands."

(TimeFrame 1500-600 BC by Time-Life Books) Assyrian War Bulletin (1000 B.C.)

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~cfford/342worldhistoryearly.html>

God used the pagan Assyrians to bring a horrendous judgment to Northern Israel. Many of the Minor Prophets, we will see, foretold of the impending doom to come to Israel because they refused to submit their lives to Yahweh and willfully defied His commandments. They also prophesized judgment to Assyria for their wickedness.

The prophet Nahum predicted Nineveh's destruction by the Babylonians and Medes which came in 612 BC, and the famous city was never rebuilt. In the New Testament Jesus commended the inhabitants of Nineveh for repenting at the preaching of Jonah, while condemning the Jewish leaders for resisting His own message.



### Babylonia (851 BCE– 536 BCE)

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Babylonian-empire.html>

Babylon rose from a Mesopotamian city on the Euphrates River to become a powerful city-state and later the capital city and namesake of one of the greatest empires in history. The city was located on the eastern side of the Fertile Crescent about 55 miles south of modern Baghdad. Babylon's history

intersected the biblical timeline early and often. The influence of Babylonia on Israel and on world history is profound.

The Bible's first mention of Babylon comes in Genesis 10. This chapter is referred to as the table of nations as it traces the descendants of Noah's three sons. In the genealogy of Ham, "*Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth*" (Genesis 10:8). Nimrod founded a kingdom that included a place called "Babylon" in Shinar (Genesis 10:10).

The Tower of Babel is found in Genesis 11. In English it is easy enough to make the connection between "Babel" and "Babylon," but in Hebrew it is the same word. This chapter cements Babylon's reputation

as a city of rebellion against God. From then on, the biblical writers consistently use Babylon as a symbol of evil and defiance (see 1 Peter 5:13 and Revelation 17:5).

Near the time of Abraham, Babylon became an independent city-state ruled by the Amorites. The first Babylonian dynasty included Hammurabi, the sixth king, known for his code of laws. Hammurabi expanded the kingdom, and the area around Babylon became known as Babylonia. During the second dynasty, Babylon was in communication with Egypt and entered a 600-year struggle with Assyria. After a time of subjugation to the Elamite Empire, a fourth dynasty of Babylonian kings thrived under Nebuchadnezzar I. Then Babylon fell under the shadow of Assyria.

By 851 B.C., Babylon was only nominally independent, requiring Assyrian “protection” and facing many internal upheavals. Finally, the Assyrian Tiglath-pileser III took the throne. The Assyrians and Merodach-baladan, a Chaldean, traded power more than once. During one of his times of advantage, Merodach-baladan sent emissaries to threaten Hezekiah, king of Judah (2 Kings 20:12-19; Isaiah 39). When the Chaldean chief Nabopolassar took control of Babylon in 626 B.C., he proceeded to sack Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

Under the Chaldean dynasty, and, arguably, throughout the rest of history, no king surpassed the glory and absolute power of Nebuchadnezzar II’s reign. As the crown prince (son of Nabopolassar), he defeated Pharaoh Necho II, who had come to the aid of the Assyrian army, winning for Babylonia the former Assyrian lands, including Israel. After being crowned king, Nebuchadnezzar forced King Jehoiakim of Judah to “*become his vassal for three years. But then [Jehoiakim] changed his mind and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar*” (2 Kings 24:1). The king of Babylon, who did not take kindly to being rebelled against, captured Jerusalem and took the king and other leaders, military men and artisans as prisoners to Babylon (2 Kings 24:12-16). This deportation marked the beginning of the Babylonian exile of the Jews.

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah to rule Judah. However, Zedekiah, against the prophet Jeremiah’s counsel, joined the Egyptians in a revolt in 589 B.C. This resulted in Nebuchadnezzar’s return. The remaining Jews were deported, Jerusalem was burned, and the temple was destroyed in August 586 BC (Jeremiah 52:1-30).

Babylon is the setting for the ministry of the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel, who were both deportees from Judah. Daniel became a leader and royal advisor to the Babylonian and Persian Empires. He had been captured after the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. (Jeremiah 46:2-12). The book of Daniel records Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Daniel 2) and foretells the fall of Babylon to the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 5). Earlier, the prophet Isaiah had also foretold the fall of Babylon (Isaiah 46:1-2).

In the Bible, Babylon is mentioned from Genesis to Revelation, as it rises from its rebellious beginnings to become a symbol of the Antichrist’s evil world system. When God’s people required discipline, God used the Babylonian Empire to accomplish it, but He limited Judah’s captivity to 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11). Then, God promised to “*punish the king of Babylon and his nation*” (Jeremiah 25:12) “*for all the wrong they have done in Zion*” (Jeremiah 51:24). Ultimately, all evil will be judged, as symbolized by Babylon’s demise in Revelation 18:21: “*The great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.*”



## Persia (539 BC – 330 BC)

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Medo-Persian-empire.html>

The Medo-Persians, led by King Cyrus II, invaded Babylonia from the east in June of 539 B.C. and captured its capital, Babylon, in July of the same year. In biblical chronology, this occurred near the end of the Babylonian exile. Within a short time, Daniel became a trusted advisor to the new Medo-

Persian Empire. This kingdom of the Medes and the Persians was later ruled by Artaxerxes II, or Ahasuerus, who married Esther. Today, Persia is essentially synonymous with modern Iran, and this was not so different in ancient times. However, Persia as an ancient *kingdom*, especially when referenced along with Media, encompassed Egypt in the west to parts of India in the east, and included Asia Minor from the eastern border of Greece to Tajikistan (see map).



Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel all prophesied that the Medes and the Persians would overtake the Babylonian Empire. Isaiah quoted God as saying, “*See, I will stir up against them the Medes. . . Their bows will strike down the young men*” (Isaiah 13:17-18). Another prophecy said that the Medes would expand beyond Babylonia and affect all nations (Jeremiah 51:28). Jeremiah also provides the reason for the Medo-Persian ascendancy: “to destroy Babylon” and gain “vengeance for [God’s] temple” (Jeremiah 51:11). Daniel interpreted a dream which also foretold the fall of Babylon.

Daniel also warned of Babylon’s demise on the eve of its fall, as recorded in Daniel 5. King Belshazzar, called “king” because he was left in charge of political affairs while his father was away at war, was using the gold and silver utensils from the temple as drinking vessels in a night of debauchery. “*Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall*” (Daniel 5:5). The frightened king summoned Daniel to the banquet hall to interpret the writing. Daniel’s inspired interpretation was dire: God had pronounced judgment on Babylon, and the kingdom would be divided. By morning, “*Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom*” (Daniel 5:30-31).

Before the Babylonian exile even began, God told Jeremiah that Judah would “*become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years*” (Jeremiah 25:11). Ezra and others recorded that “*in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia [539 B.C.], in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus*” (Ezra 1:1), and Cyrus allowed all the Jews to return to Judah. Not only did Cyrus release the Jews, but he also returned the stolen temple articles and paid for the Jews’ rebuilding efforts from the royal treasury (Ezra 6:4-5). This was a monumental time in Israel’s history, as Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt and the Law was reinstated.

Daniel was prominent in the Medo-Persian Empire and a trusted advisor to King Darius. However, after being placed as head of the satraps (governors, of sorts), Daniel was hated by some of them for his quick ascent. They laid a legal trap for Daniel that should have gotten him killed, for he was thrown into the infamous lions’ den. He survived, however, by God’s intervention, and he continued to prophesy,

rule, and provide counsel in that foreign land (Daniel 6:28).

Another key event in the history of Israel also occurred in Persia. The book of Esther describes the origin of the Feast of Purim and how the Jews were spared mass destruction. When Cyrus released the Jews to their homeland, not all of them elected to return to Judah (Esther 3:8). King Artaxerxes (or “Ahasuerus,” as he is called in Esther) reigned from 404-359 B.C. and likely had little background on his government’s history with the Jews. So, when his top advisor, Haman, accused the Jews of being routinely disobedient to the king’s laws, Artaxerxes believed him and agreed to Haman’s plan of genocide against the Jews. Queen Esther, herself a Jewess, had been chosen queen of the empire without disclosing her origin. In a series of remarkable events, plainly evincing God’s providence, Esther was able to expose Haman’s vile motives. Not only were the Jews spared destruction, but Esther’s cousin Mordecai was given Haman’s place of honor.

Darius lost three battles with Alexander and was finally defeated in 331 BC. He was murdered in 330 B.C. The great **Persian Empire** was no more. The **Persian Empire** began with conquest and ended with defeat, but it will always be remembered as a powerful force that swept through the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe.

God uses individuals and empires to accomplish His will. Certainly, the Medo-Persian Empire is a case in point. God used this empire to set His captive people free, fund the rebuilding of the temple, and encourage His children that they are never forsaken.

## Edom

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Edomites.html>

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the firstborn son of Isaac and the twin brother of Jacob. In the womb, Esau and Jacob struggled together, and God told their mother, Rebekah, that they would become two nations, with the older one serving the younger (Genesis 25:23). As an adult, Esau rashly sold his inheritance to Jacob for a bowl of red soup (Genesis 25:30-34), and he hated his brother afterward. Esau became the father of the Edomites and Jacob became the father of the Israelites, and the two nations continued to struggle through most of their history. In the Bible, “Seir” (Joshua 24:4), “Bozrah” (Isaiah 63:1) and “Sela” (2 Kings 14:7) are references to Edom’s land and capital. Sela is better known today as Petra.



The name “Edom” comes from a Semitic word meaning “red,” and the land south of the Dead Sea was given that name because of the red sandstone so prominent in the topography. Esau, because of the soup for which he traded his birthright, became known as Edom, and later moved his family into the hill country of the same name. Genesis 36 recounts the early history of the Edomites, stating that they had kings reigning over them long before Israel had a king (Genesis 36:31). The religion of the Edomites was similar to that of other pagan societies who worshiped fertility gods. Esau’s descendants eventually dominated the southern lands and made their living by agriculture and trade. One of the ancient trade routes, the King’s Highway (Numbers 20:17) passed through Edom, and when the Israelites requested permission to use the route on their exodus from Egypt, they were rejected by force.



Because they were close relatives, the Israelites were forbidden to hate the Edomites (Deuteronomy 23:7). However, the Edomites regularly attacked Israel, and many wars were fought as a result. King Saul fought against the Edomites, and King David subjugated them, establishing military garrisons in Edom. With control over Edomite territory, Israel had access to the port of Ezion-Geber on the Red Sea, from which King Solomon sent out many expeditions. After the reign of Solomon, the Edomites revolted and had some freedom until they were subdued by the Assyrians under Tiglath-pileser.

During the Maccabean wars, the Edomites were subjugated by the Jews and forced to convert to Judaism. Through it all, the Edomites maintained much of their old hatred for the Jews. When Greek became the common language, the Edomites were called Idumaeans. With the rise of the Roman Empire, an Idumaeen whose father had converted to Judaism was named king of Judea. That Idumaeen is

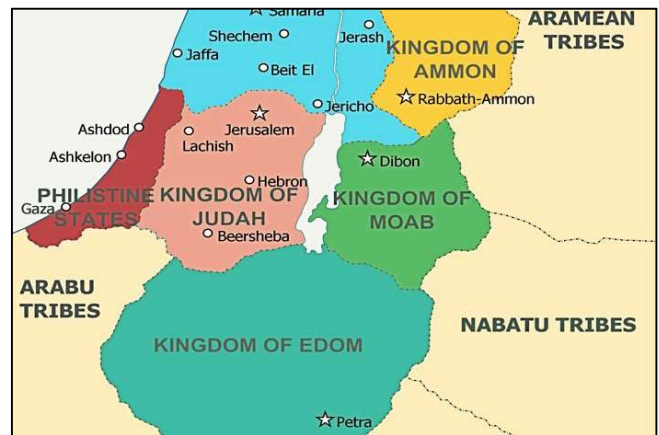
known in history as King Herod the Great, the tyrant who ordered a massacre in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the Christ child (Matthew 2:16-18).

After Herod's death, the Idumaeen people slowly disappeared from history. God had foretold the destruction of the Edomites in Ezekiel 35, saying, "As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you; you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 35:15). Despite Edom's constant efforts to rule over the Jews, God's prophecy to Rebekah was fulfilled: the older child served the younger, and Israel proved stronger than Edom.

## Moab

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Moabites.html>

The Moabites were a tribe descended from Moab, the son of Lot, born of an incestuous relationship with his oldest daughter (Genesis 19:37). From Zoar, the cradle of this tribe, on the southeastern border of the Dead Sea, they gradually spread over the region on the east of Jordan. Shortly before the Exodus, the warlike Amorites crossed the Jordan under Sihon their king and drove the Moabites out of the region between the Arnon River Valley and the Jabbok River, and occupied it, making Heshbon their capital. The Moabites were then confined to the territory to the south of the Arnon Valley (Numbers 21:26–30).



During the Exodus the Israelites did not pass through Moab, but through the "wilderness" to the east, eventually reaching the country to the north of Arnon. The Moabites were alarmed, and their king, Balak, sought aid from the Midianites (Numbers 22:2–4). This was the occasion when the visit of Balaam to Balak took place (Numbers 22:2–6).





In the Plains of Moab, which was in the possession of the Amorites, the children of Israel had their last encampment before they entered the land of Canaan (Numbers 22:1; Joshua 13:32). If we had nothing else to interest us in the land of Moab, it was from the top of Pisgah that Moses, the mightiest of prophets, looked upon the Promised Land (picture to left); it was here on Nebo that he died his solitary death; it was here in the valley over against Beth-peor where he was buried (Deuteronomy 34:5–6).

Perhaps the most significant Bible character to come from Moab was Ruth, who was “of the women of Moab” but was genetically linked to Israel through Lot, the nephew of Abraham (Genesis 11:31). Ruth is an example of how God can change a life and take it in a direction He has foreordained, and we see God working out His perfect plan in Ruth’s life, just as He does with all His children (Romans 8:28). Although she came from a pagan background in Moab, once she met the God of Israel, Ruth became a living testimony to Him by faith. Ruth, the Moabitess, is one of the few women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5).

## Short history of Israel During the time of the prophets

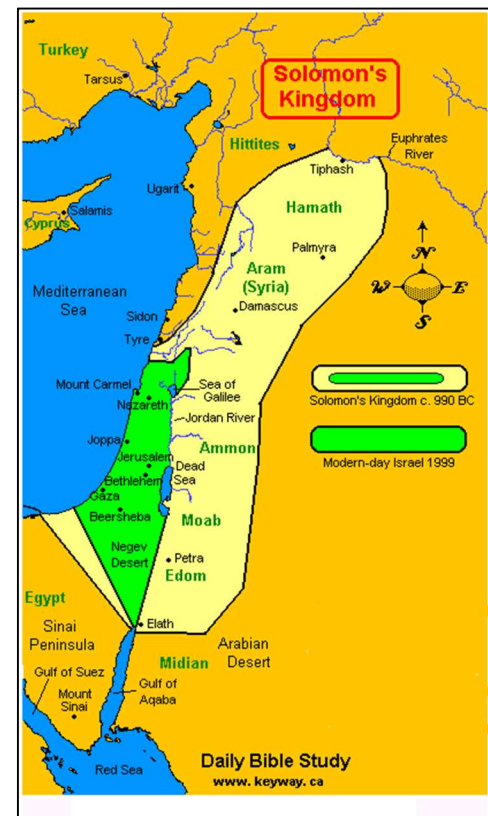
The following information was located in <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/history-israel>

### Solomon – The last unified king of Israel ( 961-922 BCE).

Solomon, the son of Bathsheba, David’s favorite wife, acceded to the Davidic throne. Solomon constructed the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. The Temple itself was built of great stones, and the interior walls were lined with cedar and covered with gold leaf. The construction of the Temple took seven years.

Solomon’s building and luxury were also supported by tribute from the subject nations which his father had conquered, from heavy taxes on the Israelites, and from levies of forced Israelite laborers. To secure these taxes and levies of workers and to organize the government Solomon divided the country into twelve districts, each of which had a governor. These districts did not coincide with the territory of the twelve tribes, a break with the tribal traditions.

Solomon’s activities brought magnificence to Jerusalem, but roused discontent in many quarters. Leaders in Edom and Syria revolted. Furthermore, Israelites themselves, particularly in the North, resented the heavy taxes, the forced levies of workers, and the favored position of Judah. The prophets objected to the introduction of the worship of foreign



gods which came to Jerusalem with Solomon’s foreign wives. Solomon had a reputation for wisdom, and he composed many proverbs, but his later policies were not wise, for they harmed his people and compromised his faith in Yahweh.

950	900	850	800	750	700	650	600	550	500	450	400
Egypt			Assyria				Babylon		Persia		
N. & S. Kingdoms				Judah Alone		Exile		Post-Exile			
△ Solomon dies				△ Israel falls		△ Judah falls		△ Captives return			
<b>Major Prophets</b>				Isaiah		Jeremiah/Lam.		Daniel Ezekiel			
<b>Minor Prophets</b>		Obadiah Joel	Jonah Amos Hosea	Micah	Nahum Zephaniah Habakkuk			Haggai Zechariah	Malachi		

### The Separate Kingdoms of Israel and Judah (922-722)

Rehoboam, Solomon’s son and successor, by trying to carry on the oppressive policies of his father, precipitated the secession of northern Israel. Jeroboam, the spokesman of the northern tribes, had been superintendent of workers under Solomon, had been encouraged to lead a revolt of the northern tribes by the prophet Ahijah, and had fled to Egypt in fear of Solomon. When Rehoboam arrogantly refused to mitigate the taxes and forced labor, the northern Israelites seceded and chose Jeroboam as their king.



After this break (c. 922), the two kingdoms continued a separate but interrelated existence for 200 years till the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE. The northern kingdom, including the territories of Ephraim, western Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, and Naphtali West of the Jordan, and of eastern Manasseh, Gad and Reuben East of the Jordan, was larger than the southern kingdom which included only Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. The northern kingdom was also richer both agriculturally, because of its plains, and commercially, because of the international trade routes running through it. The southern kingdom was more mountainous and more isolated. For the above reasons, the northern kingdom was more open to foreign cultural and religious influences as well as to foreign conquest. The southern kingdom was more provincial, more faithful in maintaining the religion of Yahweh, and it continued an independent existence for about 150 years

after the fall of the northern kingdom.

Jeroboam I (c. 922-901) made his political capital at Shechem. He felt the need of religious centers to keep his people from making pilgrimages to Jerusalem in the South. Therefore he set up golden calves in Bethel and Dan, perhaps under the influence of the animal gods he had seen in Egypt during his exile there in Solomon's time. Since The prophetic writers condemned these images.

Omri (c. 876-869) does not receive much space in the book of Kings, perhaps because he was not regarded as religiously important, but his political importance is indicated by the fact that a century later the Assyrians were still calling Israel "the land of Omri." Omri moved the capital of Israel to a new site, Samaria, which soon vied with Jerusalem in the beauty of its buildings. Omri cemented an alliance with Tyre by marrying his son Ahab to Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and Sidon. To the southeast, Omri conquered Moab, as recorded on the Moabite Stone (pictured to the right)



Ahab (c. 869-850) continued the beautification of Samaria, building there an "ivory house." This means that his palace's walls and its furniture were embellished with carved ivory inlaid panels, such as have been found in excavations there. In Megiddo Ahab built tremendous stables with stalls for about 450 horses. Jezebel, Ahab's Phoenician wife, brought with her and encouraged the worship of Baal and of the goddess Asherah. Such idolatry as well as Ahab's seizure of a private citizen's vineyard were condemned by the prophet Elijah.

Ahab was one of the leaders of a Syrian coalition which checked the advance of Shalmaneser III of Assyria in the battle of Qarqar in 853 BCE. According to Assyrian records, Ahab brought to this battle 2,000 chariots (more than any other Syrian contingent) and 10,000 foot soldiers.

In Judah Jehoshaphat's reign (c. 873-849) was marked by cooperation with Israel and by internal religious reforms. He destroyed idols and pagan sanctuaries and sent out teachers of the law of the Lord. By defeating a coalition of Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites he reestablished Judah's control over Edom.

An Israelite general, Jehu (c. 842-815), supported by prophets, led a revolt against Jehoram. Jehu killed not only Jehoram, but also the latter's nephew Ahaziah king of Judah (c. 842), who was a grandson of Ahab. In executing judgment on Ahab's house, Jehu ordered the death of Jezebel, Ahab's widow, and of the brothers of Jehoram and of Ahaziah. He also killed the worshipers of Baal.

Meanwhile in Judah a daughter of Ahab, Athaliah (c. 842-837), was trying to wipe out the Davidic dynasty and to encourage Baal worship. After hearing that Jehu had killed her son Ahaziah, she seized power herself and killed her own grandchildren, except for a baby boy, Joash, who was hidden in the Temple. After six years the high priest Jehoiada had Joash (c. 837-800) crowned as king. Athaliah and the priest of Baal were killed, and the temple of Baal was destroyed. Jehoiada gave Joash wise guidance while he was young. In his later years Joash turned to idolatry. The prophets saw it as God's judgment when the Syrians attacked Judah and plundered Jerusalem.

Both Jehoahaz (c. 815-801) and Joash (c. 801-786) of Israel continued to resist Syrian raids, which reached as far as an unsuccessful siege of Samaria itself. In their resistance to Syria the kings of Israel were encouraged by the prophet Elisha.

Jeroboam II (c. 786-746), the son of Joash, brought the kingdom of Israel to its greatest extent and prosperity. He not only recovered Trans-Jordan from Syria, but also conquered Damascus itself. The material prosperity of Israel is illustrated by large buildings which have been discovered in Samaria, Megiddo, and Tirzah. But beside the great buildings in Tirzah, for example, are the remains of hovels, evidencing the injustice to the poor which the prophet Amos condemned. In Samaria from Jeroboam's time there have been found many tax receipts written on potsherds. These receipts indicate prosperity, and the names on the receipts are compounded not only with Yahweh, like Jedaiah, but also with Baal, like Elibaal, evidences of the combination of Yahwism and idolatry denounced by Hosea and Amos. One reason for the prosperity and expansion of Israel under Jeroboam was the absence of aggression from the great powers of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

In the latter 8th cent. Judah came under Assyrian dominance, but was not wiped out. Ahaz of Judah (c. 735-715) refused to join Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus in an alliance against Assyria. When the latter two kings attacked Jerusalem, the prophet Isaiah urged Ahaz to trust in God for deliverance. Ahaz sent gifts to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria and asked his help. The Assyrians subdued both Syria and Israel and exacted tribute from Ahaz also. Ahaz forsook the worship of Yahweh and adopted an Assyrian type of altar.

Since the Assyrians came from the North, Israel more keenly than Judah felt the force of their expansion under Tiglath-pileser III (c. 745-727). This king forced Menahem (c. 745-738) of Israel to pay tribute in 738. Pekah (c. 737-732) of Israel and Rezin of Damascus made an alliance to resist Assyria. Nevertheless in 732 Tiglath-pileser captured Damascus and took away from Israel the Mediterranean coast to the W, Galilee in the N, and Gilead to the E, carrying many Israelites into exile. When Hoshea (c. 732-724), the king of the remnant of Israel, refused to pay tribute to Assyria and turned for help to Egypt, Shalmaneser V of Assyria began the siege of Samaria.

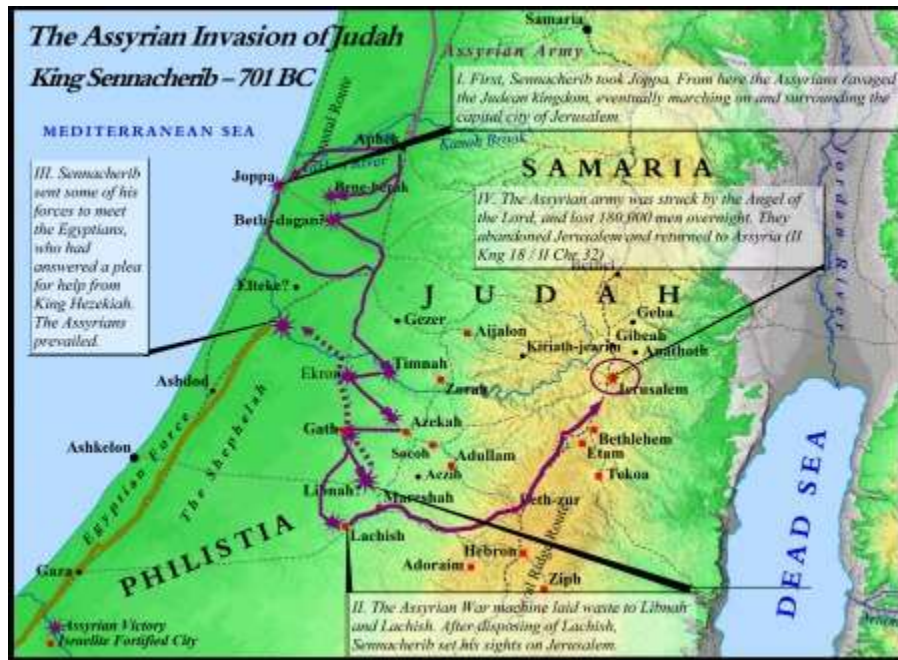
### **The fall of Samaria (722 BCE)**

Samaria withstood the Assyrian siege for three years, but the city finally fell in 722, shortly before the death of Shalmaneser. His son Sargon doubtless assisted in the siege and claims credit for the capture of the city. Sargon states that he carried away captive 27,290 Israelites, and the Bible indicates that they were taken to northwestern Mesopotamia and to Media. In place of the deported Israelites the Assyrians introduced settlers from Babylonia and Syria, who brought their idols with them. In time these pagan settlers were assimilated to the remaining Israelites and to Yahwism. So the later Samaritans were a mixture of Israelite and foreign elements and were therefore despised by the Judeans.

### **The Kingdom of Judah Alone (722-587 BCE)**

In Judah Ahaz was followed by Hezekiah (c. 715-687), who tried to throw off Assyrian control and tribute. Hezekiah welcomed ambassadors of Babylon, who was also scheming to rebel against Assyria, and gave them a tour of the city, including the wealth in the temple. Hezekiah strengthened Jerusalem's walls and dug a tunnel 1,777 ft. through solid rock to carry water from the spring Gihon to the Pool of Siloam within the city walls, to insure a water supply during a siege. In 701 Sennacherib of Assyria attacked Judah, destroying forty-six cities, including Lachish, whose siege is depicted in reliefs





from Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh. Sennacherib's records claim that he besieged, but did not take Jerusalem and imposed on Hezekiah tribute including the exact amount of gold mentioned in the parallel account in the Bible. Isaiah assured Hezekiah that Jerusalem would not be captured, and the Biblical record states that "the angel of the Lord" slew the besieging Assyrians in the night. Sennacherib returned to

Assyria in shame and was murdered by two of his sons.

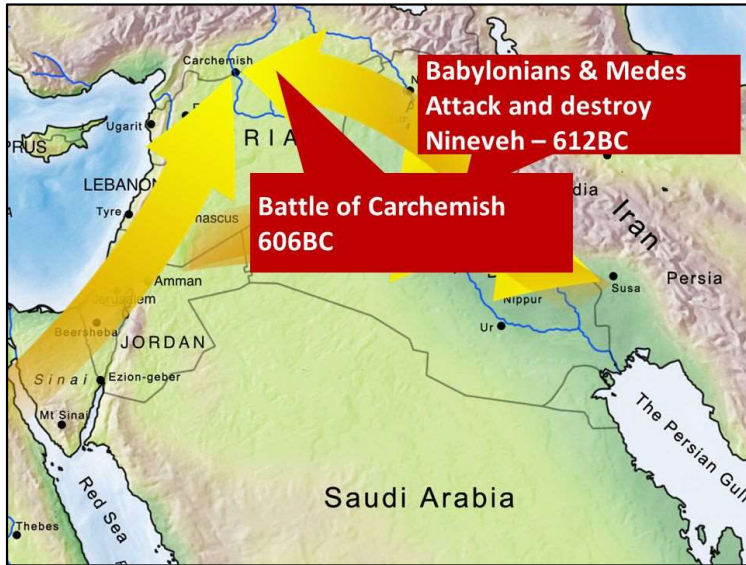
Manasseh's (c. 687-642) tribute is mentioned in Assyrian records (pictured right). He must have tried to revolt, because the Assyrians carried him a prisoner to Babylon, which they controlled. The Chronicler sees this as a punishment for Manasseh's idolatry. After Manasseh repented and returned to the Lord, the Assyrians allowed him to return to his throne in Jerusalem.



Josiah (c. 640-609) introduced religious reforms, like Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah before him, but he was more thorough than they in removing local shrines and idols. These reforms were based on a book of the law found in the Temple. Because Assyrian power was waning, Josiah was able to extend his control and the elimination of idolatry northward as far as Naphtali.

In 609 Pharaoh Neco went through Palestine to aid the Assyrians, who were hard pressed by the Babylonians. Josiah saw this move as a danger to his kingdom, and he opposed Neco's army at the pass of Megiddo in northern Israel. Josiah was defeated and killed, and the prophet Jeremiah composed a lamentation for him. Neco was delayed by this battle, and the last Assyrian effort to repulse the Babylonians was defeated.

With the extinguishing of Assyrian power, Neco took over control of Syria-Palestine. Jehoahaz (609), who succeeded Josiah, probably tried to follow an independent policy; Neco deposed him and took him captive to Egypt. Neco put his brother Eliakim in his place and gave him the throne name Jehoiakim (609-598).



After Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated Neco at Carchemish in northern Syria in 606 BCE, Jehoiakim became a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar, and some of the Judean nobility, including Daniel, were taken to Babylon. After the Egyptian army repulsed the Babylonians in 601, Jehoiakim revolted against Babylon, contrary to the advice of Jeremiah. The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem, and Jehoiakim was taken captive and died.

Jehoiachin (598-597) succeeded to the throne of Judah during the siege of

Jerusalem. In 597 the Babylonians finally took the city and seized treasures from the palace and Temple. Jehoiachin was carried captive to Babylon with thousands of Jewish leaders, soldiers, and artisans.

Nebuchadnezzar placed Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah on the throne of Judah, giving him the throne name Zedekiah (597-586). After some years Zedekiah, disregarding the warnings of Jeremiah, revolted against Babylonia, relying on possible Egyptian help.

### The fall of Jerusalem (586 BCE)

Again Nebuchadnezzar invaded rebellious Judah. Letters on potsherds sent to the Jewish commander at Lachish illustrate the advance of the Babylonians as they captured town after town. Lachish itself was taken and burned. Jerusalem withstood the Babylonian siege for eighteen months. In July, 586 BCE, the Babylonians broke through the walls. Zedekiah tried to escape, but he was captured, blinded, and taken to Babylon. In August the Babylonians burned the city, including the Temple, and broke down the walls. Some of the Jewish leaders were executed, others were taken to Babylonia. Only the poor were left to till the soil.

The fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and destruction of the city.



## List of the Kings of Israel and their response to Yahweh

Date	Kings of Israel	Years Ruled	Rating
930 - 909	Jeroboam I	22	Bad
909 - 908	<u>Nadab</u>	2	Bad
908 - 886	<u>Baasha</u>	24	Bad
886 - 885	<u>Elah</u>	2	Bad
885	<u>Zimri</u>	7 days	Bad
885 - 880	<u>Tibni</u> *	5	?
885 - 874	<u>Omri</u> *	12	Extra Bad
874 - 853	<u>Ahab</u>	22	Worst
853 - 852	<u>Ahaziah</u>	2	Bad
852 - 841	<u>Joram</u>	12	Bad mostly
841 - 814	Jehu	28	Bad mostly
814 - 798	<u>Jehoahaz</u>	17	Bad
798 - 782	Jehoash	16	Bad
793 - 753	Jeroboam II	41	Bad
	(c.r. <u>793 - 782</u> )		
753	Zechariah	6 months	Bad
752	Shallum	1 month	Bad
752 - 742	<u>Menahem</u> **	10	Bad
752 - 732	<u>Pekah</u> **	20	Bad
742 - 740	<u>Pekahiah</u> **	2	Bad
732 - 723	<u>Hoshea</u>	9	Bad

in 723 B.C. Samaria, capital of the Northern Ten Tribes of Israel, falls to Assyrian King Shalmaneser V. The Israelites go into Assyrian captivity. \* After the death of Zimri in 885 B.C. Tibni ruled half the nation and Omri ruled the other half (1 Kings 16:21 - 22). Except for this brief mention in Scripture nothing else is known about Tibni. After Tibni's death Omri became sole king of the Northern kingdom in 880 B.C.

\*\* Pekah began as a ruling rival of Menahem in 752 B.C. This rivalry lasted ten years (2 Kings 15:17) until Menahem's death in 742. From 742 to 740 Pekah and Pekahiah maintained rival thrones (15:23), with Pekah beginning his sole rule of the Northern kingdom in 740 B.C. with his assassination of Pekahiah. Pekah's reign ended when he was assassinated by Hoshea in 732 (2 Kings 15:30).

## List of the Kings of Judah and their response to Yahweh

Date	Kings of Judah	Years Ruled	Rating
930 - 913	<u>Rehoboam</u>	17	Bad mostly
913 - 910	<u>Abijah</u>	3	Bad mostly
910 - 869	Asa	41	Good
872 - 848	Jehoshaphat	25	Good
	(c.r. 872 - 869)		
853 - 841	<u>Jehoram</u>	8	Bad
	(c.r. 853 - 848)		
841	<u>Ahaziah</u>	1	Bad
841 - 835	Queen <u>Athaliah</u>	7	Devilish
835 - 796	<u>Joash</u>	40	Good mostly
796 - 767	<u>Amaziah</u>	29	Good mostly
792 - 740	<u>Azariah (Uzziah)</u>	52	Good
	(c.r. 792 - 767)		
750 - 732	<u>Jotham</u>	16	Good
	(c.r. 750 - 740)		
735 - 715	Ahaz	16	Wicked
	(c.r. 735 - 732)		
715 - 686	Hezekiah	29	Best
696 - 642	Manasseh	55	Worst
	(c.r. 696 - 686)		
642 - 640	Amon	2	Worst
640 - 609	Josiah	31	Best
609	<u>Jehoahaz</u>	3 months	Bad
609 - 598	<u>Jehoiakim</u>	11	Wicked
598 - 597	<u>Jehoiachin</u>	3 months	Bad
597 - 586	Zedekiah	11	Bad



In 597 B.C. Jerusalem falls at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar captured Jehoiachin and took him as prisoner to Babylon. Zedekiah was set up as a puppet king over Judah. In 586 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. He destroyed the city and burned its temple. The destruction of the temple started on the 9th of Ab (Hebrew month) and completed on the 10th. It is interesting that the 9th of Ab will also be the day Jerusalem's second temple (Herod's temple) was completely destroyed in 70 A.D.

### **The Exile (586-538).**

Though the Exile is usually thought of as beginning in 586 BCE with the fall of Jerusalem, it must be remembered that thousands had gone into exile from Israel in 735 bce and in 722 BCE and from Judah in 597 BCE. Furthermore, though the main body of exiles from Judah were in Babylonia, there were also exiles from Israel in northern Mesopotamia and in Media and exiles from Judah in Egypt..

The prophet Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylonia urging them to build houses, plant gardens, and live normal lives. The exiles were allowed to maintain some community organization headed by their own elders. Some Jews went into business and prospered. Daniel is said to have risen to the position of counselor to the king. Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor, removed the exiled Jewish king Jehoiachin from prison and gave him residence in the royal palace in Babylon.

Jeremiah in writing and Ezekiel in person taught the exiles that the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile were Yahweh's punishments for their sins. They urged the exiles to keep faith in Yahweh in the midst of idolatry and held out the hope of return to Judah. The prophecies of the second part of Isaiah comforted the exiles with the assurance that God, the controller of history, would lead them out of Babylonia in a new exodus back to Zion, from which the faith in the one true God would spread to all nations.

### **The Persian period (538-333).**

Cyrus the Persian (c. 559-530) was regarded in the second part of Isaiah as an instrument appointed by God to deliver the Israelite exiles. In 539 BCE the army of Cyrus took Babylon, and Babylonia and its dependencies were incorporated into the Persian empire. Cyrus followed a more tolerant policy toward subject peoples and their religions than that of Assyria or Babylonia. Throughout his empire Cyrus favored local cultural autonomy and respected local gods and their temples. The Jews also benefited from this policy, for Cyrus decreed that the Temple of Yahweh, God of heaven, should be rebuilt in Jerusalem and that Jews wishing to return to Judah could do so.

Shesh-bazzar, a prince of Judah and perhaps a son of Jehoiachin, was appointed governor of Judah. He led the first group of returnees. With them they carried, with Cyrus's permission, vessels of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. On their arrival in Jerusalem the returnees set up an altar and began the foundations of a new Temple. They were suspicious of the racial purity and religious orthodoxy of the Israelites who had not gone into exile and refused to let them help in rebuilding the Temple. These "people of the land" retaliated by urging the Persian authorities to halt the construction of the Temple and the walls.

Another much larger group of Jewish exiles returned with Zerubbabel, who was a nephew of Shesh-bazzar, and followed him as governor of Judah. With Zerubbabel came many priests and Levites led by the high priest Joshua. In 520 work was begun again on the Temple with the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and the permission of King Darius I (522-486). Finally in 515 BCE this second Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem was completed.

# Commentary on the Minor Prophets

## The Format for our Study

We are now going to study the 12 books of the Minor Prophets. Rather than approach the study by reading verse by verse and commenting on each, we will proceed by organizing our study in the following manner:

1. Read each book as homework in preparation to class presentation
2. Validate the author of the book
3. Estimate the date of writing
4. Understand the purpose of the writing
5. Examine the key verses in the book
6. Ask and answer important and often questions about key and other significant verses
7. Learn how the book foreshadows the coming of Christ and other future events
8. Suggest some practical applications of the book to our lives today
9. Each student will write a prayer to the Lord in how a passage or principle presented in the book touched his heart to make a personal response.

## The Book of Hosea

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Hosea.html>

**Author:** Hosea 1:1 identifies the author of the book as the Prophet Hosea. It is Hosea's personal account of his prophetic messages to the children of God and to the world. Hosea is the only prophet of Israel who left any written prophecies which were recorded during the later years of his life.



**Date of Writing:** Hosea, the son of Beeri, prophesied for quite some time, from 785 to 725 B.C. The Book of Hosea was likely written between 755 and 725 B.C.

**Purpose of Writing:** Hosea wrote this book to remind the Israelites—and us—that ours is a loving God whose loyalty to His covenant people is unwavering. In spite of Israel's continual turning to false gods, God's steadfast love is portrayed in the long-suffering husband of the unfaithful wife. Hosea's message is also one of warning to those who would turn their backs on God's love. Through the symbolic presentation of the marriage of Hosea and Gomer, God's love for the idolatrous nation of Israel is displayed in a rich metaphor in the themes of sin, judgment, and forgiving love.

### Key Verses:

**Hosea 1:2, "When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, 'Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.'"**

**Hosea 2:23, "I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are**

*my God.”*

**Hosea 6:6, “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”**

**Hosea 14:2-4, “Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: ‘Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips. Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses. We will never again say “Our gods” to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion.’ “I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.”**

**Brief Summary:** The Book of Hosea can be divided into two parts: (1) Hosea 1:1-3:5 is a description of an adulterous wife and a faithful husband, symbolic of the unfaithfulness of Israel to God through idolatry, and (2) Hosea 4:1-14:9 contains the condemnation of Israel, especially Samaria, for the worship of idols and her eventual restoration.

The first section of the book contains three distinctive poems illustrating how God’s children returned time after time to idolatry. God commands Hosea to marry Gomer, but after bearing him three children, she walks away from Hosea to her lovers. The symbolic emphasis can be seen clearly in the first chapter as Hosea compares Israel’s actions to turning from a marriage to life as a prostitute. The second section contains Hosea’s denunciation of the Israelites but followed by the promises and the mercies of God.

The Book of Hosea is a prophetic accounting of God’s relentless love for His children. Since the beginning of time God’s ungrateful and undeserving creation has been accepting God’s love, grace, and mercy while still unable to refrain from its wickedness.

The last part of Hosea shows how God’s love once again restores His children as He forgets their misdeeds when they turn back to Him with a repentant heart. The prophetic message of Hosea foretells the coming of Israel’s Messiah 700 years in the future. Hosea is quoted often in the New Testament.

**The question could be asked, “Why did God tell Hosea to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2)?”**

In Hosea 1:2 we read, “*The LORD said to Hosea, ‘Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom.’*” Hosea obeyed, marrying a woman named Gomer (funny name for a wife), who was unfaithful to him. Why did God tell Hosea to marry a prostitute?

To begin with, it is important to realize this command could be understood two different ways. First, and more likely, this command could be one of anticipation. In other words, God may have instructed Hosea to marry a woman who **would later become** unfaithful to him. The other possibility is that the command was for Hosea to marry someone already known as a prostitute. Since this wife was to represent a nation who turned from their love for God (the marriage vow) to adultery against God the more likely scenario is that they would marry, then his wife would become unfaithful, just as Israel had become.

In either case, the reason for this unusual directive is specified in the latter half of the same verse: “*For the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.*” God wanted to provide an illustration of His

relationship with the people of Israel, who had been unfaithful to Him by practicing idolatry. This theme is carried through the remainder of the prophecies in chapter 1 and the discussion of Israel's unfaithfulness in chapter 2.

In Hosea 3:1, after Gomer had left Hosea and was living in immorality, the Lord commanded Hosea to find her and buy her back. God was continuing His illustration, except now He wanted to show the greatness of His grace: *“Even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods.”* Hosea's faithful love of Gomer was an illustration of God's faithfulness to wayward Israel. Just as Gomer had been unfaithful to her husband and had to be redeemed, Israel needed God's initiative to restore their relationship.

To summarize, Israel had been chosen and loved by God yet had been unfaithful to Him by way of idolatry. Just as Hosea redeemed his estranged wife and sought to continue his relationship with her, God promised to redeem Israel and renew their relationship with Him. The story of Hosea and Gomer is an unforgettable picture of God's strong, unending love for His covenant people.

**Foreshadowings:** Hosea 2:23 is the wonderful prophetic message from God to include the Gentiles [non-Jews] as His children as recorded also in Romans 9:25 and 1 Peter 2:10. Gentiles are not originally “God's people,” but through His mercy and grace, He has provided Jesus Christ, and by faith in Him we are grafted into the tree of His people (Romans 11:11-18). This is an amazing truth about the Church, one that is called a “mystery” because before Christ, God's people were considered to be the Jews alone. When Christ came, the Jews were temporarily blinded until the “full number of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25).

**Practical Application:** The Book of Hosea assures us of God's unconditional love for His people. But it is also a picture of how God is dishonored and angered by the actions of His children. How can a child who is given an abundance of love, mercy, and grace treat a Father with so much disrespect? Yet, we have done just that for centuries. As we consider how the Israelites turned their backs on God, we need to look no further than the mirror in front of us to see a reflection of those same Israelites.

Only by remembering how much God has done for each of us will we be able to avoid rejecting the One who can give us eternal life in glory instead of the hell we deserve. It is essential that we learn to respect our Creator. Hosea has shown us God's heart of loving commitment. When we do sin, if we have a sorrowful heart filled with repentance, then God will bring us back to Himself and show His never-ending love to us (see 1 John 1:9). What an amazing God who loves us in spite of who we are!

My prayer in response to the Lord:



## The Book of Joel

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Joel.html>



**Author:** The Book of Joel states that its author was the Prophet Joel (Joel 1:1).

**Date of Writing:** The Book of Joel was likely written between 835 and 800 B.C.

**Purpose of Writing:** Judah, the setting for the book, is devastated by a vast horde of locusts. This invasion of locusts destroys everything—the fields of grain, the vineyards, the gardens and the trees. Joel symbolically describes the locusts as a marching human army and views all of this as divine judgment coming against the nation for her sins. The book is highlighted by two major events. One is the invasion of locusts and the other the outpouring of the Spirit. The initial fulfillment of this is quoted by Peter in Acts 2 as having taken place at Pentecost.

### Key Verses:

**Joel 1:4, "What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten."**

**Joel 2:25, "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten..."**

**Joel 2:28, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."**

**So, "What does it mean that God will pour out His Spirit on all people (Joel 2:28)?"**

Beginning in Joel 2:28, the prophet transitions to a description of events in the distant future (from his vantage point). Verse 28 says, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." What did he mean? Has this been fulfilled?

A New Testament reference to this verse provides help in understanding this statement. In Acts 2:15-17 Peter is preaching on the Day of Pentecost: "For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.'"

In this sermon, Peter connects Joel's prophecy with the Holy Spirit's coming and the commencement of the church. Not every detail of Joel's prophecy is yet fulfilled, but the "pouring out of the Spirit" began on the Day of Pentecost. From that time, the Holy Spirit indwells all those who come to faith in Jesus Christ.

This event marked a notable difference in the Spirit's role from Old Testament times. The Spirit had previously only empowered certain individuals and sometimes only for a particular period of time. On the Day of Pentecost, the 120 followers of Jesus in the Upper Room not only experienced the Holy Spirit's power but His abiding presence (cf. John 14:16). Three thousand people believed and were baptized that day. These converts all received the Holy Spirit into their lives that same day (Acts 2:38).

One of the surprising outcomes of Joel's prophecy was that even non-Jews were filled with the Spirit. In Acts 10:45 we read, *"The believers from among the circumcised . . . were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles."* God was lavishing His Spirit on everyone who believed in Jesus, regardless of their culture, nationality, or ethnicity. "All people," as Joel had said, were offered this gift.

In the future, the Holy Spirit will play an active role in end-time events, bringing to pass the other aspects of Joel's prophecies in Joel chapters 2 and 3. However, the initial fulfillment of this prophecy has already begun, as noted by the apostle Peter, allowing all who follow Christ today to experience the blessing of the Holy Spirit living within them and empowering them for Christian service. (Revelation 1:4, 10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:1, 6, 13, 22; 4:2, 5, 6; 14:13; 17:3; 21:10; 22:17).

**Brief Summary:** A terrible plague of locusts is followed by a severe famine throughout the land. Joel uses these happenings as the catalyst to send words of warning to Judah. Unless the people repent quickly and completely, enemy armies will devour the land as did the natural elements. Joel appeals to all the people and the priests of the land to fast and humble themselves as they seek God's forgiveness. If they will respond, there will be renewed material and spiritual blessings for the nation. But the Day of the Lord is coming. At this time the dreaded locusts will seem as gnats in comparison, as all nations receive His judgment.

The overriding theme of the Book of Joel is the Day of the Lord, a day of God's wrath and judgment. This is the Day in which God reveals His attributes of wrath, power and holiness, and it is a terrifying day to His enemies. In the first chapter, the Day of the Lord is experienced historically by the plague of locusts upon the land. Chapter 2:1-17 is a transitional chapter in which Joel uses the metaphor of the locust plague and drought to renew a call to repentance. Chapters 2:18-3:21 describes the Day of the Lord in eschatological terms and answers the call to repentance with prophecies of physical restoration (2:21-27), spiritual restoration (2:28-32), and national restoration (3:1-21).

### "What is the valley of decision (Joel 3:14)?"

Joel 3:14 says, *"Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision."* Many evangelists have drawn from this passage to challenge audiences to "make a decision" for Christ. Others view this valley of decision as a time of judgment when the Lord decides the fate of the nations. Which is it? An invitation or a prophecy of doom?

The context of Joel 3 clarifies that this is a time when God judges the earth. Verse 2 says, *"I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel."* The Valley of Jehoshaphat is the same as the "valley of decision." *Jehoshaphat* means "Yahweh judges"; the "decision" being made in the valley is God's, not the multitudes'. The literal, geographical location of this valley is likely the Kidron Valley on the east side of Jerusalem.

The focus of Joel 3 is on the future Day of the Lord. This time will include a gathering of the nations (verse 2), a judgment on wickedness (verse 13), and astronomical signs (verse 15). Joel's prophecy of the valley of decision finds its counterpart in Jesus' Olivet Discourse and the judgment of the sheep and

the goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

Immediately following the prophecy of judgment, Joel transitions to a description of the Lord's millennial reign, a literal 1,000-year time period that follows the tribulation. During the millennium Christ rules as king from Jerusalem. Some interpreters argue the millennium is figurative, yet many passages, including Joel 3:18-21, describe this time in great detail. Further, Revelation 20:1-7 refers to "1,000 years" six times. It seems that God desires us to know that the millennial kingdom is a literal time period.

Ultimately, the "valley of decision" in Joel 3:14 is not about humans choosing whether or not to follow Christ; it is God handing down His decision of judgment at the end of the tribulation. Wickedness will be dealt with decisively, swiftly and justly. Praise the Lord for His promise to make all things right one day and to be "a refuge for his people" (Joel 3:16).

**Foreshadowings:** Whenever the Old Testament speaks of judgment for sin, whether individual or national sin, the advent of Jesus Christ is foreshadowed. The prophets of the Old Testament continually warned Israel to repent, but even when they did, their repentance was limited to law-keeping and works. Their temple sacrifices were but a shadow of the ultimate sacrifice, offered once for all time, which would come at the cross (Hebrews 10:10). Joel tells us that God's ultimate judgment, which falls on the Day of the Lord, will be "*great and terrible. Who can endure it?*" (Joel 2:11). The answer is that we, on our own, can never endure such a moment. But if we have placed our faith in Christ for atonement of our sins, we have nothing to fear from the Day of Judgment.

**Practical Application:** Without repentance, judgment will be harsh, thorough and certain. Our trust should not be in our possessions but in the Lord our God. God at times may use nature, sorrow or other common occurrences to draw us closer to Him. But in His mercy and grace, He has provided the definitive plan for our salvation—Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins and exchanging our sin for His perfect righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). There is no time to lose. God's judgment will come swiftly, as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2), and we must be ready. Today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7). Only by appropriating God's salvation can we escape His wrath on the Day of the Lord.

My prayer in response to the Lord:

## The Book of Amos

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Amos.html>

**Author:** Amos 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of Amos as the Prophet Amos.

**Date of Writing:** The Book of Amos was likely written between 760 and 753 B.C.

**Purpose of Writing:** Amos is a shepherd and a fruit picker from the Judean village of Tekoa when God calls him, even though he lacks an education or a priestly background. Amos' mission is directed to his neighbor to the north, Israel. His messages of impending doom and captivity for the nation because of her sins are largely unpopular and unheeded, however, because not since the days of Solomon have times been so good in Israel. Amos' ministry takes place while Jeroboam II reigns over Israel, and Uzziah reigns over Judah.



### Key Verses:

**Amos 2:4, "This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed.'"**

**"Why does Amos keep repeating "for three sins . . . even for four" in chapters 1–2?"**

The phrase "for three sins . . . even for four" is a common phrase in Amos (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). Used a total of eight times in the book, these words play a special role in the way Amos communicates sin and judgment. "Three sins" represents fullness or completeness; "four" represents an overflow or a sin that is the tipping point for God's judgment. The word *sins* or *transgressions* in Hebrew specifically refers to "rebellions." The first two chapters of Amos contain eight messages against the nations, including Judah and Israel, condemning them for their rebellion against the Lord.

Interestingly, "for three sins . . . even for four" is not followed by four specific sins. In fact, the typical pattern is to list one or two sins and move on. Therefore, the expression is not meant to imply a specific number of sins but to communicate that there is an excess of sins that have led to God's judgment.

Each of Amos's eight messages follows a similar pattern. First, there is the phrase "for three sins . . . even for four." Second, one or two specific sins are mentioned regarding the nation being addressed. Third, a judgment is given. Amos starts with Israel's enemies and ends with oracles against Judah and Israel.

Judah (Amos 2:4-5) is accused of three specific sins (rejecting the Law, not keeping its statutes, and lying) and is judged with fire on the nation and Jerusalem. Israel (Amos 2:6-16) is condemned with a complete list of seven sins and receives an extended discussion of its coming judgments.

While God clearly condemned the sins of the surrounding nations, Amos' message is dominated by

judgment against Israel. Yet, even in judgment, there is hope. The conclusion of his prophecy (9:11-15) speaks of a time of future blessing for Israel. The book's final verse reads, *"I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the LORD your God.*" Though Israel would be taken from its land (as a result of attacks by Assyria and Babylon), its people would one day return to the land and live in prosperity with their Messiah.

**Amos 3:7, "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets."**

**Amos 9:14, "I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit."**

**Brief Summary:** Amos can see that beneath Israel's external prosperity and power, internally the nation is corrupt to the core. The sins for which Amos chastens the people are extensive: neglect of God's Word, idolatry, pagan worship, greed, corrupted leadership and oppression of the poor. Amos begins by pronouncing a judgment upon all the surrounding nations, then upon his own nation of Judah, and finally the harshest judgment is given to Israel. His visions from God reveal the same emphatic message: judgment is near. The book ends with God's promise to Amos of future restoration of the remnant.

**So, "What is the meaning of the symbolism in Amos, e.g., sledges with iron teeth (Amos 1:3), murdered pregnant women (Amos 1:13), burning bones (Amos 2:1), destroyed roots (Amos 2:9), and hooks (Amos 4:2)?"**

The book of Amos is filled with imagery related to sin and judgment. Included are images of iron teeth (1:3), murdered pregnant women (1:13), burning bones ([Amos 2:1](#)), destroyed roots (2:9), and hooks (4:2). How are we to understand these violent themes?

First, we must understand the context of these descriptions. Amos is pronouncing judgment on Israel's enemies, and then on Israel itself, for some specific sins. The purpose of prophesying doom was often to call sinner to repent. That's why God sent Jonah to preach in Nineveh, telling the people God would judge their city in 40 days. The Ninevites repented, and God did not bring about judgment. The Lord had compassion for those who repented.

A brief look at each of the images in Amos more fully explains what they indicate:

- Iron teeth (1:3): "Iron teeth" were part of a threshing sledge, a farming implement drawn over grain to thresh it and cut the stalks. God pictures Syria's cruelty toward Gilead (in northeast Israel) as a threshing sledge being run over His people. For their brutality, Syria is promised judgment.
- Murdered pregnant women (1:13): The Ammonites would be judged for performing atrocities against Israel. Second Kings 8:12 and 15:16 confirm the reality of such horrific acts during war.
- Burning bones (2:1): The Moabites would be judged for their sin of the disrespectful treatment of an Edomite king's corpse (2 Kings 3:26-27). In a culture in which a proper burial was of utmost importance, the burning of bones communicated a severe hatred.
- Destroyed roots (2:9): This is a picture of God's judgment on the Amorites, as the "fruit above" and

the “roots beneath” were destroyed—in other words, the Amorites were completely wiped out. God reminds Israel of the Amorites’ fate in order to call His people back to righteousness and the fear of God.

- Hooks (4:2): This is part of a prophecy against Israel, warning them that the Assyrians would one day take them captive. Israel would be led away as fish were carried away on hooks. It is believed the “hooks” could be literal, since Assyrians did at times lead captives with ropes attached to rings in the jaws or lips or noses of their enemies.

### **"What was the significance of the horns of the altar (Amos 3:14)?"**

In speaking of judgment, God says, “The horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground” (Amos 3:14). What were these horns of the altar? Why were they important?

The “horns” were horn-like projections at the four corners of the altar of burnt offering. God’s instructions for the altar’s construction specified “horns”: “Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece” (Exodus 27:2).

During Amos’s day, the Israelites had apostatized and had erected altars to false gods. First Kings 12:26-30 speaks of two such pagan altars set up in Israel, one in Dan and one in Bethel. These altars had been constructed with horns at the corners, akin to the altar in Jerusalem.

When God says that the horns of the altar would fall off, He is assuring Israel that He would judge their idolatry. Indeed, God says earlier in the same verse, “On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel.”

The horns of the altar in Jerusalem had provided a refuge for fugitives. Those who caught hold of the horns of the altar were granted asylum (1 Kings 1:50-53). This use of the horns sheds additional light on God’s statement in Amos 3:14. Some scholars believe that God’s promise that the horns of the altar would fall to the ground meant that there would be no place of asylum, no place to escape the coming judgment.

Amos 3:15 indicates that the judgment would have deeply felt effects: *“I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,” declares the Lord.* No amount of material prosperity would be able to save the wicked. God’s judgment would destroy both the places of spiritual and material significance.

Yet the people of Israel would not be completely destroyed. Verse 12 says, *“As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed.”* A remnant would survive. In their lowly state, they would be left only “the corner of a couch,” living in a state of poverty.

God’s desire in this prophecy was twofold. First, He longed for Israel to repent and turn from following other gods. Second, since these predictions did come true, they attest to God’s supernatural ability to foretell the future.

The destruction of the horns of the altar represents the downfall of idolatry and the removal of all safe



havens. When God's people refuse to heed His Word, He brings a just and curative discipline upon them.

**Foreshadowings:** The Book of Amos ends with a glorious promise for the future. *"I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God*" (9:15). The ultimate fulfillment of God's land promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:7; 17:8) will occur during Christ's millennial reign on earth (see Joel 2:26,27). Revelation 20 describes the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth, a time of peace and joy under the perfect government of the Savior Himself. At that time, believing Israel and the Gentile Christians will be combined in the Church and will live and reign with Christ.

**Practical Application:** Sometimes we think we are a "just-a"! We are just-a salesman, farmer or housewife. Amos would be considered a "just-a." He wasn't a prophet or priest or the son of either. He was just a shepherd, a small businessman in Judah. Who would listen to him? But instead of making excuses, Amos obeyed and became God's powerful voice for change.

God has used "just-a's" such as shepherds, carpenters, and fishermen all through the Bible. Whatever you are in this life, God can use you. Amos wasn't much. He was a "just-a." "Just-a" servant for God. It is good to be God's "just-a."

My prayer in response to the Lord:

## The Book of Obadiah

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Obadiah.html>

(Pictured to the right is an Edomite goddess Qitmit)

**Author:** Obadiah verse 1 identifies the author of the Book of Obadiah as the Prophet Obadiah.

**Date of Writing:** The Book of Obadiah was likely written between 848 and 840 B.C.

**Purpose of Writing:** Obadiah, the shortest book in the Old Testament, is only 21 verses long. Obadiah is a prophet of God who uses this opportunity to condemn Edom for sins against both God and Israel. The Edomites are descendants of Esau and the Israelites are descendants of his twin brother, Jacob. A quarrel between the brothers has affected their descendants for over 1,000 years. This division caused



the Edomites to forbid Israel to cross their land during the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt. Edom's sins of pride now require a strong word of judgment from the Lord.

#### **Key Verses:**

**Obadiah verse 4, "Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD."**

**Obadiah verse 12, "You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble."**

**Obadiah verse 15, "The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head."**

**Brief Summary:** Obadiah's message is final and it is sure: the kingdom of Edom will be destroyed completely. Edom has been arrogant, gloating over Israel's misfortunes, and when enemy armies attack Israel and the Israelites ask for help, the Edomites refuse and choose to fight against them, not for them. These sins of pride can be overlooked no longer. The book ends with the promise of the fulfillment and deliverance of Zion in the Last Days when the land will be restored to God's people as He rules over them.

#### **"Why did God judge Edom so harshly in the book of Obadiah?"**

Obadiah clearly predicted Edom's destruction (Obadiah vs. 1, 8), and the prophecy offers a list of specific reasons for God's impending judgment:

- Their heart of pride: *"The pride of your heart has deceived you"* (Obadiah vs. 3).
- Their violent acts against Israel: *"Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever"* (Obadiah vs.10).
- Their attitude toward Jerusalem's destruction: *"Do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin"* (Obadiah vs.12).
- Their plundering and looting of Jerusalem: *"Do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity"* (vs. 13).
- Their mistreatment of Jerusalem's survivors: *"Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives"* (Obadiah vs.14).

In addition to these specific sins, Edom had been a longtime enemy of Israel, ever since the time of the Exodus (Numbers 20:14-21), when the Edomites had acted churlishly toward the refugees. Through Obadiah, God provided a list of eight "do not's" (Obadiah vs.12-14), a list which Edom obviously ignored.

Adding to their culpability is the fact that the Edomites were related to the Israelites. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob and grandson of Abraham. This family tie should

have incited compassion for Israel's plight; instead, it made Edom's actions even more repulsive, since they were opposing not only God's chosen people but also their own relatives.

**"When were Obadiah's prophecies against Edom fulfilled (Obadiah vs.18-20)?"**

A major factor in determining when Obadiah's prophecies against Edom were fulfilled rests on when the book was written. The prophet mentions a recent invasion of Jerusalem (1:10-11), which helps to narrow down the date of writing. Jerusalem experienced four different invasions in Old Testament times, yet only two fit the time period under discussion in Obadiah. The early date would be about 841 B.C., when the Philistines and Arabians attacked Jerusalem during the reign of King Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:16-17). The later date would be approximately 586 B.C., following the invasion of Babylon (2 Kings 24-25).

If the earlier date is correct, Obadiah would be the earliest of the prophetic books in the Old Testament. Those who hold this position refer to 2 Kings 8:20, which mentions Edom setting up its own king: *"In his days Edom revolted from the rule of Judah and set up a king of their own."* Also used to support this date are comparisons of 2 Chronicles 21:16-17 with Joel 3:3-6 and Obadiah 1:11-12; as well as similarities between Obadiah 1:1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-22.

If the later date is correct, the prophecy of Obadiah regarding Edom's doom is more dramatic. Babylon completed its invasion of Jerusalem under King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. In the fifth century B.C., a people called the Nabateans defeated the Edomites and forced them from the city of Petra. The interval between prediction and fulfillment would, therefore, have been very short.

Regardless of the exact date, the predictions against Edom have already been fulfilled. Edom was removed from its land in the fifth century B.C., and there are no survivors of Edom today. This fulfilled the prediction in Obadiah vs.18: *"They shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau."* Some first-century leaders, such as Herod the Great, still traced their ancestry to Edom, but all mention of Edomites fades after the Jewish Wars of that era. At the end of the 4th century, Jerome referenced the land of Idumea (Edom), but the people of the region had long since disappeared.

**Foreshadowings:** Verse 21 of the Book of Obadiah contains a foreshadowing of Christ and His Church. *"Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, And the kingdom shall be the LORD's"* (NKJV). These "saviors" (also called "deliverers" in several versions) are the apostles of Christ, ministers of the word, and especially the preachers of the Gospel in these latter days. They are called "saviors," not because they obtain our salvation, but because they preach salvation through the Gospel of Christ and show us the way to obtain that salvation. They, and the Word preached by them, are the means by which the good news of salvation is delivered to all men. While Christ is the only Savior who alone came to purchase salvation, and is the author of it, saviors and deliverers of the Gospel will be more and more in evidence as the end of the age draws near.

**Practical Application:** God will overcome in our behalf if we will stay true to Him. Unlike Edom, we must be willing to help others in times of need. Pride is sin. We have nothing to be proud of except Jesus Christ and what He has done for us.

My prayer in response to the Lord:

## The Book of Jonah

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Jonah.html>

**Author:** Jonah 1:1 identifies the book as telling the story of the prophet Jonah. Although the book is written in the third person, the traditional view is that Jonah is the author of the book, and there is no persuasive reason to theorize about an unknown author.



**Date of Writing:** The Book of Jonah was likely written between 793 and 758 B.C.

**Purpose of Writing:** Disobedience and revival are the key themes in this book. Jonah's experience in the belly of the great fish provides him with a unique opportunity to seek a unique deliverance, as he repents during this equally unique retreat. His initial disobedience leads not only to his personal revival, but to that of the Ninevites as well. Many classify the revival which Jonah brings to Nineveh as one of the greatest evangelistic efforts of all time.

### Key Verses:

**Jonah 1:3, "But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish..."**

**Jonah 1:17, "But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights."**

**Jonah 2:2, "In my distress I called to the LORD, and He answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry."**

**Jonah 3:10, "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."**

**Brief Summary:** Jonah's fear and pride cause him to run from God. He does not wish to go to Nineveh to preach repentance to the people, as God has commanded, because he feels they are his enemies, and he is convinced that God will not carry out his threat to destroy the city. Instead he boards a ship for Tarshish, which is in the opposite direction. Soon a raging storm causes the crew to cast lots and determine that Jonah is the problem. They throw him overboard, and he is swallowed by a great fish. In its belly for 3 days and 3 nights, Jonah repents of his sin to God, and the fish vomits him up on dry land (we wonder what took him so long to repent). Jonah then makes the 500-mile trip to Nineveh and leads the city in a great revival. **But the prophet is displeased (actually pouts) instead of being thankful when Nineveh repents.** Jonah learns his lesson, however, when God uses a wind, a gourd and a worm to teach him that He is merciful.

### "Why was Jonah angry that the Ninevites repented (Jonah 4:1-2)?"

It seems strange that a preacher would be angry that his listeners repented of their sin, but that is exactly Jonah's reaction to the Ninevites' repentance. Jonah 4:2 tells us why: *"O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."* Jonah knew from the start that God was gracious and merciful. He realized that if the people of Nineveh repented, God would spare them. The prophet was angry at their repentance because he would rather see them destroyed.

There are several possible reasons for Jonah's desire to see Nineveh destroyed. First, Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, a ruthless and warlike people who were enemies of Israel. Nineveh's destruction would have been seen as a victory for Israel. Second, Jonah probably wanted to see Nineveh's downfall to satisfy his own sense of justice. After all, Nineveh deserved God's judgment. Third, God's withholding of judgment from Nineveh could have made Jonah's words appear illegitimate, since he had predicted the city's destruction.

We can learn from Jonah's negative example that we should praise God for His goodness. First, our God is a merciful God, willing to forgive all those who repent (see 2 Peter 3:9). The Ninevites were Gentiles, yet God still extended His salvation to them. In His goodness, God warned the Assyrians before sending judgment, giving them a chance to repent.

Second, God cares for people of every nation. He is, by nature, a Savior. As Luke 15 reveals in the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son, God's heart is for the redemption of all who will come to Him. Further, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 emphasizes God's call to take God's message of "good news" to all the nations. Romans 1:16 also emphasizes the importance of sharing the gospel with both Jews and non-Jews.

Third, God is concerned for children. The mention of "more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left" (Jonah 4:11) may refer to young children. When God mentions His concern for this group, He highlights His love and concern for all the children of the world.

### "Was Jonah truly swallowed by a great fish?"

The story of Jonah is the amazing tale of a disobedient prophet who, upon being swallowed by a great fish and vomited upon the shore, reluctantly led the reprobate city of Nineveh to repentance. The biblical account is often criticized by skeptics because of its miraculous content. These miracles include:

- A Mediterranean storm, both summoned and dissipated by God (1:4-16).
- A massive fish, appointed by God to swallow the prophet after he was thrown into the sea by his ship's crew (1:17).
- Jonah's survival in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, or his resurrection from the dead after being vomited upon the shore, depending on how you interpret the text (1:17).
- The fish vomiting Jonah upon shore at God's command (2:10).
- A gourd, appointed by God to grow rapidly in order to provide Jonah with shade (4:6).
- A worm, appointed by God to attack and whither the shady gourd (4:7).
- A scorching wind, summoned by God to discomfort Jonah (4:8).



Critics also find Nineveh's repentance (3:4-9) hard to believe, though it isn't technically a miracle. In actual fact, Nineveh's repentance makes perfect sense given Jonah's extraordinary arrival upon the shores of the Mediterranean and the prominence of Dagon worship in that particular area of the ancient world. Dagon was a fish-god who enjoyed popularity among the pantheons of Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean coast. He is mentioned several times in the Bible in relation to the Philistines (Judges 16:23-24; 1 Samuel 5:1-7; 1 Chronicles 10:8-12). Images of Dagon have been found in palaces and temples in Nineveh and throughout the region. In some cases he was represented as a man wearing a fish. In others he was part man, part fish—a merman, of sorts.

As for Jonah's success in Nineveh, Orientalist Henry Clay Trumbull made a valid point when he wrote, "What better heralding, as a divinely sent messenger to Nineveh, could Jonah have had, than to be thrown up out of the mouth of a great fish, in the presence of witnesses, say on the coast of Phoenicia, where the fish-god was a favorite object of worship? Such an incident would have inevitably aroused the mercurial nature of Oriental observers, so that a multitude would be ready to follow the seemingly new avatar of the fish-god, proclaiming the story of his uprising from the sea, as he went on his mission to the city where the fish-god had its very center of worship" (H. Clay Trumbull, "Jonah in Nineveh." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 2, No.1, 1892, p. 56).

Some scholars have speculated that Jonah's appearance, no doubt bleached white from the action of the fish's digestive acids, would have been of great help to his cause. If such were the case, the Ninevites would have been greeted by a man whose skin, hair and clothes were bleached ghostly white—a man accompanied by a crowd of frenetic followers, many of who claimed to have witnessed him having been vomited upon the shore by a great fish (plus any colorful exaggerations they might have added).

Jonah needed only to cause enough of a stir to gain himself admittance to the king who, upon believing Jonah's message of imminent doom for himself, would have the power to proclaim a citywide day of fasting and penance. According to the biblical narrative that's exactly what happened (Jonah 3:6-9). So we see that, given the caveat that Jonah was spewed upon the shore by a great fish, Nineveh's repentance follows from a very logical progression.

Nineveh was Assyrian. What this essentially means is that Berosus wrote of a fish-man named Jonah who emerged from the sea to give divine wisdom to man – a remarkable corroboration of the Hebrew account.



Jonah appears elsewhere in the chronicles of Israel as the prophet who predicted Jeroboam II's military successes against Syria in the 8th century before Christ (2 Kings 14:25). He is said to be the son of Amittai (cf. Jonah 1:1) from the town of Gath-hepher in lower Galilee. Flavius Josephus reiterates these details in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (chapter 10, paragraph 2). Jonah was not an imaginary

figure invented to play the part of a disobedient prophet, swallowed by a fish. He was part of Israel's prophetic history.

As for the city of Nineveh, it was rediscovered in the 19th century after more than 2,500 years of obscurity. It is now believed to have been the largest city in the world at the time of its demise. It is interesting to note where the lost city of Nineveh was rediscovered. It was found buried beneath a pair of tells in the vicinity of Mosul in modern-day Iraq. These mounds are known by their local names, Kuyunjik and Nabi Yunus. Nabi Yunus happens to be Arabic for “the Prophet Jonah.” The lost city of Nineveh was found buried beneath an ancient tell named after the Prophet Jonah.

So we now have three of the four major players: Jonah, Nineveh and the man-eating fish. All that remains is the fourth major player: God. Skeptics scoff at the miracles described in the book of Jonah as if there were no mechanism by which such events could ever occur. That is their bias. We are inclined, however, to believe that there is One who is capable of manipulating natural phenomena in such supernatural ways. We believe that He is the Creator of the natural realm and is not, therefore, circumscribed by it. We call Him “God,” and we believe that He sent Jonah to Nineveh to bring about their repentance.

God has made Himself known throughout history in many diverse ways, not the least of which was His incarnation in the Person of Jesus Christ. Not only does Jesus give us reason to believe that there exists One who is able to perform miracles, He gives us every confidence that such events have, in fact, occurred.

Jesus spoke of Jonah’s ordeal as a real historical event. He used it as a typological metaphor for His own crucifixion and resurrection, itself a miraculous event. Matthew quoted Jesus as saying, *“For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea creature, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, Someone greater than Jonah is here”* (Matthew 12:40-41; cf. Luke 11:29-30, 32).

The evidence is such that any Christian should have confidence to believe and any skeptic should think twice before dismissing Jonah as a fairy tale.

**Foreshadowings:** That Jonah is a type of Christ is clear from Jesus’ own words. In Matthew 12:40-41, Jesus declares that He will be in the grave the same amount of time Jonah was in the great fish’s belly. He goes on to say that while the Ninevites repented in the face of Jonah’s preaching, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law who rejected Jesus were rejecting One who is far greater than Jonah. Just as Jonah brought the truth of God regarding repentance and salvation to the Ninevites, so too does Jesus bring the same message (Jonah 2:9; John 14:6) of salvation of and through God alone (Romans 11:36).

**Practical Application:** We cannot hide from God. What He wishes to accomplish through us will come to pass, despite all our objections and foot-dragging. Ephesians 2:10 reminds us that He has plans for us and will see to it that we conform to those plans. How much easier it would be if we, unlike Jonah, would submit to Him without delay!

God’s love manifests itself in His accessibility to all, regardless of our reputation, nationality or race. The free offer of the Gospel is for all people in all times. Our task as Christians is to be the means by which God tells the world of the offer and to rejoice in the salvation of others. This is an experience God wants us to share with Him, not being jealous or resentful of those who come to Christ in “last-minute conversions” or who come through circumstances dissimilar to our own.

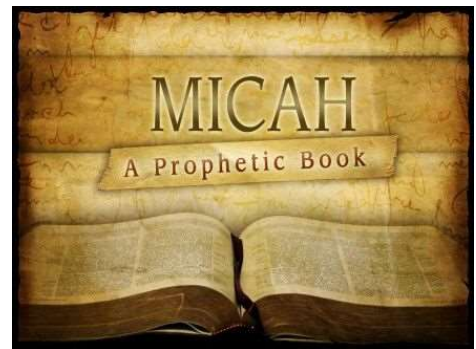
My prayer in response to the Lord:

## The Book of Micah

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Micah.html>

**Author:** The author of the Book of Micah was the Prophet Micah (Micah 1:1).

**Date of Writing:** The Book of Micah was likely written between 735 and 700 B.C.



**Purpose of Writing:** The message of the Book of Micah is a complex mixture of judgment and hope. On the one hand, the prophecies announce judgment upon Israel for social evils, corrupt leadership and idolatry. This judgment was expected to culminate in the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem. On the other hand, the book proclaims not merely the restoration of the nation, but the transformation and exaltation of Israel and Jerusalem. The messages of hope and doom are not necessarily contradictory, however, since restoration and transformation take place only after judgment.

### Key Verses:

**Micah 1:2, "Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple."**

**Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."**

**"Is Micah 5:2 a Messianic prophecy?"**

Micah 5:2 predicts, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of

*old, from ancient days.*" The verse clearly speaks of a coming king in Israel, but does it predict the coming of the Messiah?

Micah 5:2 makes a couple of predictions. First, the birthplace of this future "ruler of Israel" would be Bethlehem Ephrathah. Since there were two locations known as Bethlehem at the time of Micah's writing, the addition of Ephrathah is significant. It specifies the Bethlehem in Judah, the portion of Israel in which the capital, Jerusalem, was located. Bethlehem was considered "little," or insignificant, among the cities of Judah, yet would serve as the birthplace of this future ruler.

Second, the coming ruler of Jewish background was one "*whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days.*" What else could this refer to other than the Messiah? Only the Messiah fits the description of a ruler in Israel whose origin was from times past. In fact, "from ancient days" is sometimes synonymous with "eternal" (as in Habakkuk 1:12). Only the Jewish Messiah could be a ruler in Israel from eternity past.

**This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the Jewish religious leaders in the first century identified Micah 5:2 as a Messianic prophecy.** In Matthew 2, wise men from the East visited King Herod in Jerusalem and asked where the king of the Jews had been born. Herod assembled all the chief priests and scribes, and "he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea,'" basing their answer on Micah 5:2.

Only Jesus Christ fits the Messianic claims of Micah 5:2. He was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah (Matthew 2; Luke 2:1-20). Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the ruler of Israel (John 4:25-26). He also fits the description as being "from ancient times" or eternal (John 1:1; Colossians 1:16-17). No other ruler in Israel fits these requirements. Dozens of other direct prophecies in the Old Testament (some scholars cite hundreds) fit Jesus' birth, ministry, and death.

Jesus told the Jews that the Law and the Prophets provided a clear witness that He was who He claimed to be. "*These are the Scriptures that testify about me,*" He said (John 5:39). Still today, those who investigate the prophecy of Micah 5:2 and other Messianic passages find compelling evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

**Micah 6:8, "*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*"**

**"What does it mean to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly (Micah 6:8)?"**

One of the most popular verses among both Jews and Christians promoting social justice is Micah 6:8. Many desire to know more about what this inspiring verse teaches on the issues of justice, mercy, and humility.

Micah 6 involves an imaginary conversation between the Lord and Israel. In verses 1-5 the Lord introduces His case against the disobedient people of Israel. Verses 6-7 record Israel's response as a series of questions beginning with, "*With what shall I come to the Lord?*" (Micah 6:6).

Israel's focus is on their external religious rites, and their questions show a progression from lesser to greater. First, they ask if God would be satisfied with burnt offerings of year-old calves (Micah 6:6b), offerings required in the Law of Moses. Second, they ask if they should bring "*thousands of rams, with*

*ten thousands of rivers of oil*" (Micah 6:7a). This is the rhetoric of hyperbole; such an offering could only be made by someone extremely wealthy or by the larger community of God's people. Third, they ask whether they should offer their firstborn sons as a sacrifice for God. Would that be enough to cover their sin? Would God be pleased with them then?

Verse 8 follows with God's answer, rooted in the Law of Moses: *"He has told you, O man, what is good."* In other words, Israel should already have known the answer to their questions. God then says that He did not need or desire their religious rites, sacrifices, or oblations. Instead, the Lord sought Israel's justice, mercy, and humility.

The answer to Israel's sin problem was not more numerous or more painful sacrifices. The answer was something much deeper than any religious observance: they needed a change of heart. Without the heart, Israel's conformity to the Law was nothing more than hypocrisy. Other prophets tried to communicate a similar message (Isaiah 1:14; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21). Unfortunately, God's people were slow to heed the message (Matthew 12:7).

"Act justly" would have been understood by Micah's audience as living with a sense of right and wrong. In particular, the judicial courts had a responsibility to provide equity and protect the innocent. Injustice was a problem in Israel at that time (Micah 2:1-2; 3:1-3; 6:11).

"Love mercy" contains the Hebrew word *hesed*, which means "loyal love" or "loving-kindness." Along with justice, Israel was to provide mercy. Both justice and mercy are foundational to God's character (Psalm 89:14). God expected His people to show love to their fellow man and to be loyal in their love toward Him, just as He had been loyal to them (Micah 2:8-9; 3:10-11; 6:12).

"Walk humbly" is a description of the heart's attitude toward God. God's people depend on Him rather than their own abilities (Micah 2:3). Instead of taking pride in what we bring to God, we humbly recognize that no amount of personal sacrifice can replace a heart committed to justice and love. Israel's rhetorical questions had a three-part progression, and verse 8 contains a similar progression. The response of a godly heart is outward (do justice), inward (love mercy), and upward (walk humbly).

The message of Micah is still pertinent today. Religious rites, no matter how extravagant, can never compensate for a lack of love (1 Corinthians 13:3). External compliance to rules is not as valuable in God's eyes as a humble heart that simply does what is right. God's people today will continue to desire justice, mercy, and humility before the Lord.

**Micah 7:18-19, "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."**

**Micah 4:2, "In the last days, will everyone need to go to Jerusalem to worship God."**

**"In the last days, will everyone need to go to Jerusalem to worship God (Micah 4:2)?"**

Micah 4:2 contains an interesting prophecy that people from around the world will come to Jerusalem to learn about God. It reads, "Many nations shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his



paths.” Based on this verse, many have wondered if everyone will need to go to Jerusalem to worship God in the last days.

It is important to first identify when this prophecy will be fulfilled. When the Old Testament prophets speak of “the last days” (e.g., Micah 4:1), they usually refer to the tribulation period or the millennium (Deuteronomy 4:30; Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 2:28; 10:14; Hosea 3:5). In Micah 4, the prophet shifts from the theme of judgment in the previous chapter to a theme of future blessing in Jerusalem when God Himself will rule (Micah 4:3). This would correspond with the millennial kingdom, during which the Messiah reigns from His throne in Jerusalem.

Micah 4:2 teaches that, during the millennium, people from many nations will come to “the mountain of the Lord”—a reference to Zion, or Jerusalem. People from all over the world will come to the temple (“the house of the God of Jacob”) to learn God’s Law and obey it.

The fact that people from every nation come to Jerusalem does not mean that everyone *must* travel to Jerusalem during the millennium. Most likely, people will be able to worship the Lord from anywhere in the world: “*The earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea*” (Isaiah 11:9).

To the Jewish people who saw themselves as God’s only people, the mention of people from many nations coming to the temple is significant. God had always made Himself known to people of all backgrounds who turned to Him (such as the Ninevites who repented in Jonah 3), but He was still the “Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 12:6). Micah’s prophecy highlights the fact that the millennial kingdom will consist of people of many cultures, races, and nationalities serving the King. The prediction foreshadows the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

Some say that today’s interest in Holy Land tours fulfills Micah 4:2. While a visit to Jerusalem can be an enriching and faith-building experience for believers, it does not fulfill Micah’s prophecy. It will take more than tourists and travel agents to bring in the millennium. It will take the Lord Himself coming in power and great glory (Luke 21:27) to establish His throne, comfort His people (Isaiah 51:3), and usher in worldwide peace (Micah 4:3).

**Brief Summary:** The prophet condemns the rulers, priests, and prophets of Israel who exploit and mislead the people. It is because of their deeds that Jerusalem will be destroyed. The prophet Micah proclaims the deliverance of the people who will go from Jerusalem to Babylon and concludes with an exhortation for Jerusalem to destroy the nations who have gathered against her. The ideal ruler would come from Bethlehem to defend the nation, and the prophet proclaims the triumph of the remnant of Jacob and foresees a day when Yahweh will purge the nation of idolatry and reliance on military might. The prophet sets forth a powerful and concise summary of Yahweh's requirement for justice and loyalty and announces judgment upon those who have followed the ways of Omri and Ahab. The book closes with a prophetic liturgy comprising elements of a lament. Israel confesses its sin and is assured of deliverance through Yahweh's mighty acts.

**Foreshadowings:** Micah 5:2 is a Messianic prophecy quoted when the magi were searching for the king born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:6). These kings from the East were told that from the tiny village of Bethlehem would come forth the Prince of Peace, the Light of the world. Micah’s message of sin, repentance and restoration finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ who is the propitiation for our sins (Romans 3:24-25) and the only way to God (John 14:6).

**Practical Application:** God gives warnings so we will not have to suffer His wrath. Judgment is certain if God's warnings are not heeded and His provision for sin in the sacrifice of His Son is rejected. For the believer in Christ, God will discipline us—not from hate—but because He loves us. He knows that sin destroys and He wants us to be whole. This wholeness which is the promise of restoration awaits those who remain obedient to Him.

My prayer in response to the Lord:

## The Book of Nahum

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Nahum.html>

**Author:** The author of the Book of Nahum identifies himself as Nahum (in the Hebrew “Consoler” or “Comforter”) the Elkoshite (1:1). There are many theories as to where that city was though there is no conclusive evidence. One such theory is that it refers to the city later called Capernaum (which literally means “the village of Nahum”) at the Sea of Galilee.



**Date of Writing:** Given the limited amount of information that we know about Nahum, the best we can do is narrow the timeframe in which the Book of Nahum was written to between 663 and 612 B.C. Two events are mentioned that help us to determine these dates. First, Nahum mentions Thebes (No Amon) in Egypt falling to the Assyrians (663 B.C.) in the past tense, so it had already happened. Second, the remainder of Nahum's prophecies came true in 612 B.C.

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

**Key Verses:**

**Nahum 1:7, “The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.”**

**Nahum 1:14a. “The LORD has given a command concerning you, Nineveh: ‘You will have no descendants to bear your name.’”**

**Nahum 1:15a, “Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!” See also Isaiah 52:7 and Romans 10:15.**

**“When will the peace of Nahum 1:15 come?”**

Nahum 1:15 predicts a future time of peace, stating, “Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! . . . No more will the wicked invade [Judah].”

To discover when this time of peace will occur, we must consider the larger context of Nahum. The book of Nahum was written to communicate the pending destruction of the city of Nineveh. The prophet Nahum wrote sometime between 663 and 612 B.C. Nahum 1:1-8 introduces the oracle and highlights the majesty of God and His attributes. Verses 9-14 focus on God’s anger against Nineveh and His plans to afflict it.

Nahum 1:15 then looks back at the preceding verses and declares that the destruction of Nineveh by the Babylonians would be “good news” for Judah. Why? Nineveh was an enemy of Judah and the capital of the Assyrian Kingdom. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians had defeated the northern kingdom of Israel, destroying Samaria, its capital. In 701 B.C., the Assyrians nearly conquered Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. The Assyrians were widely known for their “endless cruelty” (Nahum 3:19), leading God to condemn Nineveh to destruction.

We know from history that this destruction of Nineveh took place in 612 B.C. at the hands of the Medes. At that time, Judah was rid of one of its most dangerous enemies. The report of this news would have been considered “good” to everyone in Judah.

The last half of Nahum 1:15 says, “*Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed.*” Nineveh’s defeat would result in the ability of Judah to continue its annual feasts and to fulfill its vows to God in Jerusalem at the temple.

In addition, the Hebrew noun translated “peace” in Nahum 1:15 is sometimes used in reference to deliverance or freedom from enemy attack (e.g., Jeremiah 4:10; 6:14). The context of Nahum 1:15 fits this usage, connecting “peace” with the destruction of an enemy.

In the New Testament, Paul quotes part of this verse in Romans 10:15 when he writes, “*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*” This does not mean that Paul believed Nahum 1:15 was a prediction of the gospel message. Instead, he used this verse to connect the preaching of the gospel with the deliverance from sin provided by God’s salvation.

**Nahum 2:13a, “Behold I am against you,’ says the Lord of hosts.”**

**Nahum 3:19, “Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?”**

## "Do we ever reach a point that we cannot be forgiven (Nahum 3:19)?"

The book of Nahum ends with a rhetorical question regarding the reason for Nineveh's coming destruction: *"Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?"* The statement "Nothing can heal your wound" indicates that Nineveh's sin was unforgivable. Does this principle apply to individuals? Is there a point at which we can no longer be forgiven?

The question in this verse highlights the atrocities that Nineveh was guilty of. When God says that their "injury is fatal," He is stressing the certainty of their demise. Nineveh will reap what they have sown (Galatians 6:7).

However, it's important to remember that God had previously shown mercy to Nineveh when its people repented. In 760 B.C., about a century before Nahum's prophecy, Jonah preached that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days (Jonah 3:4). What happened? The people turned from their sin: "And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). God spared the Nineveh of Jonah's day, but the Nineveh of Nahum's day rejected any opportunity they had to repent.

The Bible contains many examples of God's compassion on those willing to trust Him and repent of their sin. Luke 15 offers three illustrations of God's desire to redeem the lost: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. In each case, the Lord rejoices over the one who comes to Him.

God offers forgiveness to all who will ask it of Him (Isaiah 1:18). First John 1:8-9 says, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* It is those who claim to be sinless or who refuse to ask for forgiveness who miss out on God's cleansing.

The night before Jesus died on the cross, He shared a meal with His followers. At that time, *"He took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'"* (Matthew 26:27-28). God loves us so much that He sent His one and only Son to die on the cross to provide forgiveness for our sins (John 3:16).

The only point at which it is too late to be forgiven is the point of death. Hebrews 9:27 says, *"Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."* At death, believers in Christ will spend eternity with Him. Unbelievers, who have rejected God's offer of forgiveness, will have no more opportunities to change their minds. That is why 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, *"Now is the day of salvation."*

**Brief Summary:** Nineveh once had responded to the preaching of Jonah and turned from their evil ways to serve the Lord God. But 150 years later, Nineveh returned to idolatry, violence, and arrogance (Nahum 3:1-4). Once again God sends one of His prophets to Nineveh warning of judgment in the form of the destruction of their city and exhorting them to repentance. Sadly, the Ninevites did not heed's Nahum's warning, and the city was brought under the dominion of Babylon.

## "Why did God judge Nineveh so harshly in the book of Nahum?"

The message of Nahum concerns the impending destruction of Nineveh. The Lord's word to the

Assyrians is dire: *"I am against you. . . . I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth. The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard"* (2:13). God was obviously angry with the Ninevites, and Nahum reveals why.

Nineveh had long been an enemy of Judah and Israel, the people of God. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom of Israel, destroying its capital, Samaria. In 701 B.C., the Assyrians nearly conquered Jerusalem, the capital of Judah.

The text of Nahum provides additional clues regarding God's anger with the Ninevites. Nahum 3:1 says, "Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!" Nineveh was a city of violence, known for its brutal treatment of those it conquered. The Assyrians were notorious for amputating hands and feet, gouging eyes, and skinning and impaling their captives. The final verse of Nahum's book emphasizes the violence of the Assyrians in the form of a rhetorical question: "Who has not felt your endless cruelty?" (Nahum 3:19).

Another reason for God's anger against Nineveh was its extreme pride, implied in Nahum 3:8. The pride of Nineveh may have been due in part to its wealth and power. One account reveals, "In Sennacherib's day the wall around Nineveh was 40 to 50 feet high. It extended for 4 kilometers along the Tigris River and for 13 kilometers around the inner city. The city wall had 15 main gates. . . . Each of the gates was guarded by stone bull statues. Both inside and outside the walls, Sennacherib created parks, a botanical garden, and a zoo. He built a water-system containing the oldest aqueduct in history at Jerwan, across the Gomel River" (*Nelson's Bible Dictionary*, p. 760).

Jesus taught, *"For all who take the sword will perish by the sword"* (Matthew 26:52). This truth is vividly predicted and fulfilled in the case of Nineveh, whose warlike people were known for their brutal treatment of enemies. Despite the military might of Nineveh, they were no match for the God of heaven. Nineveh's downfall was greeted as good news by Judah (Nahum 1:15) and all who had suffered under their merciless rule (Nahum 3:19).

After Nineveh's destruction, the site was hidden for some time (see Nahum 3:11). It was not until 1842 that modern archaeologists rediscovered its location in modern-day Iraq.

**Foreshadowings:** Paul repeats Nahum 1:15 in Romans 10:15 in regard to the Messiah and His ministry, as well as the apostles of Christ in His time. It may also be understood of any minister of the Gospel whose business it is to "preach the Gospel of peace." God has made peace with sinners by the blood of Christ, and has given to His people the peace that "transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). The preacher's work is also to "bring glad tidings of good things" (KJV), such as reconciliation, righteousness, pardon, life, and eternal salvation by a crucified Christ. The preaching of such a Gospel, and bringing such news, make their feet beautiful. The imagery here is of one who runs to others, eager and joyful to proclaim the Good News.

**Practical Application:** God is patient and slow to anger. He gives every country time to proclaim Him as their Lord. But He is not mocked. Any time a country turns away from Him to serve its own motives, He steps in with judgment. Almost 220 years ago, the United States was formed as a nation guided by principles found in the Bible. In the last 50 years that has changed, and we are turning daily in the opposite direction. As Christians it is our duty to stand up for biblical principles and scriptural truth, for Truth is our country's only hope.

My prayer in response to the Lord:

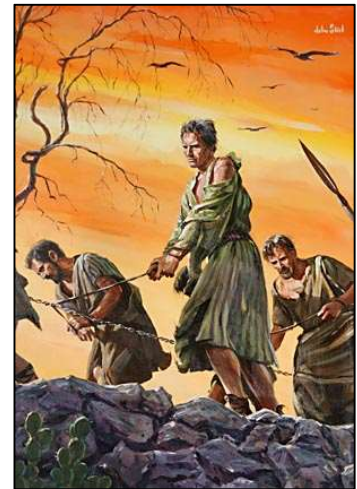
## The Book of Habakkuk

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Habakkuk.html>

**Author:** Habakkuk 1:1 identifies the Book of Habakkuk as an oracle from the Prophet Habakkuk.

**Date of Writing:** The Book of Habakkuk was likely written between 610 and 605 B.C.

**Purpose of Writing:** The prophet Habakkuk decries the sins of Judah but grapples with the fact that God's chosen people will suffer at the hands of enemies even more wicked than they. God answers Habakkuk's questions, resulting in continuing faith in God's wisdom, sovereignty, and salvation.



### Key Verses:

**Habakkuk 1:2, "How long, Oh Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save."**

**Habakkuk 1:5, "Look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if I told you."**

"Does God sometimes use evil to accomplish His plans (Habakkuk 1:5-11)?"

Habakkuk 1:5-11 is a prophecy in which God relates His intention to raise up Babylon, a "ruthless" and "dreaded" nation, to achieve His purpose. This raises the question, Does God sometimes use evil to accomplish His plans?

There is an important distinction to be made between God controlling evil and God creating evil. God is not the author of sin, but He can use sinful men to attain an objective. Romans 8:28 says, "For those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." "All things" includes both good and bad things. God can use struggles, heartbreaks and tragedies in ways to bring about His glory and our good. Such events, even though we don't understand the reason for



them, are part of His perfect, divine plan. If God could not control evil, He would not be God. His sovereignty demands that He be in control of everything, even “dreaded” nations such as Babylon.

At the same time, the Bible is clear that God does not sin and He performs no evil. James 1:13 teaches, “*God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*” Deuteronomy 32:4 says, “*The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice*” (see also 2 Samuel 22:31; Psalm 18:30; and Matthew 5:48).

The problem in Habakkuk is that God was using the Babylonians (an evil people) to accomplish His will. Our wise and perfect God can and sometimes does use the sin already existing in our world to fulfill His purpose. The perfect example of this is Jesus’ crucifixion: the murder of Christ was an evil act, but through it God redeemed His elect and “*disarmed the [demonic] powers and authorities*” (Colossians 2:15). In Habakkuk’s day, God’s purpose was to bring judgment on Judah for their idolatry. Babylon was the instrument of His judgment (cf. Isaiah 10:5).

God’s revelation caused Habakkuk to then ask how God could use a nation wickeder than Judah to judge Judah (1:12-2:1). God’s response was a promise that He would later punish Babylon as well (2:2-20). In the end, Habakkuk could only acknowledge the Lord’s perfect wisdom; the prophet ends with a song of praise in chapter 3.

We may struggle with questions about God’s methods as Habakkuk did. How God chooses to operate is up to Him. At times, He intervenes miraculously. Other times, He works behind the scenes. And, yes, God may even allow a certain measure of freedom to evil forces in our world to bring about His design. Like Habakkuk, if we view life from God’s perspective, our response will be to worship the Lord, knowing He is in control of all things.

**Habakkuk 1:12, “Oh, Lord are you not from everlasting? My God, My Holy One, we will not die.”**

**Habakkuk 2:2-4, “Then the Lord replied: Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation waits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and not delay. See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright - but the righteous will live by his faith.”**

**“What does it mean that the righteous will live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4)?”**

Habakkuk 2:4 includes the well-known statement “the righteous will live by faith.” What does this mean?

The context helps us to understand God’s intent in this passage. The whole verse reads, “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.” “His soul” is a symbolic reference to Babylonia. This nation had become proud or “puffed up.” As a result, they were unrighteous and facing God’s judgment. In contrast, the righteous (or the “just”) would live by faith in God. By contrast, the righteous are humble in God’s eyes and will never face God’s judgment.

Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the New Testament. Paul quotes it in Romans 1:17, emphasizing the idea that righteousness by faith is for both Jews and Gentiles: “*For in the gospel a righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’*”

Then, in Galatians 3:11, we read, “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for *‘The righteous shall live by faith.’*” Here, Paul stresses that we are justified or made right before God by faith. The Law has no ability to justify anyone. As Habakkuk had recorded, people have always been saved by faith, not by works. Habakkuk 2:4 is also quoted in Hebrews 10:38.

In the third century, Rabbi Simla noted that Moses gave 365 prohibitions and 248 positive commands. David reduced them to eleven commands in Psalm 15; Isaiah made them six (33:14-15); Micah bound them into three (6:8); and Habakkuk condensed them all to one, namely—“The righteous shall live by faith” (from P. L. Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, #1495).

Christians are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), and we walk in faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Only by faith in Christ are we made righteous (Romans 5:19). Paul further expounds on this truth in Galatians 2:16, saying, “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” It is Christ’s righteousness that saves us, and the only way to receive that gift is to trust in Him. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36).

When Habakkuk wrote, “*The righteous shall live by his faith,*” he was echoing a timeless truth first modeled in Abraham’s life (Genesis 15:6). The righteous man will “live” in that he will not face God’s judgment; rather, in return for his faith in God, he has been given eternal life.

**Habakkuk 2:20, “*But the Lord is in His Holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him.*”**

**Habakkuk 3:2, “*Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.*”**

**Habakkuk 3:19, “*The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to go on the heights.*”**

**"How can we learn to trust God like the prophet Habakkuk (Habakkuk 3:17-19)?"**

Despite the questions the prophet Habakkuk had concerning the evil taking place during his time, he concludes his oracle with positive words of praise. Habakkuk expresses his faith in God in a hymn: “*Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places*” (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

How can we learn to trust God in this way? A closer look at these verses reveals some concepts that help us to trust God more.

First, Habakkuk commits to praising God regardless of external circumstances. The opening of his hymn delineates a catastrophe: 1) no fruit on the fig trees, 2) no grapes growing on the vines, 3) no olives, 4) no produce of any kind, 5) a lack of sheep, and 6) a lack of cattle. After this doleful description, the prophet says, “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord.”

Habakkuk’s joy was not dependent on physical blessings. Even if Habakkuk suffered extreme loss, he

was determined to praise God. Habakkuk remembered God's goodness in times past and concluded God was worthy of praise. The prophet might lack olives and grapes, but he would never be without God.

Second, Habakkuk praises God specifically for salvation: "I will take joy in the God of my salvation." God not only *could* save; God *is* salvation. Interestingly, the title "God of my salvation" is used seven times in the Old Testament. Five of these are found in the Psalms (18:26; 25:5; 27:9; 51:14; 88:1), one in Habakkuk, and the other in Micah 7:7.

Third, Habakkuk recognizes the Lord as His strength: "GOD, the Lord, is my strength." This statement is the central focus of Habakkuk's hymn. The theme becomes apparent when the literary structure is diagrammed as follows:

A1 "I will . . ."

A2 "I will . . ."

X "GOD, the Lord, is my strength"

B1 "he makes . . ."

B2 "he makes . . ."

After two statements of the prophet's determination come two mentions of what God will accomplish on his behalf. In between, we find "God, the Lord, is my strength."

The truth of God's present strength caused Habakkuk to trust God even during the most difficult times. Like Habakkuk, we can choose to praise God even in the face of desolation. Like Habakkuk, we can praise God for the salvation He provides in Jesus Christ. And, by seeing God as our source of strength, we, like Habakkuk, can trust God's promises.

**Brief Summary:** The Book of Habakkuk begins with Habakkuk crying out to God for an answer to why God's chosen people are allowed to suffer in their captivity (Habakkuk 1:1-4). The Lord gives His answer to Habakkuk, essentially stating, "You wouldn't believe it if I told you" (Habakkuk 1: 5-11). Habakkuk then follows up by saying, "Ok, you are God, but still tell me more about why this is happening" (Habakkuk 1:17-2:1). God then answers him again and gives him more information, then tells the earth to be silent before Him (Habakkuk 2:2-20). Then Habakkuk writes a prayer expressing his strong faith in God, even through these trials (Habakkuk 3:1-19).

**Foreshadowings:** The Apostle Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 on two different occasions (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11) to reiterate the doctrine of justification by faith. The faith that is the gift of God and available through Christ is at once a faith that saves (Ephesians 2:8-9) and a faith that sustains throughout life. We attain eternal life by faith and we live the Christian life by the same faith. Unlike the "proud" in the beginning of the verse, whose soul is not right within him (NASB) and whose desires are not upright (NIV), but we who are made righteous by faith in Christ are made completely righteous because He has exchanged His perfect righteousness for our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) and has enabled us to live by faith.

**Practical Application:** The application to the reader of Habakkuk is that it is permissible to question what God is doing, although with respect and reverence. Sometimes it is not evident to us what is going on, especially if we are thrown into suffering for a period of time or if it seems our enemies are prospering while we are just barely getting by. The Book of Habakkuk affirms that God is a sovereign,

omnipotent God who has all things under control. We just need to be still and know He is at work. He is who He says He is and does keep His promises. He will punish the wicked. Even when we cannot see it, He is still on the throne of the universe. We need to stay focused on this: *"The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights"* (Habakkuk 3:19). Enabling us to go on the heights is taking us to the higher places with Him where we are set apart from the world. Sometimes the way we have to go to get us there is through suffering and sorrow, but if we rest in Him and trust Him, we come out where He wants us.

My prayer in response to the Lord:

## The Book of Zephaniah

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Zephaniah.html>

Picture to right: Jerusalem is destroyed by the Babylonians

**Author:** Zephaniah 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of Zephaniah as the Prophet Zephaniah. The name Zephaniah means "defended by God."



**Date of Writing:** The book of Zephaniah was written during the reign of King Josiah, likely in the early part of his reign, between 635 and 625 BC.

**Purpose of Writing:** Zephaniah's message of judgment and encouragement contains three major doctrines: 1) God is sovereign over all nations. 2) The wicked will be punished and the righteous will be vindicated on the day of judgment. 3) God blesses those who repent and trust in Him.

### Key Verses:

**Zephaniah 1:5** *"those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom,"* <sup>KJV</sup>

**Milcom** = There are a number of Canaanite gods with names based on this root, which became summarily associated with **Moloch**, including biblical מַלְכָם **Malkam** "great king" (KJV Milcom), which appears to refer to a god of the Ammonites, as well as **Tyrian Melqart** and others.

**"What does it mean to worship the starry host or the host of the heavens (Zephaniah 1:5)?"**

Zephaniah's opening verses include a strong judgment on Judah because of "those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molech" (Zephaniah 1:5).

To "worship the starry host" is a clear violation of God's law in Deuteronomy 4:19. There we read, "When you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars – all the heavenly array – do not be enticed into bowing down to them." The "starry host" includes the sun, moon, planets, and stars. These celestial bodies were worshiped by the pagan cultures of the day, but God had commanded His people to worship Him and not bow down to other gods (Exodus 20:3-4).

The Ten Commandments specifically says, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above. . . . You shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exodus 20:4-5). The violation of this command became a perennial problem in Judah. Zephaniah prophesied against it during the reign of King Josiah. Later, during Manasseh's reign, we are told that the king "worshiped all the host of heaven and served them" (2 Kings 21:3). The prophet Jeremiah condemned the same practice: "The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah—all the houses on whose roofs offerings have been offered to all the host of heaven" (Jeremiah 19:13). God's people were frequently tempted to worship heavenly bodies, and their rulers often led the way.

The apostle Paul speaks of those who worship created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). These created things include the stars, planets, and other heavenly objects. Today, many people seek wisdom from the stars instead of from God. Astrology, including the use of horoscopes, is simply another form of worshiping the "starry host" and should have no place in a Christian's life. The heavens point to the majesty and glory of their Creator (Psalm 19:1-6); they are not to be the focus of worship.

**Zephaniah 1:18, "Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth."**

**Zephaniah 2:3, "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger."**

**Zephaniah 3:17, "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."**

**"What does it mean that God will rejoice over us with singing (Zephaniah 3:17)?"**

Zephaniah 3:17 includes an interesting description of God singing over people.

Two important observations regarding this passage: first, singing represents God's joy. The Hebrew phrase translated "he will rejoice over you with singing" can also be translated literally as "he rejoices over you with a shout of joy."

Second, God's singing parallels the singing of His people in Jerusalem. "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion!" (verse 14). This unit of poetry begins with the people of Jerusalem singing praise to God and ends with God singing over His people. God rejoices with His people, and He expresses joy when His people praise

Him.

The question then is, why is God so joyful? This passage of Zephaniah speaks of a future time when God has ended His judgment upon Israel. All of their enemies have been destroyed, and Israel is entering a time of safety and blessing (verses 8, 15, 19). Zephaniah is speaking of the future millennial kingdom when the Messiah (Jesus) will reign with His people in Jerusalem (Isaiah 9:7; Revelation 20:1–6).

The word picture in Zephaniah 3:17 is full of emotion. God the Father is the One who holds His daughter Jerusalem and sings joyfully in her presence. Just as a loving parent cradles a child and sings out of love, so God's song over His people is born of His great love. After a time of hardship, our loving Lord dries His people's tears, comforts their hearts, and welcomes them to a new world.

Finally, Jesus also taught in the New Testament that *"there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents"* (Luke 15:10). Whether or not God Himself sings in this passage is not made clear, but it is clear there is rejoicing in God's presence when those who are lost repent and are made right with God (Ephesians 2:8–9; John 3:16).

**Brief Summary:** Zephaniah pronounces the Lord's judgment on the whole earth, on Judah, on the surrounding nations, on Jerusalem and on all nations. This is followed by proclamations of the Lord's blessing on all nations and especially on the faithful remnant of His people in Judah.

Zephaniah had the courage to speak bluntly because he knew he was proclaiming the Word of the Lord. His book begins with "The word of the Lord" and ends with "says the Lord." He knew that neither the many gods the people worshiped nor even the might of the Assyrian army could save them. God is gracious and compassionate, but when all His warnings are ignored, judgment is to be expected. God's day of judgment is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures. The prophets called it the "Day of the Lord." They referred to various events such as the fall of Jerusalem as manifestations of God's Day, each of which pointed toward the ultimate Day of the Lord.

**Foreshadowings:** The final blessings on Zion pronounced in 3:14-20 are largely unfulfilled, leading us to conclude that these are messianic prophecies that await the Second Coming of Christ to be completed. The Lord has taken away our punishment only through Christ who came to die for the sins of His people (Zephaniah 3:15; John 3:16). But Israel has not yet recognized her true Savior. This is yet to happen (Romans 11:25-27).

The promise of peace and safety for Israel, a time when their King is in their midst, will be fulfilled when Christ returns to judge the world and redeem it for Himself. Just as He ascended to heaven after His resurrection, so will He return and set up a new Jerusalem on earth (Revelation 21). At that time, all God's promises to Israel will be fulfilled.

**Practical Application:** With a few adjustments in names and situations, this prophet of 7th century B.C. could stand in our pulpits today and deliver the same message of judgment of the wicked and hope for the faithful. Zephaniah reminds us that God is offended by the moral and religious sins of His people. God's people will not escape punishment when they sin willfully. Punishment may be painful, but its purpose may be redemptive rather than punitive. The inevitability of the punishment of wickedness gives comfort in a time when it seems that evil is unbridled and victorious. We have the freedom to



disobey God but not the freedom to escape the consequences of that disobedience. Those who are faithful to God may be relatively few, but He does not forget them.

My prayer in response to the Lord:

## The Book of Haggai

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Haggai.html>

**Author:** Haggai 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of Haggai as the Prophet Haggai.



**Date of Writing:** The Book of Haggai was written in approximately 520 B.C.

**Purpose of Writing:** Haggai sought to challenge the people of God concerning their priorities. He called them to reverence and glorify God by building the Temple in spite of local and official opposition. Haggai called them not to be discouraged because this Temple would not be quite as richly decorated as Solomon's. He exhorted them to turn from the uncleanness of their ways and to trust in God's sovereign power. The Book of Haggai is a reminder of the problems the people of God faced at this time, how the people courageously trusted in God and how God provided for their needs.

### Key Verses:

**Haggai 1:4, "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"**

**"Why were the Israelites not rebuilding the temple (Haggai 1:2)?"**

After a brief introduction, Haggai begins his prophecy by declaring, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD" (Haggai 1:2). Why were the Israelites not rebuilding the temple?

During his first year as king of Persia, in 538 B.C., Cyrus issued an edict allowing the Jews to return from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). The altar was repaired, and the foundation of the temple probably began sometime in 537 B.C. Then Samaritan opposition brought construction to a halt in 536 B.C. Ezra 4:24 notes, "Then the work on the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped, and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia." The temple

project languished for 16 years, until 520 B.C.

Therefore, originally, the Jews stopped rebuilding the temple due to opposition from the neighboring Samaritans. But other reasons crept in. At the time of Haggai's prophecies, some Jews simply said that the timing was not right (Haggai 1:2). Yet the time was right for them to build their own homes. In fact, Haggai rebukes the people for their concern for their own houses while neglecting God's house.

Haggai taught that God was sending His judgment because of the Jews' neglect of the temple of the Lord. Their harvest had failed, and their finances were not blessed: *"He who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes"* (Haggai 1:6). No matter how hard the people worked, their food, drink, and finances were not adequate. Haggai said that their needs would only be met when they obeyed God and rebuilt the temple (Haggai 1:7-11).

Together with the prophet Zechariah (Ezra 5:1), Haggai prompted the restart of the temple building project (Ezra 5:2). Once God's people were back on track, the temple was soon completed, on March 12, 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:13-15). This fulfilled Jeremiah's prediction of a 70-year captivity (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10) that lasted from Nebuchadnezzar's burning of the temple in the fifth month of 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8-9) until the new temple's reopening in the twelfth month of 515 B.C.

**Haggai 1:5-6, "Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.'"**

**"Does God use frustrations in life to awaken and/or punish us (Haggai 1:6, 9)?"**

Haggai 1 contains two verses that clearly state that the sinful lifestyles of the Jewish people resulted in punishment or a lack of blessing from God. Verse 6 says, *"You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."*

Verse 9 adds, *"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the Lord Almighty. 'Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.'"* In both verses, judgment was the result of disobeying the Lord. Is this true in our lives today?

The biblical answer is that there are some times when our struggles are the result of our sin, but not always. In fact, persecution or suffering can sometimes be the product of serving God. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy from a Roman jail, *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Timothy 3:12).

In addition, suffering sometimes serves as part of God's plan for our lives. God said regarding the apostle Paul, "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16). James 1:2-4 teaches us to consider it joy when we encounter trials: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." The result of persevering through difficulties is spiritual maturity.

However, there are cases in which we may suffer due to our sin. God does discipline His wayward children (Hebrews 12:6). Acts 5 contains the account of Ananias and Sapphira, who died as the result of their deception, even though they were part of the church. Paul said that some of the Corinthians had been sick and a few had even died due to their sin when partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:30).

The reasons we suffer are varied. It is unwise to jump to conclusions when the reason for a particular trouble is unclear. For example, sometimes people claim that a certain natural disaster is a judgment from God on a nation or a city due to its sinfulness. However, God does not tell us why natural disasters occur when and where they do. Rather than make such judgments, the appropriate Christian responses are to empathize with those affected (Romans 12:15) and to help meet the needs (Luke 10:25-37).

**Haggai 2:9, "*The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, ' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty.*"**

**Brief Summary:** Will the people of God reconsider their priorities, take courage, and act on the basis of God's promises? God sought to warn the people to heed His words. Not only did God warn them, but He also offered promises through His servant Haggai to motivate them to follow Him. Because the people of God reversed their priorities and failed to put God in first place in their lives, Judah was sent into Babylonian exile. In response to Daniel's prayer and in fulfillment of God's promises, God directed Cyrus the Persian king to allow the Jews in exile to go back to Jerusalem. A group of Jews returned to their land with great joy, put God first in their lives, worshiped Him and began to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem without the aid of the local people who lived in Israel. Their courageous faith was met with opposition from the local people as well as the Persian government for approximately 15 years.

**Foreshadowings:** As with most of the books of the Minor Prophets, Haggai ends with promises of restoration and blessing. In the last verse, Haggai 2:23, God uses a distinctly messianic title in reference to Zerubbabel, "My Servant" (Compare 2 Samuel 3:18; 1 Kings 11:34; Isaiah 42:1-9; Ezekiel 37:24,25). Through Haggai, God promises to make him like a signet ring, which was a symbol of honor, authority, and power, somewhat like a king's scepter used to seal letters and decrees. Zerubbabel, as God's signet ring, represents the house of David and the resumption of the messianic line interrupted by the Exile. Zerubbabel reestablished the Davidic line of kings which would culminate in the millennial reign of Christ. Zerubbabel appears in the line of Christ on both Joseph's side (Matt. 1:12) and Mary's side (Luke 3:27).

**Practical Application:** The Book of Haggai draws attention to common problems most people face even today. Haggai asks us 1) to examine our priorities to see if we are more interested in our own pleasures than doing the work of God; 2) to reject a defeatist attitude when we run into opposition or discouraging circumstances; 3) to confess our failures and seek to live pure lives before God; 4) to act courageously for God because we have the assurance that He is with us always and is in full control of our circumstances; and 5) to rest secure in God's hands knowing that He will abundantly bless us as we faithfully serve Him.

My prayer in response to the Lord:

## The Book of Zechariah

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Zechariah.html>

**Author:** Zechariah 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of Zechariah as the Prophet Zechariah.

**Date of Writing:** The Book of Zechariah was likely written in two primary segments, between 520 and 470 B.C.

**Purpose of Writing:** Zechariah emphasized that God has used His prophets to teach, warn and correct His people. Unfortunately, they refused to listen. Their sin brought God's punishment. The book also bears evidence that even prophecy could be corrupted. History shows that in this period prophecy fell into disfavor among the Jews, leading to the period between the Testaments when no lasting prophetic voice spoke to God's people.



### Key Verses:

**Zechariah 1:3, "Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty."**

**Zechariah 7:13, "'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the LORD Almighty."**

**Zechariah 9:9, "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."**

**Zechariah 13:9, "This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"**

**Brief Summary:** The Book of Zechariah teaches that salvation may be obtained by all. The last chapter depicts peoples from all over the world coming to worship God, who desires that all people follow Him. This is not the doctrine of universalism, i.e., that all people would be saved because it is God's nature to save. Rather, the book teaches that God desires that all people worship Him and accepts those who do, regardless of their national or political expressions. Finally, Zechariah preached that God is sovereign over this world, any appearance to the contrary notwithstanding. His visions of the future indicate that God sees all that will happen. The depictions of God's intervention in the world teach that

ultimately He will bring human events to the end He chooses. He does not eliminate the individual's freedom to follow God or rebel, but holds people responsible for the choices they make. In the last chapter, even the forces of nature respond to God's control.

### **"Is Zechariah 11:12-13 a Messianic prophecy?"**

Zechariah 11:12-13 offers an intriguing account regarding 30 silver coins, bringing to mind the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot. The New Testament identifies this as a Messianic prophecy, which found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

*The verses read, "I told them, 'If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.' So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter."*

Earlier, Zechariah had been commanded to watch a flock of sheep doomed to slaughter (Zechariah 11:4). He obeyed, using two shepherd's staffs that he named Favor and Union (verse 7). Within a month, Zechariah fired the three shepherds working under him (verse 8). Then Zechariah abandoned the flock and broke his staff named Favor. Observers realized these actions were "the word of the LORD" (verse 11). The Lord would remove His favor from His people, allowing them to be harried by their enemies (verse 6).

In verses 12-13 Zechariah tells his employers to pay him his wages if they saw fit to do so. They pay him 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave (Exodus 21:32), as an insult to Zechariah. The prophet sarcastically calls it a "handsome price." God then commands Zechariah to give the coins to the potter in the house (or temple) of the Lord.

The corresponding passage in the New Testament is in Matthew 27. Judas is filled with remorse for betraying the Lord, and he tries to return the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests (verse 3). When the elders refuse to accept the money, Judas throws the coins into the temple and leaves and hangs himself (verses 4-5). Not wanted to put "blood money" into the treasury, the priests use it to buy a potter's field (verses 6-7). "*Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 'They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me'*" (verses 9-10). Zechariah 11 is, therefore, a Messianic prophecy, because it is explicitly identified as such by Matthew.

A seeming difficulty is the fact that Matthew attributes the prophecy to Jeremiah, not Zechariah. The explanation is two-fold. First, Jeremiah also bought a field at the Lord's command (Jeremiah 32:6-9). Second, the Hebrew Bible was divided into three sections: the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets. The Prophets began with Jeremiah, and it was common for people to refer to the whole section (which included Zechariah) as "the book of Jeremiah."

Zechariah's prophecy had a dual fulfillment: one in the prophet's contemporary context, and one in the more distant future. The Jewish people of Zechariah's day would be judged, as seen in the breaking of Favor, and the specific details regarding 30 pieces of silver and a potter's field found a future fulfillment in the betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas Iscariot.

### "Is Zechariah 12:10 a Messianic prophecy?"

Zechariah 12:10 reads, *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."* This prediction, that Israel will see someone whom they "pierced," is amazing because it is God Himself speaking—**the Lord is the One who is "pierced."** This appears to fit later descriptions of Jesus Christ's suffering. Indeed, the New Testament specifies that this prophecy is truly Messianic.

This verse indicates a future time when the Jewish people will plead for the mercy of God. This will happen when they see "the one they have pierced." Zechariah's verse is mentioned in John 19:36-37 when Jesus, hanging on the cross, was pierced with a spear: *"These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: . . . 'They will look on the one they have pierced.'" Revelation 1:7* adds, *"Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him"*—definitely an allusion to Zechariah 12:10. Isaiah 53:5 also predicts that the Messiah would be pierced: *"But he was pierced for our transgressions."*

In addition to the idea of a "pierced" God is the concept of the "only child." Zechariah's mention of a "firstborn son" bears an unmistakable connection to Jesus as God's Son. The Hebrew word *bekor* was translated in the Septuagint as *prototokos*, the same term used for Jesus in Colossians 1:15: *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [prototokos] of all creation."* And, of course, there is John 3:16, which includes a reference to Jesus as God's "*one and only Son.*"

This Messianic prophecy has not yet been completely fulfilled. Jesus has been "pierced," but there will still be a future time when all of Jerusalem will see Him and mourn their ill treatment of Him. At that time, they will cry out to God for mercy, and He will answer them by saving them from their enemies: *"On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem. . . . I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem"* (Zechariah 12:8-9). These events will occur at the end of the tribulation period at Christ's second coming.

In summary, Zechariah 12:10 predicts the piercing of the Son of God, the Messiah, fulfilled at the first coming of Jesus Christ when He died on the cross and was pierced by a spear in His side (John 19:36–37). The complete fulfillment of this verse awaits the last days when the Jewish people will plead for mercy from the One they have pierced.

### "Is Zechariah 14:4 a prophecy about the second coming of Christ?"

Zechariah 14:4 predicts, *"On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the Mount moving north and half moving south."* "That day" is a reference to the Day of the Lord, and the One who stands on the mountain is the Lord Himself. So, yes, this passage predicts the second coming of Christ.

The opening of Zechariah 14 speaks of a future day when Jerusalem will be plundered by its enemies. Verse 2 prophesies that all nations will gather against Jerusalem and capture and ransack the city. Half of the citizens of Jerusalem will flee the devastation, but the other half will remain. This will be one half of the one third of the Jewish population still alive in Jerusalem after the Tribulation (13:8). Then, Zechariah says, the Lord Himself will go forth and engage these opponents in battle (14:3). Verse 4



speaks of the Messiah standing on the Mount of Olives, a hill near Jerusalem on the east. The mountain will split, creating an enormous valley. Since none of this has taken place yet, the prophecy points to a future time.

A parallel passage tells of the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-21). Revelation 16:18-21 predicts horrible events at the end of the Tribulation when the seventh bowl is poured out:

*“Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. . . . Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.”*

The earthquake in Revelation could very well speak of the event described in Zechariah when the Mount of Olives splits in two. Jesus the Messiah will cause an earthquake at His second coming that will serve as part of the destruction of God’s enemies. The outcome of this battle is never in doubt: Christ will be the victor, Israel’s enemies will be destroyed, and the beast (Antichrist) and false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:11-21).

**Foreshadowings:** Prophecies about Jesus Christ and the messianic era abound in Zechariah. From the promise that Messiah would come and dwell in our midst (Zechariah 2:10-12; Matthew 1:23) to the symbolism of the Branch and the Stone (Zechariah 3:8-9, 6:12-13; Isaiah 11:1; Luke 20:17-18) to the promise of His Second Coming where they who pierced Him will look upon Him and mourn (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:33-37), Christ is the theme of the Book of Zechariah. Jesus is the Savior of Israel, a fountain whose blood covers the sins of all who come to Him for salvation (Zechariah 13:1; 1 John 1:7).

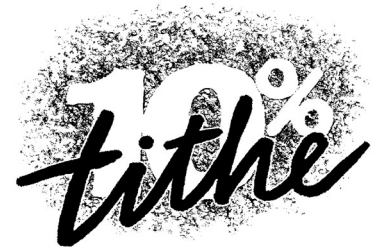
**Practical Application:** God expects sincere worship and moral living of us today. Zechariah's example of breaking through national prejudice reminds us to reach out into all areas of our society. We must extend God's invitation of salvation to people of all national origins, languages, races and cultures. That salvation is only available through the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, who died in our place to atone for sin. But if we reject that sacrifice, there is no other sacrifice through which we can be reconciled to God. There is no other name under heaven by which men are saved (Acts 4:12). There is no time to lose; today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

My prayer in response to the Lord:

## The Book of Malachi

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Malachi.html>

**Author:** Malachi 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of Malachi as the Prophet Malachi.



**Date of Writing:** The Book of Malachi was written between 440 and 400 B.C.

**Purpose of Writing:** The Book of Malachi is an oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi (1:1). This was God’s warning through Malachi to tell the people to turn back to God. As the final book of the Old Testament closes, the pronouncement of God’s justice and the promise of His restoration through the coming Messiah is ringing in the ears of the Israelites. Four hundred years of silence ensues, ending with a similar message from God’s next prophet, John the Baptist, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 3:2).

### Key Verses:

**Malachi 1:6, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the Lord Almighty. It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. 7By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised. 8When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.**

**“How do we bring blemished offerings to God (Malachi 1:8)?”**

In Malachi 1:8, the Lord accuses Israel of bringing Him blemished offerings: “‘When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?’ says the Lord Almighty.”

Bringing animal sacrifices to the temple that were blind, disfigured, or sick was a direct violation of the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 22:22; Deuteronomy 15:21). The reason for this command was that such sacrifices dishonored the Lord. “Do not profane my holy name” (Leviticus 22:32). They were sacrifices in name only; a true sacrifice must cost something, and there was no pain involved in getting rid of something already slated for culling. As God points out, giving such an inferior gift to another person would be unthinkable—what made them think God would be pleased with it?

More importantly, each sacrifice was a symbol of the **future sacrifice of Christ, who was “a lamb without blemish or defect”** (1 Peter 1:19). The cheap, marred sacrifices of Malachi’s time were travesties of Christ’s perfection.

The application for Christians today does not involve animal sacrifices, of course, nor is it even directly related to financial offerings. **Rather, it is a matter of treating God as holy.** This concerns all areas of

life, ranging from how we speak of God, to how we obey Him and how willing we are to sacrifice material things like finances.

The larger context of Malachi 1:6-14 deals with a variety of ways in which God's people had dishonored or cheated the Lord by their actions. Both the priests and those who presented offerings were neglecting full obedience to God, giving sacrifices that were in violation of God's Word. Today's churches are at risk of the same sin, in principle. Simply attending a service, singing songs, listening to sermons, and giving offerings is not what God desires. He deserves the best, and He wants *us*, not just our stuff.

First, He calls us to accept His Son, Jesus, by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), recognizing our sinful status in relation to His perfection (Romans 3:23).

Second, God expects our full commitment to Him. While our works do not earn salvation or a right standing with the Lord, He saves us to do the good works He has prepared for us. Ephesians 2:10 says, *"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

The sacrifice we offer today is our own selves. *"Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship"* (Romans 12:1). For a believer to knowingly continue in sin is to present to the Lord a "blemished," unholy sacrifice. God is holy, and He expects His children to honor Him with purity and holiness (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:16). Why would we follow the sin of the ancient Israelites in treating the Lord with disrespect? God makes forgiveness available to us (1 John 1:9), so there is no reason for living a sinful life.

**Malachi 3:6-7, *"I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty."***

**Malachi 3: 8-10 *"Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. 9You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. 10Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."***

**"Does the teaching on tithing in Malachi 3:8-10 apply to us today?"**

Malachi 3:8-10 is often used to teach the need for Christians to tithe to local churches today. Does this teaching apply to Christians today?

First, the context of this passage concerns the Israelites not bringing their offerings to the temple. Because of their disobedience, God had judged them with a small harvest. The Lord challenged them to bring the "full tithe" of grain sacrifices (Leviticus 6:14-23) and see that He would bless them with an abundance of future crops. The "storehouse," mentioned in verse 10, is a place to store grain in the temple in Jerusalem, not the local church.

Second, this passage teaches that the Jews were to give a tithe as part of the temple worship, but it does not teach that Christians are to give to churches. Malachi was written more than 400 years before

the start of the first church in Jerusalem. Applying its command of temple giving to the local church takes these verses out of their original context.

Are New Testament Christians commanded to tithe or not? To be clear, a tithe is literally a “tenth,” or 10 percent. Abraham gave a tenth of all he had to the priest of Salem in Genesis 14:20. Later, the Mosaic Law included commands to give a tenth for tabernacle worship. Tithing is mentioned 18 times in the Law, as the people were to share their produce and livestock to support the Levites, the caretakers of the tabernacle. This same system of tithing would later be applied to the temple (2 Chronicles 31:5).

While the word, “tithe” literally means a “tenth”, the Mosaic Law called for two tithes to be given each year, one to the local priests, and one to be sent to Jerusalem. A third tithe was mandated every third year for the care of widows and orphans. So the actual Mosaic Law called for 23.3% of produce and livestock to be “tithed” to the Lord annually.

Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His day, saying, “*But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others*” (Luke 11:42). These Pharisees obeyed the Law of Moses in that they tithed scrupulously, yet did not truly love God. They were challenged to do both. Also you might note that the Mosaic Law never commanded to tithe mint, rue and herbs. The Pharisees added to the law by making up their own rules of righteousness.

The Law was fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17). When the church began to grow beyond the Jewish people and reach Gentiles, leaders struggled with whether or not to command these new believers to follow the Mosaic Law. In the end, only a few instructions were given for the sake of peace, but tithing was not among them (Acts 15:19-21).

The principle in the New Testament is to give voluntarily to support the needs of others (Acts 2:45; Romans 15:25-27), support Christian workers (1 Corinthians 9:11-12; 1 Timothy 5:18), and expand Christian outreach (Philippians 4:15-16). It is called Grace Giving and can best be understood by studying the principles laid down by Paul in I Corinthians chapter 9. No specific amount is ever commanded, and no percentage is suggested. While a tithe or tenth of one’s finances may be a good standard to use for Christian giving, it is clear the early church did not focus on a specific amount but rather on meeting needs. This sometimes included giving much more than a tenth, as some believers sold homes or land to meet the needs that existed in the church (Acts 4:34-37).

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

**Foreshadowings:** Malachi 3:1-6 is a prophecy concerning John the Baptist. He was the Messenger of the Lord sent to prepare the way (Matthew 11:10) for the Messiah, Jesus Christ. John preached repentance and baptized in the name of the Lord, thus preparing the way for Jesus’ first advent. But

the Messenger who comes “suddenly to the Temple” is Christ Himself in His second advent when He comes in power and might (Matthew 24). At that time, He will “purify the sons of Levi” (v. 3), meaning that those who exemplified the Mosaic Law would themselves need purification from sin through the blood of the Savior. Only then will they be able to offer “an offering in righteousness” because it will be the righteousness of Christ imputed to them through faith (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**Practical Application:** God is not pleased when we do not obey His commands. He will repay those who disregard Him. As for God hating divorce (2:16), God takes the covenant of marriage seriously and He does not want it broken. We are to stay true to the spouse of our youth for a lifetime. God sees our hearts, so He knows what our intentions are; nothing can be hidden from Him. He will return and He will be the judge. But if we return to Him, He will return to us (Malachi 3:6).

My prayer in response to the Lord: