

*A People of the Book*  
*8-Year Curriculum*  
*Year 6, Quarter 4*

A Study of  
Selected Texts from

# Minor Prophets III

(Zephaniah, Haggai,  
Zechariah, Malachi)

Mike White

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Introduction

Timeline

Summary Table for all the Minor Prophets

Lesson 1-Zephaniah 1-2:3- Urgency for national spiritual revival -7 October

Lesson 2-Zephaniah 2:4-3-God's present judgment & future hope-14 October

Lesson 3-Haggai 1-Putting first things first-21 October

Lesson 4-Haggai 2-Victory comes from the Lord & not from men!-28 October

Lesson 5-Zechariah 1-3-Be encouraged because God is among us-4 November

Lesson 6-Zechariah 4-6-Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit-11 November

Lesson 7 -Zechariah 7-8-What does true religion look like?-18 November

Lesson 8 -Zechariah 9-11-1<sup>st</sup> Oracle: Sovereignty of God and the Good Shepherd -25 November

Lesson 9 - Zechariah 12-14-2<sup>nd</sup> Oracle: Our Lord's final victory-2 December

Lesson 10 -Malachi 1 - Cheating God? - 9 December

Lesson 11 - Malachi 2 - Honoring God - 16 December

Lesson 12 -Malachi 3-4-God is in control & Jesus Christ is on the way-23 December

Lesson 13 - Pop Quiz-30 December

**Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi**

Welcome to our study of the last four books of the Old Testament. All of what we study in these books will be perfectly applicable to our lives today because the stress and challenges of the Jews in Jerusalem during the time of Zephaniah, and the small group of Jews who returned to Judah and Jerusalem after the destruction of their way of life as foreordained by God demand the same level of trust toward God and obedience to His will today as it did 2500 years ago. These books are rarely discussed in the churches of Christ much less become the focus of a 13 week study, but I believe that if you will do the assignments in your study book, read the Bible, and participate in our open discussion during our Bible class you will be spiritually benefited. Zephaniah is chronologically ahead of Haggai and Zechariah by about 100 years, and I believe ahead of Malachi by about 200 years. The reason we will study Zephaniah in combination with the prophets from the post-exile period is simply a matter of convenience as we have divided the Minor Prophets into three study books of four Minor Prophets each. This study guide will complete Summit's review of the Minor Prophets. Each of these men whose prophetic work we will study were men that God called to big things at critical points in the life of the nation. In most ways their work was difficult but in every way they gave themselves fully to the Lord as His servants. If we can visualize this lesson alone from the life examples of these four men our study will be successful.

As your teacher I have four big take-a-ways from these four books:

1. We must understand and acknowledge the sovereignty of God in the affairs of men
2. We must lead holy lives before our Lord or risk losing focus, drifting away, and dropping out as we face the tough challenges of daily life.

3. Our relationship with God cannot be a sometimes thing. Walking with God is an all the time thing and we must be fully committed for God to use us His servants.
4. We must have full confidence in the validity and reliability of our Bible which is the unerring, life changing, salvation guiding word of God. You will find many reinforcements of the divine origin of scripture in these four prophetic books that could only come from a Sovereign God who loves each one of us so much that He purposefully fulfilled His plan for salvation history even though it cost Him his only Son.

I will come back to these themes over and over so it is good that I point out to you what I consider to be key "faith builder" themes as we begin our study.

My recommendation is that you read the text first and then read the lesson summary I have briefly outlined at the start of each lesson. Next answer the questions of the readings so you might understand the textual facts. Then complete the thought questions that ask for a deep dive on some of the thinking displayed in that lesson. I have ended each lesson with a compilation of devotionals that I wrote for the Summit church of Christ web page on the Minor Prophets Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi. Not all devotionals on Zechariah were completed when this guide was compiled. I will provide a copy of these devotionals for insertion in your study guide when I complete them.

May God Bless your study of the Minor Prophets III which are the books of Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. I hope you will have as much fun as I had in preparing our study guide.

Mike White, teacher

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- 793 B.C. - Jonah becomes a prophet
- 760 B.C. - Amos becomes a prophet
- 753 B.C. - Hosea becomes a prophet
- 742 B.C. - Micah becomes a prophet
- 740 B.C. - Isaiah becomes a prophet
- 722 B.C. - Israel falls to Assyrians and no longer exists
- 701 B.C. - Sennacherib of Assyria surrounds Jerusalem but God delivers them because of Hezekiah's prayer and the prayers of the people
- 640 B.C. - Zephaniah becomes a prophet & King Josiah begins reign
- 627 B.C. - Jeremiah becomes a prophet
- 621 B.C. - Zephaniah's ministry ends
- 612 B.C. - Nineveh falls
- 612 B.C. - Habakkuk becomes a prophet
- 609 B.C. - King Josiah killed at Meddigo and the nation mourns
- 609 B.C. - Assyria completely defeated
- 605 B.C. - Babylon defeats Egypt at Carchemish & becomes the world super power
- 605 B.C. - first exiles taken to Babylon including Daniel
- 597 B.C. - Babylon's 2<sup>nd</sup> attack on Judah...more exiles taken
- 586 B.C. - Fall of Jerusalem and destruction of City/temple by Nebuchadnezzar
- 539 B.C. - Babylon falls to the Medes and Persians
- 538 B.C. - Jewish exiles (Remnant) return to the homeland as God had promised
- 536 B.C. - Temple reconstruction begins
- 530 B.C. - Temple work halted because of local opposition and political turmoil
- 520 B.C. - Temple work restarted under messages of Haggai and Zechariah
- 516 B.C. - Temple reconstruction completed by Zerubbabel
- 458 B.C. - Ezra comes to Jerusalem
- 445 B.C. - Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem and wall is completed
- 430 B.C. - Malachi becomes a prophet
- 167 B.C. - Antiochus Epiphanes IV desecrates the temple (abomination that causes desolation of Daniel 9)
- 164 B.C. - Maccabees revolt and regain control of Judea and govern it
- 63 B.C. - Roman armies take control of Judea and Jewish governance ceases
- 6/5 B.C. - John the Baptist and Jesus are born

**Minor Prophets III 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2012 Summary Table of all Minor Prophets**



| Prophet | Dates<br>B.C. | Kingdom | King(s)                     | Threat  | Contemporaries | Theme  |
|---------|---------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------|----------------|--|
| Hosea   | 753-715       | Israel  | Jeroboam II                 | Assyria | Isaiah<br>Amos | God's love for His people illustrated by Hosea in his love for his wife Gomer who was a prostitute.  |
| Joel    | 835-796       | Judah   | Jehu<br>Jehoahaz<br>Jehoash | unk     | unk            | Day of the Lord: Joel's words in Joel 2 are incorporated into Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2.  |
| Amos    | 760-750       | Israel  | Jeroboam II                 | Assyria | Hosea          | Judgment coming against Israel for her sins  |
| Obadiah | 627-586       | Judah   | unk                         | Babylon | Jeremiah       | Judgment against Edom and its total destruction.   |
| Jonah   | 793-753       | Israel  | Jeroboam II                 | Assyria | Amos           | God's evangelistic outreach to the gentiles in the great city of Nineveh. Jonah's mission to Nineveh is delayed by his own obstinacy including 3 days and nights in the belly of a fish. |

| Prophet  | Dates<br>B.C. | Kingdom | King(s)   | Threat  | Contemporaries  | Theme  |
|----------|---------------|---------|---|---------|-----------------|--|
| Micah    | 742-647       | Judah   | Jotham<br>Ahaz<br>Hezekiah                                | Assyria | Isaiah<br>Hosea | Judgment is coming to both Israel and Judah. Israel falls to Assyria in 722 B.C. and ceases to exist as a nation. A great mountain peak of scripture is found in Micah 6:6-8 describing what is truly important to God in the lives of men. Some messianic verses are also found in Micah. |
| Nahum    | 663           | Judah   | Manasseh<br>Josiah  | Assyria |                 | The end of Nineveh is prophesied. Prophecy describes in accurate detail (which is historically documented) how Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C. some 50 years after Nahum's prophecy.   |
| Habakkuk | 612-589       | Judah   | Josiah<br>Jehoahaz<br>Jehoiakim<br>Jehoiachin<br>Zedekiah | Babylon | Jeremiah        | The Babylonian army is coming to destroy the Nation of Judah, but Habakkuk in faith looks to God who is sovereign and trusts Him to restore the land and its people. Habakkuk 3:16-19 is a mountain peak of scripture on what having faith in God means.                                   |

|           |         |             |                        |                    |           |   |
|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------|---|
| Zephaniah | 640-621 | Judah       | Josiah                 | Assyria<br>Babylon | Jeremiah  | God's judgment is coming on Judah & Jerusalem unless it repents. Zephaniah's message is similar to Jeremiah's preaching. God's great grace offers hope to the remnant @ the end.  |
| Haggai    | 520     | Post-exilic | Zerubbabel<br>governor | local              | Zechariah | With the temple building stopped God calls Haggai through 4 visions given over about 3 ½ months to encourage the leaders and the people to complete the temple reconstruction.  |
| Zechariah | 520-?   | Post-exilic | Zerubbabel<br>governor | local              | Haggai    | Zechariah began his prophetic ministry a few months following Haggai, and encouraged the Jews with God's word to not become discouraged but work on and complete the temple which occurred in 516 B.C. Zechariah's focus is on the nation as well as the temple. Chapter's 9-14 address time beyond the 520-516 period of temple reconstruction and are highly futuristic and messianic in content. |

|                |                 |                    |                  |              |             |   |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|---|
| <b>Malachi</b> | <b>430-395?</b> | <b>Post-exilic</b> | <b>Nehemiah?</b> | <b>local</b> | <b>none</b> | <b>Malachi as the last book of the Old Testament addresses the serious spiritual malaise of the priests and people in serving and worshipping God. Malachi called the people back to a sincere faith which puts God first. Malachi also transitions to the New Testament era prophesying on the coming Messiah and His forerunner Elijah (John the Baptist)</b> |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|---|

**Zephaniah**

**Read Zephaniah Chapter 1-Chapter 2:3**

**Lesson Purpose: An Urgent Need for National Revival**

Zephaniah preached during the reign of King Josiah, and is the next to last of the nine "minor" prophets who prophesied chronologically before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 B.C. Although Habakkuk prophesied last chronologically, many scholars speculate that Zephaniah was placed last in the books of the nine prophets since his book summarizes them. The key themes that run through all of the prophets of judgment and salvation are addressed in summary in Zephaniah. It is widely thought that Zephaniah wrote his Book around 629 B.C. some 43 years before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian armies. Zephaniah's indictment of the spiritual condition of the Jews in Jerusalem helps us understand the urgency of Josiah's reforms, and supports that Zephaniah's preaching could have been a key element in focusing the people on the need for revival. What we do know about Josiah's reforms is that they did not last, and some four years following Josiah's death in 609 B.C. the first deportation of the Jewish elite to Babylon took place. This unthinkable event was followed by two attacks of the Babylonian army of which the last one in 586 B.C. destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple leading to the deportation of many more Jews and the disruption of Jewish national life. Zephaniah like his contemporary Jeremiah was unafraid to speak truth to power. He spoke boldly secure in the knowledge that he was a voice of a prophet of God. Zephaniah had a thankless job to warn people of the unthinkable since the people were complacent that God would never allow something to happen to His holy city of Jerusalem. Nevertheless Zephaniah preached on and his teaching to the Jews of a doomed Jerusalem before the great and terrible day of the Lord speaks to us some 2600 years later as still relevant for our obedience before God today. The lessons from Zephaniah that we must all learn are shown in the box below:

1. The day of the Lord is near-near and coming quickly for each one of us.
2. Bad things happen in our lives when we turn our backs on following the Lord.
3. Complacency before God is the worst form of disrespect toward Him because it says that we don't care about the things of God and believe Him to be irrelevant.
4. The first step back towards God at any time and in any situation is to humble ourselves and seek righteousness by obeying Him.
5. God is in control and His purposes will be accomplished.
6. There are always consequences when we sin.
7. Whenever there is a remnant among the people they will have a character of humility, meekness, and trust in God. They will not fear because they understand the presence of God and He is their confidence.

As you read chapter 1 it becomes clear that the Jews of Jerusalem had turned their backs on following the Lord because they worshiped Baal, they worshiped the heavenly skies on their rooftops, and even sacrificed their children to the Ammonite god Molech. How did the Jews slip so far from God's will? The answer is found in chapter 1:6-7 when their complacency and lack of loyalty to God was demonstrated by their "neither seeking the Lord nor inquiring of Him". There was a lack of reverence or respect for God as well because the people were not silent before Him. You see the complacency of the people who don't think He will do anything good or bad since he is not involved in their lives so they reasoned (Zephaniah 1:12). Regardless of the people's lack of reverence for God and their unwillingness to listen to the prophet Zephaniah, the great day of the Lord was near and coming nearer, and with it the wrath of God, and distress and anguish for the nation. The only alternative for the Jews was to humble themselves and seek the Lord and obey His commands so that perhaps they would be sheltered in the day of the Lord's anger. God does not tolerate sin and His opportunities for repentance and restoration were finite and not open ended for the Jews of Zephaniah's time. Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

### Review of the Reading

1. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of what king? (Zephaniah 1:1)

2. What kind of king was Josiah and what did he do? (2 Kings 23:19-25)
3. Who will God stretch out His hand against? (Zephaniah 1:4-5)
4. What does it mean to turn your back on the Lord? (Zephaniah 1:6-7)
5. Why will the Lord search Jerusalem with lamps? (Zephaniah 1:12)
6. What will happen to complacent people? (Zephaniah 1: 13)
7. People were saved from God's wrath by their silver and gold in their possession. (Zephaniah 1:18) TRUE or FALSE
8. What is a prerequisite for seeking the Lord? (Zephaniah 2:3)

### Thought Questions

1. What had happened to the Lord's people in Zephaniah's time? What was the primary contributing factor in your opinion?
2. Do you think this spiritual decline of the Lord's people occurred overnight or do you think it was gradual?
3. How does a complacent Christian or a complacent church act today?
4. What does Zephaniah say the key to spiritual restoration with God is?

5. Do you agree that this prescription applies today (pick one):

- Agree fully
- Agree somewhat
- No opinion
- Disagree somewhat
- Disagree fully

6. Why is it so easy for today's Christians to put our confidence in national security, financial assets, houses, and things in general? Would it be better if we had none of these things?

### Devotionals from Zephaniah 1-2:3

Zephaniah 1:6-7 "...those who turn back from following the Lord and neither seek the Lord nor inquire of him. Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near...." (NIV)

Zephaniah is a prophet of the Lord who was called to serve his people in a most difficult time during the reign of King Josiah. Zephaniah prophesied to a people who would be devastated by the Babylonian Army with towns destroyed including the capital city of Jerusalem and many of their inhabitants deported into captivity in less than 50 years. It is clear as we read Zephaniah that he had a daunting task from the Lord that required his total commitment and perseverance through great discouragement. Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah the prophet and both lived in Jerusalem during their prophetic ministries in a failed attempt to bring the people to repentance before their God and the great Day of the Lord which I believe to be the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonian army in 586 BC. It is clear from our reading of the early verses of chapter 1 that God's people had lost their way and were steeped in rebellion against God. They served Baal, bowed down and worshiped the heavenly skies, and swore by Molech a deity so evil that the people even sacrificed their children to him. It is clear that God's people had turned their backs on Him and slipped to new depths of depravity and idolatry. How did God's people go so far off track particularly at a time King Josiah was trying to spiritually reform Jewish society? Our devotional text offers the explanation that each one of us must take to heart to avoid the pitfalls of pride and rebellion that ultimately resulted in the devastation of God's people. *Zephaniah makes it clear as to why the Jews failed to heed his call to repentance: they turned their back on following the Lord.* When a person turns their back they are deliberately heading in the wrong direction regardless of the consequences. This is

exactly what the Jews of Jerusalem were doing during this period. This active rebellion and turning their backs on the Lord manifest itself in three characteristics common to all sinners:

- (1) *They didn't seek the Lord.* The things of the Lord were neither a priority nor an important consideration for the Jews of the day. In their pride and arrogance they had no time for God or his messengers like Zephaniah.
- (2) *They didn't pray to the Lord and ask him for his guidance and direction.* God's involvement in their lives was fully rejected as silliness and beneath them. How sad it is that the Jews preferred to inquire on roof tops looking at stars than listen to the Lord Almighty.
- (3) *They weren't silent before the SOVEREIGN Lord.* The Jewish people had great disrespect for God in that they didn't reverence him as demonstrated that they were unwilling to be silent before him that they might listen to him.

God is Sovereign which means God is in control and in our pride and arrogance to reject God's first place in our lives is to live dangerously in this world. Zephaniah shouted to God's people that the day of the Lord is near but no one would listen and heed the prophet's pleas. *We will never listen to God if we don't reverence Him, we will never seek Him if we don't honor him, and we will never pray to Him if we don't think he has the power to hear and act on our behalf!* TODAY FATHER I CHOOSE TO SEEK YOU FIRST AND INQUIRE OF YOU AS TO WHERE MY STEPS SHOULD GO AS I PREPARE FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD. AMEN!

Zephaniah 1:12-13 "At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.' Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. They will build houses but not live in them; they will plant vineyards but not drink the wine." (NIV)

The greatest danger in the Church of Christ is not the sinner nor is it the man or woman who in their zeal may go too far or say too much or offend too many. *The greatest dangers in the modern church are those that simply don't care about the Lord, his Church, and the people of God.* Not caring or having no passion or energy for the things of God is rooted in our self-sufficiency based on an attitude of pride and arrogance that stunts our spiritual growth in Christ. It is a common trap sprung by the evil one on us because the devil knows that if he can achieve a spirit of complacency and compromise in our lives then he need not concern himself with us because we have nothing of God to offer others seeking spiritual healing in this world. This same attitude existed at the time of Zephaniah and he tells us what the Lord will do about it in our lives and what the long term life impacts are on those who lack passion for the things of God. Zephaniah says that men who are compromised with the world and complacent in the kingdom are like "wine left on its dregs" a metaphor for a lack of energy and motion in the pursuit of doing anything worthwhile for the Lord. Why should this attitude exist among God's people? *The answer is given to us that people who allow themselves to become complacent and compromised by the world system really don't think God is relevant or active in their lives. In short they don't think God is real or helpful to them.* That's the belief and attitude that fuels the spirit of so many who compromise, grow cold, and drop out of a relationship with the Lord. Please notice those who have no desire for Christ or his Church, and be assured that God knows who they are and he will

shine his lamp on them. Not one of us wants to be in that group! Compromise with the world system is a dangerous and deadly exercise for those who quit on God. The outcome in our lives is to forfeit the blessings of God. *Not only will we jeopardize what we already have, but God will allow us to experience futility in our lives as we never benefit from the work that we do or the plans that we make as "houses are built but not lived in, and vineyards are planted but no wine is drunk."* My friends this is what happens when God blesses us again and again and we continually choose rebellion, and only then our God allows us to suffer "leanness of soul". (Psalm 106:15 KJV) TODAY MAY I RESIST COMPROMISE WITH THE WORLD SYSTEM BUT DEPEND UPON GOD'S POWER, HELP, AND LOVE TO STAND FIRM IN MY FAITH AND ACTIVELY SERVE OTHERS.

Zephaniah 1:14, 18 "The great day of the Lord is near – near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. (NIV)

I'm a big football fan and I love to root on the fighting Texas Aggies every fall. The Aggies may win or lose but there is one thing for certain: both teams have 60 minutes to play the game and unless there is overtime that is all the time that both teams have. In other words when you begin a football game or most athletic contests you are on the clock. *In life we are all defined by time and as the years pass by we understand all too well that we are on the clock and there will come a time when this life is no more and we will face our God (Hebrews 9:27).* In the days of Zephaniah, God had put the Jewish nation on the clock and without repentance their fate was sealed for death, destruction and deportation to a strange land. This was a tough message for Zephaniah to preach to Jerusalem as it was for his contemporary prophet Jeremiah because no one wanted to hear it, much less to deal with it in their individual lives. Our devotional text makes it clear that the day of the Lord is near-near and coming quickly. This day of the Lord referred to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. when both the city and the temple were razed to the ground in total destruction following a horrific siege by the Babylonian army where so many died. Although Zephaniah called God's people to repentance they refused to listen, foolishly thinking that their own frail and feeble ways would protect them from the coming holocaust. In this instance they thought their money (silver and gold) would deliver them, but we all know that depending on the "props of life" such as money or city walls or political allies cannot thwart the will of a Sovereign God whose purposes will be realized. The key for the people of Jerusalem hearing Zephaniah's preaching is what is important for all of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near." (Isaiah 55:6) For each one of us the day of the Lord is fast approaching and there are no guarantees for any of us except one and that is that all of us will die physically unless Jesus returns during our life time in the climatic day of the Lord. But the point is clear that we know neither the time, place, or date of our leaving this life and facing Christ Jesus in the judgment. *Nothing we own or possess can help us avoid the day of the Lord since it is coming to all men on God's time, terms, and conditions.* Our proper response is to repent and humble ourselves before the Lord depending upon His mercy and love and not the futile schemes of the evil one and men. FATHER GIVE ME THE COURAGE TO HEAR YOUR TRUTH AND REPENT OF MY SINS AND DRAW CLOSE TO YOU IN HUMBLE OBEDIENCE SO THAT I MIGHT BE SAVED ON THE DAY OF THE LORD.

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.” (NIV)

There is a painting that hangs in a prestigious building in Pittsburgh showing cowboys riding to get away from Indians chasing them but as they race up the cliff trail toward the mesa top there is an ambush ready to be sprung on them by an Indian war party. When you see this picture it seemingly transforms you back to that time and place and you want to shout to the cowboys to watch it for there is an ambush at the mesa top! You can see it coming like many a car wreck when you want to shout out a warning to avoid the inevitable and sometimes deadly collision. This was the position that God had called the prophet Zephaniah to by shouting out a warning to God’s people to turn from their wicked ways so perhaps they might be saved. The Jews of the day were entrapped in idolatry, materialism, and self-sufficiency and refused to listen to Zephaniah’s message from the Lord. As a result, Zephaniah’s message became focused and directed to people of the land that would listen and take steps to make their way back to the Lord. Our devotional text provides what many consider to be the highlight thought of this book because it clearly defines the way home for anyone of us who has lost his or her way in this world and must return back to God.

- (1) ***First, we must seek the Lord.*** You cannot find God unless you seek Him. Understanding of God’s nature, purposes, and plans only comes when we seek Him (Psalm 53:2) and we will never seek Him UNLESS we reverence and respect Him.
- (2) ***Second, we must humble ourselves before the Lord and seek humility.*** Humility of heart is essential to obedience because it requires humility to submit to the will of God in our lives.
- (3) ***Third, we must seek righteousness which requires obedience to God’s commands.*** Obedience is essential to being in a right relationship with God as we seek his righteousness.

Zephaniah appealed with all his heart to his people to return to God so that perhaps they might be sheltered on the day of the Lord and the full force of God’s wrath against a disobedient and belligerent people. The prophet Micah said something very similar 100 years earlier in 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.” God’s commands are never too hard, too harsh, or too difficult but they do require a respect for God and a humble mind willing to submit in obedience to His commands that we might walk righteously before Him. TODAY FATHER I CHOOSE TO SEEK YOU AS MY FIRST PRIORITY BY HUMBLING MYSELF AND OBEYING YOUR COMMANDS SO THAT I WILL BE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE YOU ON THE DAY OF THE LORD. AMEN!

## Zephaniah

Read Zephaniah Chapter 2:3-Chapter 3

Lesson Purpose: God's Present Judgment and Future Hope

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah and was very likely a key ally in the king's spiritual reforms for the nation. Zephaniah's message was an unpopular one as he called the people to repentance and return to their God or suffer the consequences of death and destruction by a foreign power. In the last two chapters of the Book of Zephaniah we see God's declarations against the surrounding nations and also for Jerusalem. God is serious about sin and its consequences and here in Zephaniah we have historical examples of this truth. Zephaniah's first declaration was against the Philistine nation to the west who was a constant irritant and enemy of God's people. God sealed their fate by pronouncing their destruction as a people (Zephaniah 2:5). But God goes further by declaring that the remnant of God will occupy the former territory of the Philistines, and will lie down in complete safety, security, and peace because God cares for his people (Zephaniah 2:7). What a great message of hope for a people who were war weary and always living on the edge of national insecurity. Next Zephaniah declared that God was against Moab and Ammon who lived to the east of Judah, and who were continuous bad influences, trouble makers, and detractors of God's people in their fidelity to Him. The end of Moab and Ammon was to become like Sodom and Gomorrah for insulting and mocking the people of God because He destroyed their gods (Zephaniah 2:10-11). Then Zephaniah declares that the Cushites to the south would be slain by sword which came to pass in 605 B.C. when the Babylonian army defeated Egypt at Carchemish (Zephaniah 2:12). Zephaniah's next prophetic declaration was against Assyria to the north and its capital city of Nineveh when he predicted the destruction of Nineveh which occurred in 612 B.C. some 17 years into the future (Zephaniah 2:13). It was impossible for a man in this time to conceive that the greatest city in the world inhabited by the strongest world power would be destroyed and its ruins be a home for wild

beasts (Zephaniah 2:15). That Zephaniah's prophetic message came true demonstrates the awesome and omnipotent power of God who is sovereign in all things. Finally, Zephaniah pronounces God's declaration against Jerusalem that He calls a city of oppressors both rebellious and defiled. The character of the people was determined in Zephaniah 3:2:

- They don't obey the Lord
- They accept no correction from the Lord
- They do not trust the Lord
- They do not draw near to the Lord

This leads to a breakdown in national leadership (Zephaniah 3:3-4) that will reap the wrath of God in the fall of Jerusalem and its destruction in 586 B.C.

Zephaniah ends his prophetic book with a message of hope for the people of God. One of the great things about the books of the Minor Prophets is that they always end with a message of hope for the remnant people from their God. It is interesting to note in contrast to the rebellious Jews what the character of the remnant will be (Zephaniah 3:9, 12-13):

- They will call on the name of the Lord
- They will serve Him shoulder to shoulder
- They will be meek and humble
- They will trust in the name of the Lord
- They will not be afraid
- They will do no wrong, nor speak lies, and no deceit will be found in their mouths

Zephaniah closes with God's promise to gather the Jews to their home and restore their fortunes (Zephaniah 3:20).

The lessons from Zephaniah that we must all learn are shown in the box below:

8. The day of the Lord is near-near and coming quickly for each one of us.
9. Bad things happen in our lives when we turn our backs on following the Lord.
10. Complacency before God is the worst form of disrespect toward Him because it says that we don't care about the things of God and believe Him to be irrelevant.
11. The first step back towards God at any time and in any situation is to humble ourselves and seek righteousness by obeying Him.
12. God is in control and His purposes will be accomplished.
13. There are always consequences when we sin.
14. Whenever there is a remnant among the people they will have a character of humility, meekness, and trust in God. They will not fear because they understand the presence of God and He is their confidence.

Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

### Review of the Reading

1. What will happen to the Philistines (Zephaniah 2:5)
2. What will the remnant do on this land? (Zephaniah 2:7)
3. What will happen to Moab and Ammon? (Zephaniah 2:9)
4. What will happen to the Cushites? (Zephaniah 2:12)
5. What will happen to Assyria and Nineveh its capitol city? (Zephaniah 2:13)
6. What will happen to Jerusalem? (Zephaniah 3:7-8)
7. What were the Jerusalem officials like? Her prophets? Her priests? (Zephaniah 3:3-4)
8. Who is the remnant and what are they like? (Zephaniah 3:12-13)

9. Why should Jerusalem not fear after the day of God's wrath?  
(Zephaniah 3:17)

Thought Questions

1. When you read Zephaniah 2:4-3:8 what impresses you about the mind of God?
2. How do we apply the lessons of Zephaniah 3:2 to ourselves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
3. The Jews of Jerusalem could not accept correction even though if they did not destruction would come. Why is accepting correction from anyone so difficult for us and what are some prerequisites for us to accept it?
4. No one could make the remnant afraid in Zephaniah 3:13. What should we do in the Churches of Christ when we discover we have fear in our lives? Can we grow spiritually if we are afraid?
5. In your opinion what is the most important message for Christians today from the Book of Zephaniah?

## Devotionals from Zephaniah 2:4-3:20

Zephaniah 2:7 “It will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah; there they will find pasture. In the evening they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon. The Lord their God will care for them; he will restore their fortunes.” (NIV)

If there is one piece of wisdom I could impart to anyone it would be to stay with God and cling to Him through all of life’s ups and downs. *If salvation history teaches us anything it teaches us one thing: if we will stay with God then God will form a remnant that he will soon restore for His use and purposes.* We see this over and over in the pattern of the Old Testament and we find this concept in our devotional text. Zephaniah in chapter 2 was prophesying against both the Jews and nations that bordered Judah when he raises the term “remnant” of the house of Judah. A remnant above all else has survived the holocaust and has been restored by a gracious God to bring glory to Him. So as God through Zephaniah declares the sorry fate of the Philistine nation, he also lovingly portrays his love and care for the true people of God in heart and mind that he calls His remnant because they have remained faithful to His word and obedient to His will. When you live in a society of greed, violence, and betrayal with war clouds building all around you, it is a marvelous thing to have your mind reset to living in the land of a former enemy at peace and in security as you lie down perfectly safe in the loving arms of God. When we stay true to God we can depend upon his care and be confident that the outcomes of our lives are blessed by God and meant to enable us to achieve His vital purposes. The critical lesson that we must all learn if we are to stay with God is not to grow discouraged and fearful through the storms and turmoil that comes into our lives. Simply put to stay with God requires that we trust Him in spite of the circumstances in absolute confidence that God will see us through this too as his unfailing love surrounds us (Psalm 32:10). *The greatest wrong we can commit as a Christian is to lose heart, quit on God, and drop out into the world system.* Jesus makes it very clear to us that we must maintain faith, hold his hand, and be comforted by his message in John 16:33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” If we are to be a remnant people and enjoy the benefits of God’s reign in our lives we must stay with God regardless of the consequences. **TODAY, I AM DEDICATED TO STAY WITH GOD REGARDLESS OF THE CONSEQUENCES BECAUSE I KNOW THE LORD IS FAITHFUL, CAPABLE, AND POWERFUL ENOUGH TO MAKE A WAY FOR THE PEOPLE OF HIS REMNANT IN THIS WORLD.**  
AMEN!

Zephaniah 2:15 “This is the carefree city that lived in safety. She said to herself, “I am, and there is none beside me.” What a ruin she has become, a lair for wild beasts! All who pass by her scoff and shake their fists.” (NIV)

If there is one thing in life that is sure to get us on the wrong side of God, it is the folly of human pride and arrogance (Proverbs 8:13). In fact God goes a step further and tells us that pride goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18). It is a dangerous place for any person or people to be by basking in self-sufficiency and self-congratulation of how great and invincible they are. God is sovereign in the affairs

of men and all things are done on his timetable to achieve his purposes in this world (Daniel 4:17). Zephaniah prophesied against Assyria and in our devotional text more than ten years before the event categorically states that God will destroy Assyria and its capital city of Nineveh. I'm sure when the world heard Zephaniah's words they ridiculed them and responded with caustic derision of Zephaniah the prophet. But here we have it in our devotional text the prophesy of God as to the sorry end of the great city of Nineveh. As God's people we must never depend upon our own strength or the strength of others or the possession of things for our own safety and security. *Nineveh is prime example #1 of how foolish men are in depending upon their own frail devices and foolish pronouncements. The truth of every day with every man is that God is in control and we are not and God's purposes will prevail in this world just as Zephaniah prophesied.* One of the great faults of our time is that so many fail to take God seriously and spurn his holy word. The things of God demand our attention and priority in all that we think, say and do in our lives. God has always required that of each one of us and history is littered with men who have treated God with a casual denial of His power and rule in their lives. Even today many treat God with neglect and deny his authority over their lives. But as Christians we know better for we fully affirm "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11). TODAY FATHER HELP ME TO TAKE YOUR WORD SERIOUSLY AND TO OBEY IT AS I WALK WITHOUT FEAR IN THIS WORLD SUPPORTED BY THE POWER OF YOUR LOVE. AMEN!

Zephaniah 3:1-2 "Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled! She obeys no one, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God." (NIV)

Sin is a foreign concept to modern mankind. The thought that a preeminent authority over the affairs of man exists and applies a standard of right and wrong is rejected as foolishness at best and evil at worst. Unfortunately where we find ourselves today is not unlike where the Jews found themselves at the close of Judges: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." (Judges 21:25) The prophet Zephaniah preached to a sinful people who God had put on the clock of his eternal plan and as the dark storm clouds gathered over Jerusalem the people refused to turn back to God in repentance. A person cannot place himself in a more dangerous place than to turn their backs on God's message of repentance and salvation as preached in the City of Jerusalem by Zephaniah. Our devotional text describes the "death spiral" that Jerusalem was on and in the end would lead to her total destruction during the day of the Lord in 586 BC when the Babylonian Army destroyed the city, razed the temple, murdered many and deported the people. This was such a waste and it all could have been avoided IF those in Jerusalem would have responded to Zephaniah's preaching. It is interesting to note the attitude of the Jews of Jerusalem as they reject Zephaniah's words and pursue their own way. Does this attitude seep into our thinking and behavior? Do we refuse to listen and respond to Zephaniah's message in our own lives? There are some key characteristics that define a stubborn, inflexible, and self-willed person that is a candidate for the spiritual death spiral." The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to examine ourselves to see whether or not we are in the faith. Each one of us must examine ourselves to see whether or not we remain in Christ Jesus and the criteria used by Zephaniah to describe the sinful unrepentant Jews of Jerusalem are a fair place to begin.

- (1) Do we obey the Lord and His word?
- (2) Do we accept the Lord's correction and discipline in our lives?
- (3) Do we trust God with all aspects of our lives?
- (4) Do we draw near to God in prayer and study?

If any answer to these questions is NO then you have a problem that is distancing you from God because of your own stubborn will. The only response acceptable to God is to turn back to Him in repentance seeking to obey His will unlike the Jews in Zephaniah's time. **FATHER GIVE ME A SENSITIVE HEART THAT I MAY LISTEN TO YOUR VOICE AND OBEY YOUR WORD AS I DRAW NEAR TO YOU AND REACH OUT TO OTHERS!**

Zephaniah 3:9, 12-13 "Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder. But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid." (NIV)

It is a most difficult task to read and study prophets like Jeremiah and Zephaniah because so much of their message is an attempt by God to make his people understand the calamitous impact of their ways and call them back to repentance and obedient living. However, it is very important that we see in each of God's books of the Minor Prophets no matter how discouraging the times or rebellious the people that there is always an ending of great hope for the future in a relationship with a great God! Zephaniah 3:9-20 is the "hope" passage of Zephaniah and it points us toward the salvation, love, and restorative powers of God in our lives. No matter how dark the storm or howling the winds our God will see us through the storm into calmer waters and more peaceful times. The key is to not become fearful, doubtful, or distracted but to maintain contact with God through the storm and stay with God no matter what. How do we do this? How is it to be done in the storms of life? Zephaniah mentions three important building blocks of the true servants of the Lord that will keep us grounded in the faith so that we might stay with God regardless of the consequences.

- (1) *The true servants of the Lord call on the name of the Lord so that they might serve him shoulder to shoulder.* None of us is equipped to serve God under our own power. We all need the strength and spirit of God in our lives to serve Him in this world, and that requires that we constantly call on His name to receive his supernatural power into our lives. (verse 9)
- (2) *The true servants of the Lord have a spirit of meekness and a heart of humility that produces a submissive spirit that simply "trusts and obey" their Lord.* Without humility of heart there is no submission and without submission no one can be a servant. (verse 12)
- (3) *The true servants of the Lord live holy lives before their God.* They are the remnant of God's people who have stayed with God through the chaos and storm and now serve him on the other side. They do no wrong, speak no lies, practice no deceit, and are fearless in this world. Right thinking leads to right doing and so it is with the Lord's servants. (verse 13)

God never abandons His servants or leaves them without hope in their lives. Life can be difficult and even deadly as in the days of Zephaniah. In our devotional text we learned that to experience the

hope of God in our lives we must be his servants in this dark and sin filled world. TODAY DEAR GOD MAKE ME A SERVANT AND MAKE ME LIKE YOU BY GIVING ME A SUBMISSIVE SPIRIT AND AN OBEDIENT MIND. AMEN!

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." (NIV)

I love being a grandfather and spending time with Gracie my granddaughter. Gracie is now about 10 months old and when she grows tired and is ready for a nap she will put her thumb in her mouth and with the other hand she will touch her ear and curl her hair to calm and quiet herself. It's a wonderful thing to see a baby loved and able to find peace and quiet in the arms of a loving mother. I know how Gracie arrives at peace, but how do the rest of us reach that blessed state where nothing can move us or touch us with its anxiety or fear? I once read a story of a bird who had built its nest near the spray and noise of the roaring water falls. The baby birds in the nest would patiently wait for the mother bird to return to the nest to feed them, and in spite of the violent waters nearby would snuggle under the wing of the mother in perfect peace and security. The lesson for us is that regardless of how tumultuous the circumstances or hard the times we can achieve peace IF we are in the presence of our God and in the arms of Jesus Christ. After all that Zephaniah had experienced and the hard words he was commanded to preach to his own people, he was rewarded by God in our devotional text with the vision of how God surrounds us in the most difficult of times and brings us into an extraordinary peace of mind and a total absence of anxiety and fear in our lives. Our devotional text is very explicit as to how the peace that transcends all understanding (Philippians 4:7) is achieved in our lives as a blessing from God.

- (1) *We know God's presence is continually with us. (Hebrews 13:8)*
- (2) *We are confident in God's salvation. (John 10: 27-29)*
- (3) *We sense the Lord delights in us as we obey His voice. (1 Samuel 15:22)*
- (4) *We are quieted by the overwhelming love of God secure in his care. (1 John 3:1)*
- (5) *We have joy in this world because God takes joy in us. (Psalms 97:11)*

You must be a positive and constructive force in this world if you are to be a servant of the Lord. To be the Lord's servant requires that we practice the life of God's presence in our day to day walk. Only then will people feel the attraction of the light and the powerful, quiet, submissive, and at peace presence of the Lord living on the inside of us. THANK YOU FATHER FOR YOUR JOY, PEACE, AND PRESENCE IN MY LIFE THAT WILL NEVER BE TAKEN FROM ME AS I ABIDE IN YOU. AMEN!

Zephaniah 3:20 "At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes." Says the Lord." (NIV)

Zephaniah begins with the warning of great future destruction for Jerusalem and ends with the restorative powers of the love of God for His people. There has been more than several times in my life that God could have devastated me and burdened me for a lifetime with personal loss and humiliation. However, God always allowed me to work through my mistakes and troubles teaching

me to depend on Him to make good the losses in my life. The Book of Zephaniah closes with such a loving spirit that I simply stand in awe of the grace and mercy of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. As sinners the Jews deserved nothing just as we deserve nothing from God but destruction. But because of God's love, mercy, and grace he will not allow us to be punished beyond what we can bear and as we draw close to Him he restores us whole as part of his beloved people. I can't explain those times that I knew I deserved loss of all things, and yet because of God's willingness to restore me without loss I drop to my knees with hands outstretched in praise and thanksgiving to Him and thanked Him for his mercy. *What I find amazing about our devotional text it is that all of the gathering together and the bringing home is the initiative of God and not the people. God will provide for honor and praise not because of our deeds but because of His nature and character. God will do this time and time again in our lives before our very eyes IF we will stay with God through our life's ups and downs! If Zephaniah teaches us anything he teaches us one thing: when the dark storm clouds gather turn to God, trust Him only, and cling to Him through the storm because he will always bring you to a place of peace and security regardless of the mischief in the world.* Zephaniah's message to the Jews of Jerusalem is as real and urgent today for us today as it was over 2600 years ago: trust God in all things, obey God in all things, and walk with God in all things that we may stay with God and receive His blessings of mercy, grace, and peace. MY GOD I TRUST YOU AT ALL TIMES, IN ALL THINGS, WITH ALL PEOPLE ABSOLUTELY SECURE IN YOUR ABILITY TO DELIVER ME WITHOUT LOSS TO YOUR HOLY PRESENCE. AMEN!

## Haggai

## Read Haggai Chapter 1

Lesson Purpose: Putting First Things First

Haggai is a prophet of God in the post exilic period when the Jewish remnant returned to the homeland to rebuild the temple starting in about 536 B.C. Haggai was a contemporary of the prophet Zechariah, the high priest Joshua, and the governor Zerubbabel. God's people had returned to Jerusalem to begin to renew their national worship at His restored temple. The only way this could be achieved was to complete the temple rebuilding. Unfortunately opposition arose from those already in the land and they petitioned the new King Artaxerxes to stop the work and he responded by halting it (Ezra 4). During the time after the halt to temple rebuilding the Jews acclimated to their new situation in the land. The Jews became somewhat lax in their devotion to God, became preoccupied with their own personal property and comfort ahead of God's priorities. In fact when asked about it the Jews said that "the time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built." (Haggai 1:2) The long delay in restarting the work on the temple had resulted in the people of God inverting their priorities by putting themselves ahead of God. Ezra 5:1 speaks to the role Haggai and Zechariah played in prophesying to the people on God's command to complete temple reconstruction. In the second year of King Darius on the first day of the sixth month the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai in late August/early September 520 B.C. In Haggai 1:4 we read exactly the message that God had entrusted to Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" Further Haggai pointed out to the Jewish remnant with his exhortation to "give careful thought to your ways" that their futility in securing God's blessings was because of their disobedience, and inaction in rebuilding the temple. The Lord "blew" away their blessings because God's house remained a ruin while each of the Jews was busy with their own houses! (Haggai 1:9) In fact God impacted the weather to withhold His blessing from

them (Haggai 1:11). When Haggai challenged Zerubbabel, Joshua the high priest, and the people they responded with fear of the Lord and obedience to the voice of the Lord their God. (Haggai 1:12) As a direct result of their obedience, God stirred up the spirit of both leaders (Zerubbabel and Joshua) and the whole remnant of people, and they came together and began work on the temple in late September 520 B.C. just 3 ½ weeks after Haggai's first prophetic message! **WHEN GOD INSPIRES THINGS ALWAYS HAPPEN, AND WHEN ONLY MEN INSPIRE IT IS LIKE PUSHING ON A ROPE.**

The Book of Haggai has only two chapters, but its theme of putting God first in all things by being His faithful servant is a message for our day. Christians today must realize that there is a "cause and effect" in their daily walk with God created by obedience or disobedience to His word and will. All of us depend upon the blessings of our God, and to fully receive them we must put Him first, and walk obediently before Him. The Book of Haggai emphasizes this message with great power and truth to today's church. The lessons from Haggai that we must all learn are shown in the box below.

15. Put God first at all times, under all circumstances, with all people.
16. Practice to examine myself by considering my ways as I walk with my Lord so that I learn how God operates in my life either to bless me in obedience or discipline me in disobedience.
17. Recognize that I have been chosen by God in Christ, and He will never let me go as I serve Him through serving others. Always remember that I am a special person of God called to His purposes of saving the lost and building up His holy church.

### Review of the Reading

1. Who was Haggai? (Haggai 1:1, Ezra 5:1)
2. God's prophetic message from Haggai was for what two people? (Haggai 1:1)
3. What were the people saying that the Lord Almighty was displeased with? (Haggai 1:2)

4. Haggai's first prophetic message occurred in late August 520 B.C. and was critical of the Jews. What was God's message through Haggai? (Haggai 1:4)
5. Even though the people had not pursued God's priorities, they were blessed by God anyway. (Haggai 1:5-6,9) TRUE or FALSE (circle one)
6. Haggai told the people to \_\_\_\_\_ to your \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Haggai 1:7) (Based on the NIV)
7. The people expected much, but what happened when they brought it home? (Haggai 1:9)
8. Did God adversely impact weather to withhold blessings? (Haggai 1:10-11)
9. When Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people heard Haggai's prophetic message, what did they do? (Haggai 1:12)
10. How long did it take the people to start temple rebuilding once they heard Haggai's prophetic message? (Haggai 1:1,15)

### Thought Questions

1. Is it understandable from a common sense perspective as to why the Jews were working on their own houses but not the Lord's house? Do we rely too much on common sense in spiritual matters today?

2. Haggai's book mentions five times within it that God's people are to give careful thought to their ways. Why should this be so important to the Jews of the remnant? Does this still apply today?
  
3. God stirred up the spirit of the leaders and the people AFTER they obeyed. Why should that be and what implications does it have for church growth today in the churches of Christ?
  
4. Is one act of obedient faith important in moving a nation, church, or family forward?
  
5. Do you believe that God causes futility in the lives of Christians by withholding His blessings when they are disobedient?

### Devotionals from Haggai 1

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

The prophet Haggai is an impressive figure in the Bible because he changed the course of history for his people as he obeyed the word of God to spur the Jews on to rebuilding the temple. The historical context is most important to understand the true meaning of our devotional verse. The small "remnant" of Jews had left the comfort, ease, and pleasure of Persia and returned to an impoverished Judea as God had commanded them to rebuild the temple of the Lord. The work was stopped after the King died and the Jews went about their personal business of getting resettled in the land, but when the time had come to restart the temple work they had failed to begin because they were absorbed with their own interests. God's displeasure with them is clear and effective since He is withholding His blessings from them because they had forgotten the priority work of temple

rebuilding that they had returned from the exile to do (Haggai 1:9). *The Jews had inverted their priorities for they were putting their own personal property and things above the house of God.* God was displeased when he heard many say: “the time has not yet come for the Lord’s house to be built.” (Haggai 1:2) God sent Haggai to shake up the status quo and instill some urgency in the Lord’s work by asking the people “was it time to be living in paneled houses while the Lord’s house remained in ruin?” In other words Haggai wanted the people to rethink their priorities about putting themselves in front of God. It is easy to understand how this might happen after the work was suspended and discouragement set in. In order to get on living in the land the Jews took on developing, building, and organizing their own property and belongings which was a good thing in and of itself, but over time the Jews forgot what they were there for as first priority. Because this remnant of men and women were anxious to obey God when they were asked to “put first things first” they did so (Haggai 1:12). *Haggai had asked them to consider in their thoughts the lack of God’s blessing because of their misplaced priorities, and challenged them to get restarted immediately in the work of rebuilding the temple.* Their obedience came immediately from their respect for their Lord and serves as a strong reminder to all of us that when God goes with us we can do all things (Philippians 4:13). Haggai responded with a word from the Lord and delivered the right message to the Nation to put God first in all things and leave the consequences of their obedience to God. So one man of God bold in the spirit and clear with the truth was used by God for his purposes, and it made all the difference in the world. *God never allows us to drift too far off course on our priorities before shaking us up to what’s really important in this life which is to put the things of God first.* Haggai was used by God to shake up the Jews for their good and God’s glory. *In humility allow God to speak to you to challenge your priorities if they are inverted or misplaced, and when he does respond obediently to change them just as the Jews did in the time of Haggai.* TODAY FATHER HELP ME TO PUT YOU FIRST IN ALL THINGS, AT ALL TIMES, WITH ALL PEOPLE, AND NEVER TO LOSE SIGHT OF THAT GOAL BY THE DISTRACTIONS OF THE WORLD. AMEN!

Haggai 1:5 “Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but 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.” (NIV)

Do you believe that God directly operates in your life to influence you in your life’s choices and direction? *In the Book of Haggai there are five instances where the prophet Haggai tells the people to consider their ways when it comes to their obedience or lack of obedience to God.* The first instance is contained in our devotional text when Haggai seeks to contrast the scarcity experienced by the returning Jews with their unfaithfulness in rebuilding the temple while at the same time living in paneled houses for themselves. *What Haggai warns them of is that there are causative and adverse impacts to our well-being which stem from disobedience to God.* The people never would be satisfied since there would never be a sufficient amount as long as they put their own needs ahead of God and rebuilding the temple. God will create scarcity in our lives spiritually, emotionally, physically, and financially when we stubbornly refuse to put Him first. The term “leanness of soul” is used in the KJV in Psalms 106:15 to describe the Israelites in the desert who gave into their craving and stubbornly

refused to obey God. *The truth of the matter is that we risk our quality of life and joy in living when we put our selfish desires ahead of God's call to be a servant!* Jesus calls us to this same principle of life in Matthew 6:33-34 when he says: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." When Christians invert their priorities and put self above God we run the real risk of stripping enjoyment and fulfillment from our lives because we put God last and never fully benefit in our souls from putting ourselves first. *God in His grace will demonstrate in the struggles and troubles we must face in our life that joy and fulfillment are only possible connected to the Lord Jesus Christ because apart from Him we can do nothing! (John 15:5).* So when Haggai tells the people to consider their ways this message transcends the centuries and speaks directly to our hearts because God operates in our life too and His spiritual principles do not change. If we invert our priorities as the Jews did we can expect to receive the same results which will require our repentant change of mind to enjoy the full blessing of God in our lives. The bottom line is that we must walk daily most sensitive to the presence of God in our lives and our obedience to his word. Much is to be learned from God's interaction with us as he shapes and disciplines our lives as we walk with Him. *If we go into the "ditch" of life let us first back up and consider our ways to ask ourselves: (1) what has happened? (2) why did it happen?, and (3) what's God trying to teach me about it? Every mistake is an opportunity for us to seek the wisdom of God and to learn God's infinite purposes for our lives.* TODAY AS I WALK BY FAITH I WILL SEEK TO DISCERN GOD'S ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN MY LIFE SO THAT I MIGHT WALK OBEDIENT TO HIS WORD. AMEN!

Haggai 1:9 "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." (NIV)

What are your expectations for your life today? Expectations are usually a good thing because they drive us forward to achieve something in this life. Sometimes if we expect a good outcome it keeps us in a positive frame of mind and helps us to realize our expectations. In the Christian sphere of thinking expectations are always tied to our faith in the enabling power of God. When our expectations are focused on our relationship with God and motivated by our faith in Him much can be achieved. For example, one of the great touchstone verses of the Bible is Philippians 4:13 "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." The key in this passage and in life is to bring faith to our expectations. In the parable of the talents the two and five talent man doubled the investment of their Master because they went to work expecting an increase. Unfortunately, the expectations of the one talent man were controlled by fear and loss creating a desire by the one talent man to bury his talent instead of using it in this world. Jesus's harsh response to this man must condition our expectations: "For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have in abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." (Matthew 25:29) *The point is clear that when we set expectations that don't involve the power and priority of God in our lives then only disappointment will result.* In our devotional text we see this spiritual principle played out with the "Jewish remnant" that put themselves above their God while expecting plenty but received little because "God blew it away". *Unmet expectations are a red flag in our lives to consider our ways and*

*seek the “why?” in such an outcome for us.* Our devotional text exposes the “why?” of the Jews unmet expectations when God tells them plainly that it is because His house remains a ruin while the people are busy with their own houses. If we are to live godly in this world we must walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:8), and it is important that we recognize the active involvement of God in our lives and establish our expectations consistent with placing Him first. It is a spiritual exercise and learning tool to examine our expectations to determine if they are being met so that we might discern how God is operating in our lives. *Faith is always made stronger by seeking to understand God’s involvement in our lives.* I WILL BUILD MY EXPECTATIONS IN LIFE CONSISTENT WITH THE WILL OF GOD, AND I WILL WORK IN FULL FAITH WITH GOD’S POWER TO ACHIEVE HIS PURPOSES IN MY LIFE. AMEN!

Haggai 1:12-13 “Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord. Then Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: “I am with you”, declares the Lord.” (NIV)

There is no substitute for obedience to the word of God when it comes to mankind. When God gives us a messenger with His message our only acceptable response is immediate, full, and sincere obedience to God’s word. Everything else is unacceptable including excuses, compromise, a better idea, or delayed obedience. So when the prophet Haggai bursts on the scene he makes four prophetic announcements over 3 1/2 months calling the Nation back to God and His will. What is most appealing about our devotional text is that the leaders of the people including Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest led their people in obedience to their God. *Leaders must first obey God before they can lead God’s people.* There must be absolute humility and fidelity to the word of God on this point. This is exactly what happened in response to Haggai’s message for the people to “put first things first” and get back to the work of rebuilding the temple. There were no excuses, delays, or resistance; the leaders and the people obeyed and got back to the Lord’s work. This always occurs when people fear or respect or reverence God Almighty. Our devotional text makes it very clear that the people feared the Lord. It becomes evident as we work our way through the lessons of obedience by countless Biblical characters that a spiritual axiom always applies to godly obedience: *If you do not reverence God then you will not submit to God, and if you will not submit to God then you will never obey God. Put in a more positive way, reverence leads to submission and submission leads to obedience* (Hebrews 5:7-8). So we see this spiritual truth applied when the remnant responded in obedience to Haggai’s message from the Lord. The obedience of the saints to the word of God results in God’s transmission in great power of His wisdom, insight, and understanding that helps keep our feet from evil and wrong paths (Psalm 119:97-104). Never be duped by Satan that disobedience is an ok thing with no consequences because obedience keeps us in the circle of the will of God where we are at peace in the storms of life and where God keeps us safe! The blessing of obedience simply stated by Haggai is that the Lord would be with them. His awesome presence would be with the people in all that they must do because they were obedient to His will. *Once we are in the circle of the will of God by obedience to his word, God then can accomplish great things through our humble, submissive, and obedient hearts.* Every Christian must trust and obey at the point of any decision big

**or small just as the remnant did in obeying God's message through Haggai the prophet. TODAY FATHER I COMMIT TO OBEYING YOUR WORD IN MY LIFE BY HUMBLING MYSELF BEFORE YOU AND SUBMITTING TO YOUR AUTHORITY OVER ME IN MY LIFE. HELP ME FATHER TO OBEY REGARDLESS OF THE CONSEQUENCES!**

## Haggai

## Read Haggai Chapter 2

Lesson Purpose: Victory comes from the Lord and not men!

When you read Haggai chapter 2 you are brought "full square" to the reality that if God is not involved and behind any task, endeavor, program, or idea then it's not going anywhere fast. What we find in chapter 2 is the second prophetic message of Haggai almost a month after the Jews began rebuilding the temple. The reason that God speaks this message to Haggai is that there is a whiff of discouragement in the air as the work progresses. The people who had seen Solomon's temple before its destruction were discouraged that this temple seems like nothing (Haggai 2:3). These very feelings came out initially when the Jews arrived back in Jerusalem from exile in about 536 B.C. and the foundation of the temple was laid out causing both joy and sorrow depending on one's perspective from history (Ezra 3:12-13). God understands these feelings and emotions and so He sends Haggai to them with a message of encouragement that God is with them, and His spirit remains among them so they are not to fear. God through Haggai further emphasizes that the glory of the present house will be greater than the glory of the former house (Haggai 2:9). God knows what we need and when we need it, and His word of encouragement will always meet in perfect timing our need to hear it! The dates that are mentioned in Haggai are enormously important to getting an understanding of what such a short period of time Haggai's prophetic ministry took place in. The box below contains a summary of events and prophetic messages and their dates in Haggai.

- Haggai 1:1-1<sup>st</sup> prophetic message – 1<sup>st</sup> day of the six month which is late August early September
- Haggai 1:15 -restart temple rebuilding-24<sup>th</sup> day of six month which is in late September
- Haggai 2:1- 2<sup>nd</sup> prophetic message -21<sup>st</sup> day of seventh month which is in mid-October
- Haggai 2:10-3<sup>rd</sup> prophetic message-24<sup>th</sup> day of ninth month which is in late December
- Haggai 2:18-4<sup>th</sup> prophetic message -24<sup>th</sup> day of ninth month which is late December

Everything in the Book of Haggai takes place over a four month period of time from September through December 520 B.C. God certainly has a sense of urgency about His business. Haggai's third prophetic message addresses the seriousness of holiness demonstrating that only defilement and sin is easily transferred from one person to another, however, God's holiness is His alone to bestow and it requires our faith and obedience before Him to receive it. There are no substitutes for being holy before God (Haggai 2:10-14). Haggai's third prophetic message also concerns the precise timing of when the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid because on that very date God returned to blessing His people. Blessings always flow from God to an obedient heart (Haggai 2:15-19).

Finally, the fourth prophetic message was for Zerubbabel the governor of the Jews who was told that God would shake the heavens and the earth to overthrow royal thrones and shatter the power of the nations which is exactly what occurred with the fall of the Persian Empire and the rise of the Greek empire under Alexander the Great. But this prophetic message also recognized that Zerubbabel the servant of the Lord was specially chosen by God to lead God's people to accomplish God's purpose in Zerubbabel's time. Further God tells Zerubbabel through Haggai that He will make Him like a signet ring. A signet ring was always close to the king and it was what was used to give authority to any order. So it was to be with Zerubbabel that God would keep him close and ensure his success in rebuilding the temple. The temple was rebuilt in 515 B.C. just as God had assured Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:20-24).

As a reminder the lessons from Haggai that we must all learn are shown in the box below.

18. Put God first at all times, under all circumstances, with all people.
19. Practice to examine myself by considering my ways as I walk with my Lord so that I learn how God operates in my life either to bless me in obedience or discipline me in disobedience.
20. Recognize that I have been chosen by God in Christ as God chose Zerubbabel, and He will never let me go as I serve Him through serving others. Always remember that I am a special person of God called to His purposes of saving the lost and building up His holy church.

## Review of the Reading

1. What was the second prophetic message given to Haggai? (Haggai 2:1-9)
2. Why was this prophetic message given? (Haggai 2:3)
3. How did God encourage Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people of the land? (Haggai 2:4-5)
4. Silver and gold belong to whom? (Haggai 2:8)
5. The rebuilt temple will be inferior to Solomon's temple? (Haggai 2:9)  
TRUE or FALSE
6. Was God pleased with sacrifices that were not in the temple of the Lord? (Haggai 2:14)
7. What would begin to happen the very day that the foundation of the temple of the Lord was laid? (Haggai 2:18-19)
8. The last prophetic message comes on the same day as the third in December 520 B.C. and focuses on Zerubbabel. What does the prophecy say about the kings and kingdoms of the world? (Haggai 2:21-22)
9. What is God going to make Zerubbabel like? (Haggai 2:23)

## Thought Questions

1. What should we do when people around us grow discouraged in the Lord's work?

2. Are there any practical lessons for today to learn from the prophecy on consecrated meat and a dead body? (Haggai 2:10-14)
  
3. Does Haggai teach that there is a direct connection between the blessings of God and obedience to God?
  
4. Zerubbabel was chosen by the Lord in Haggai 2, and we are chosen by the Lord in Ephesians 1. How important should we feel about being chosen and what confidence should it give us in doing the Lord's work?
  
5. What is the greatest message of truth for the 21<sup>st</sup> century church from the Book of Haggai?

### Devotionals from Haggai 2

Haggai 2:4-5 "But now be strong, O Zerubbabel", declares the Lord. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the Lord, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'" (NIV)

Haggai's second prophetic message came weeks later in October during the Feast of Tabernacles and in response to a feeling upon the part of the Jews that the temple they were rebuilding was inferior to the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonian Army some 66 years earlier. Discouragement is a terrible thing because it saps your energies, focuses you on self, and deprives you of vision and hope for the future. *Discouragement always has its roots in the past and never in the future which is something we must keep in mind when we face discouragement because left unchecked discouragement will morph into despondency and finally into despair.* God knows us intimately and he

knew the Jews of the remnant needed encouragement and to give it to them he used Haggai's message to point them toward the future and not the past in rebuilding the temple. Haggai's message from God was an important one and we must examine its content in some detail since it is useful in helping us to look at the broader picture and to reset our minds when beginning any task from our Lord.

- (1) *First, when assigned a task from our Lord we must remember we do not act on our own strength but we have the awesome and immeasurable strength of the Lord that we are to draw on.* The leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest along with all the people needed to understand that God's tasks can only be accomplished when we have His strength to access.
- (2) *Second, we must work to accomplish God's purposes and plans.* Haggai's message made it clear that the people must work and be assured that God was with them. We never benefit if we quit and drop out of the Lord's work.
- (3) *Third, the Spirit of God is with us whenever we do the Lord's work and we are not to fear!* God never gives us something to do that he does not go with us by His Holy Spirit. God expects us to be bold and without fear when he calls us to the spiritual battlefield.

I was discussing this morning with a beloved brother the importance of activity in the Church both to our spiritual development and godly influence on others. If a Christian commits to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ then one thing will be true: you will be called by God to His tasks for His purposes. *Always remember that if discouragement creeps in when doing the Lord's work just give yourself an examination of three questions: Am I working with the Lord's strength? Am I working (or just talking about others working with criticism)? Am I bold and aware of God's Spirit in me?* Three yes answers means that you will stay engaged and not grow tired, discouraged and drop out. **FATHER TODAY I WILL SEEK YOUR HELP BY RELYING ON YOUR STRENGTH, GETTING TO WORK, AND BEING BOLD BECAUSE THE LORD'S SPIRIT IS LIVING ON THE INSIDE OF ME.**

Haggai 2:8-9 "The silver is mine and the gold is mine," declares the Lord Almighty. "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.'" (NIV)

God makes promises but unlike man, our God keeps all His promises. In our devotional text God makes a promise to the remnant who were laboring on the temple that the glory of the temple they were working on would be greater than the previous temple. Like all of God's promises this one had to be viewed through the eyes of faith to be understood. When anyone of us view the promises of God we start with the reality that God is in control and He has everything He needs EXCEPT one thing which are our willing hands to labor for the Lord. The silver and gold belong to God and we know from Psalm 50:12 that the world is God's and all that are in it. *One of the great lessons to be learned from our devotional text is the importance of each one of us to God's plans to bring Him glory since God has all the resources in our world and only needs loyal servants to accomplish his purposes.* God makes this promise to a weary mankind and He points us to the peace that He will establish in us if we fully submit to Him. This promise refers to the future Messiah our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who gives us

His peace which is unique and unlike any peace that the world can give us (John 14:27). As we labor for the Lord let us take comfort that given the chaos of the world, we can still find perfect peace in the presence of Jesus Christ who is living on the inside of us (Colossians 1:27). Let us remember that at all times, in all things, with all people we must be seeking the presence of God in our lives and we refused to be shaken from this journey. God needed faithful men and women to rebuild the temple of the Lord long ago in Jerusalem, and he also needs faithful men and women to labor in love for His church today so that they too will find the peace of Christ that comes by serving Him. TODAY FATHER I CHOOSE TO COMMIT MYSELF TO YOUR WORK THAT I MIGHT FIND THE PEACE OF CHRIST AS I SERVE YOU.

Haggai 2:18-19 “From this day on, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid. Give careful thought: Is there any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. ‘From this day on I will bless you.’” (NIV)

*Our devotional text plainly speaks the truth that obedience precedes God’s blessings in our lives. As the Jews in Jerusalem struggled when resettled in their homeland after 70 years of exile their efforts were like “pushing on a rope” because the harder they worked the less good that happened to them. Apparently they were devoid of seed in the barn and the vines, fruit trees and olive trees that supplied the precious oil for cooking had not borne fruit. Indeed the Jews of the remnant were headed for a tragedy if God failed to intervene in their difficult circumstances. Then Haggai the prophet told them that their failure in receiving God’s blessing was due to their failure to repair the temple while at the same time spending all their time, effort, and energy on their own needs and desires. However, the people repented when they heard the words of Haggai and obeyed God because they feared the Lord (Haggai 1:12). Haggai then told the people to give careful thought to the “cause and effect” of their obedience. It is so important in our daily walk with the Lord that we examine our steps so that we might understand how God works with us in our lives. Haggai was insistent that the people note with precision when they obeyed and went back to rebuilding the temple since God’s blessing would begin to flow at that same time. Every one of us whether we admit to it or not is highly dependent upon the blessings of God to sustain us and help us in our lives. Our devotional text firmly underscores the spiritual principal that God’s blessing comes from our obedience to His word in our lives. Today for those living in the Christian Age following the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ all blessing is conditioned by being in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Our blessings proceed from our relationship with God through Christ, and we get into Christ through water baptism (Galatians 3:26-28). The blessings of Christ are always sufficient to enable us to sustain ourselves and endure in this world, but they do not mean all trouble and problems are gone (John 16:33). Nevertheless the blessings of God through Christ are as essential in our day to victorious living as the blessings of God were in the days of Haggai for the Jews rebuilding the temple. Haggai speaks across the centuries and asks us to give careful thought to our ways and to understand the connection between obedience to God and His inexhaustible blessings. If we are dismissive of God’s presence in our lives and shirk our obedience to the Lord, His blessings will dry up and our lives will become dry and parched just as an un-watered lawn in the August heat. Do you love God? Do you desire God’s*

blessing? Then obey God by entering Christ through water baptism and walk humbly and obediently before Him throughout life. TODAY FATHER I WILL OBEY YOU BECAUSE AS I GIVE CAREFUL THOUGHT TO MY CIRCUMSTANCES, I KNOW YOUR BLESSINGS WILL COME TO THOSE WITH A SUBMISSIVE SPIRIT AND AN OBEDIENT HEART. AMEN!

Haggai 2:23 “ ‘On that day,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,’ declares the Lord Almighty.” (NIV)

*God is control of the affairs of men and we see that great reality demonstrated to us in the last verse of the Book of Haggai when God affirms to Zerubbabel that he has been chosen by God. What is being referred to in this verse is that Zerubbabel, who was in the line of David, would play an essential part in bringing the Messiah into the world. We may read the authenticity of God’s promise in the genealogy of the Messiah Jesus Christ in Matthew 1:12-13. These words upon hearing were a great comfort to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judea, since he had the responsibility for leadership and God told him that he would ensure his success in the rebuilding of the temple and resettlement of the remnant of the Jews in Judea. God also told Zerubbabel that he would make him like God’s signet ring which was very precious and always in the possession of the ruler because the signet ring had a seal on it to stamp orders and decrees. God’s authority would flow through Zerubbabel as he led the people and Zerubbabel would always be close to God’s protective presence to assure his successful leadership. It’s a wonderful thing to be chosen and to belong in the task that you have been called to do. As Christians we are all called to a holy life once we are saved through baptism because of God’s purpose and grace through Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:9). Once God calls us to a task we can be assured that His presence, power, and provision in our life will enable us to fulfill the purposes just as in the life of Zerubbabel. Even though we may suffer God is faithful to guard what we have entrusted to Him for that great and final day! (2 Timothy 1:12). Haggai ends his prophetic message from God on an encouraging note for Zerubbabel that God will make it happen for him so he was to be bold and courageous and draw on the strength of the Lord. As Paul writes in Romans 8:31 “if God be for us who can be against us?” The answer is no one since we are the chosen people of God who He has called to a high and holy task and He will be there for us through it all until we are called home to Him. THANK YOU FATHER, FOR YOU HAVE CHOSEN ME IN CHRIST AND I KNOW THAT YOU WILL NEVER LEAVE ME OR FORESAKE ME BUT WILL STRENGTHEN ME TO OVERCOME ALL THINGS TO BECOME YOUR OBEDIENT SERVANT. AMEN!*

**Zechariah**

**Read Zechariah Chapters 1, 2, and 3**

**Lesson Purpose: Be encouraged because God is among us**

The Book of Zechariah divides itself into two major parts. The first part consisting of chapter's 1-8 deals with the events from 520 to 516 B.C. as the temple was being rebuilt. Chapters 9-14 address the future of Israel and are clearly both apocalyptic and messianic in their tone and substance. Many scholars have suggested that Zechariah wrote this part later in his life. Zechariah was part of the group of Jews who returned with Ezra from the exile in 538 B.C. when he at a very young age. In Nehemiah 12:16 Zechariah is listed as head of the family of Iddo suggesting that his father had died at a young age. Zechariah was of a priestly family and was called by God to be a prophetic voice. One of Zechariah's contemporaries was the prophet Haggai and Zechariah began his prophetic ministry during Haggai's time. Although Zechariah's visions were received in one night, they were given to encourage the people to complete the temple rebuilding which occurred in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15), his focus was broader than simply the temple since he called the people back to a restored relationship with their God. Without question Zechariah is one of the most powerful books of the Old Testament because it reveals the coming Messiah more than any other in explicit and detailed terms. God used Zechariah to preach to Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest as the temple rebuilding continued. Jesus tells us that this same Zechariah was murdered between the alter and the temple as the last martyr of the Mosaic Age (Matthew 23:35). Zechariah was a godly and wise man who God greatly blessed in revealing in some detail the nature and work of the Messiah our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who was to come some 500 years later.

Chapters 1-3 stand as a great encouragement to a people who had returned from 70 years of exile and must begin anew with their lives. The opposition of others and the political turmoil in the Persian kingdom had brought the temple work to a halt. It was in 520 B.C. the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Darius that both Haggai

and Zechariah called the people back to their first priority which was to complete construction of the Lord's house!

Chapter 1 has the great call to repentance when God tells His people in Zechariah 1:3 "Return to me," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty.

About 3 months later Zechariah is given a vision of a man riding a red horse standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine with red, brown, and white horses. The angel of the Lord standing with Zechariah told him that they were the ones the Lord had sent out throughout the earth. They reported to the angel of the Lord that they found the whole world at rest and in peace while Jerusalem and the towns of Judah stood in ruin. The Lord comforted with the words that He was returning to Jerusalem with mercy where His house (temple) would be rebuilt and prosperity would return.

The second vision was of four horns that had scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. The vision also included four craftsmen who would terrify the horns and demolish them in retribution for scattering the people of Judah.

Chapter 2-The third vision was of a man with a measuring line who was headed to Jerusalem to measure how wide and long it was. The angel of the Lord was told by another angel that Jerusalem will be a city without walls because the Lord will be a wall of fire around it. The Lord then declares that He will live among the people of Jerusalem and Judah. In that day many nations will be joined with the Lord and become His people previewing the gentiles being included in God's salvation call (Zechariah 2:11).

Chapter 3-The fourth vision is of Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord with Satan the great accuser. The Lord rebukes Satan saying of Joshua "Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire" (Zechariah 3:2). Joshua who was in filthy clothes standing before the angel had his filthy clothes removed signifying that his sins had been taken away and rich garments and a clean turban put on him. Only God has the power to remove sin for anyone including the high priest. The angel of the Lord charged Joshua the high priest that he must walk in His ways and keep His

requirements to govern His house (temple). But Joshua and his associates were merely symbolic for the Lord was going to bring His servant, the Branch (Jesus Christ). The Lord sets a stone in front of Joshua and engraved an inscription saying that He will remove the sin of this land in a single day referring to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross not far from where the temple would be rebuilt (Zechariah 3:8). The Messiah's presence and work will allow for each man to invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree which in Jewish thought pointed to the Messianic time.

The lessons from Zechariah Chapter 1-3 that we must all learn are shown in the box below:

21. Any nation, man or woman to start over must return to the Lord and turn from their evil ways, and then He will return to us.
22. When we return to the Lord, He will meet us with mercy.
23. Zechariah's prophecy looks forward to God adding the gentiles to His kingdom to be His people.
24. Sin is like wearing filthy clothes and only God can do something about it through Jesus Christ who will remove sin in one day! That one day was the day of the cross when our precious Savior gave Himself up for all of us who are soaked in sin.

Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

### Review of the Reading

1. What does the Lord promise His people He will do? (Zechariah 1:3-4)
2. What happen to their forefathers and what message did that send them? (Zechariah 1:5-6)
3. What strange thing happened to Zechariah son of Berekiah, son of Iddo on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the eleventh month during the night?
4. What was the first vision Zechariah was given? (Zechariah 1:8)

5. What did the Lord assure the Jews would happen? (Zechariah 1:16)
6. What was the second vision and what do you think it meant? (Zechariah 1:18-20)
7. What was the man with a measuring line told by the angel about the walls of Jerusalem? (Zechariah 2:3-5)
8. Who will be joined to the Lord? (Zechariah 2:11)
9. What is Joshua the high priest wearing before the angel of the Lord and what does it signify? (Zechariah 3:3-4)
10. Who is coming to take away the nation's sin in one day? (Zechariah 3:8-9)

### Thought Questions

1. Does true repentance require us only returning to God?
2. Is enjoying security and peace always a sign that God is not displeased with a nation?
3. What does the vision of Joshua the high priest tells us about our self-righteousness?

4. Who rebuked Satan the accuser and what does this mean for us?

5. What is our only remedy for sin?

Devotionals from Zechariah chapters 1, 2 and 3

## Zechariah

Read Zechariah Chapters 4, 5 and 6

Lesson Purpose: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit

Chapters 3-6 continue the visions that Zechariah received. In chapter 4 we have the encouragement of the angel to Zerubbabel the governor of the Jews. Zerubbabel had led the people during a most difficult time when political opposition and turmoil as well as apathy had greatly slowed and even halted the work on temple reconstruction. It would certainly be a natural thing for Zerubbabel to be discouraged about his leadership of the people. But just as God lifted up Joshua the high priest and cleansed him of his sins so that he could serve before the Lord Almighty in behalf of the people. Then God turned to Zerubbabel to encourage and assure him that He will be enabled to finish the work on the temple not by his own power but by the Spirit of God working through him (Zechariah 4:6-7). In fact God specifically promises Zerubbabel that not only had his hands laid the foundation of the temple, but his hands would also complete the temple (Zechariah 4:9). What a wonderful thing to do for Zerubbabel's confidence and faith in the Lord. The vision in this chapter was of a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. There were two olive trees by the lampstand with one on the right of the bowl and the other on the left. Zerubbabel didn't understand what the olive trees were so he asked the angel what they were for. The angel replied these were the two that were anointed to serve the Lord. I believe in this context the two anointed were Joshua the high priest (Zechariah chapter 3), and Zerubbabel the governor (chapter 4). That God would spend time addressing the needs and feelings of His leaders among the people should demonstrate the importance of encouraging those who serve honorably among us in a leadership capacity.

The next three visions of Zechariah chapters 5 and 6 are visions of judgment upon the people of God. The Lord is emphasizing in these visions the absolute need for holiness and purity among his people. The first is of a flying scroll which was thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide which were the identical dimensions of the porch of Solomon's temple where the law was usually read. The flying scroll represented the curse that was going out through all the land because of sin. Although God is said to banish those that steal and lie, I don't believe these sins alone are the only ones in question. The message of the flying scroll is that all sin in the land will be judged by God.

The next vision of chapter 5 was of a woman in a basket who represented wickedness in the land. The basket was an ephah or about 39 quarts of dry measure, and had a lead top. So the picture is of a good size basket and Zechariah asks what was in it only to be shown the woman (wickedness) who was pushed back down into the basket and the lead cover was placed back over the mouth of the basket. Then two women with wings of a stork picked the basket up and flew to Babylon to a place where a house would be built for the basket full of iniquity. These two visions taken together show that in God's kingdom all sin will be judged and even the principle of wickedness will be removed from the land.

In chapter 6 we have the eighth and final vision received by Zechariah that night. The vision was of four chariots coming through two mountains of bronze. The four chariots were pulled by different colored horses: the first chariot with red horses, the second with black, the third with white, and the fourth with a dappled color and all of these horses were very powerful. Zerubbabel was told by the angel that these chariots represented four spirits of heaven were going out into all the earth to judge the gentile nations especially the wicked Babylon that is referred to as the North Country where God's Spirit found rest in the land because her destruction. These three judgment visions fit well together since the scroll represents the judgment of sin in Israel, and the woman in a basket represents the removal of the principle of wickedness from the land Of Israel, and the chariots going throughout the earth represent the judgment of the wickedness of the gentile nations.

The last section of chapter 6 addresses the crowning of Joshua the high priest with a crown of silver and gold (Zechariah 6:11). The crown represented kingship and in Israel there was a strict differentiation between the priesthood and the kingly office so this act is symbolic and points us forward to the Messiah who is both priest and king. And so we find in Zechariah 6:12-15 another passage pointing to the Messiah who is called the Branch who will sit on His throne and bring perfect harmony between the priestly and kingly functions. It is my view when Zechariah talks about the Branch building the temple of the Lord, and those who are far away coming to build it that we are talking about the church and the inclusion of the gentiles (Zechariah 6:16).

The lessons from Zechariah Chapter 1-6 that we must all learn are shown in the box below:

25. Any nation, man or woman to start over must return to the Lord and turn from their evil ways, and then He will return to us.
26. When we return to the Lord, He will meet us with mercy.
27. Zechariah's prophecy looks forward to God adding the gentiles to His kingdom to be His people.
28. Sin is like wearing filthy clothes and only God can do something about it through Jesus Christ who will remove sin in one day! That one day was the day of the cross where our precious Savior gave Himself up for all of us who are soaked in sin.
29. The power of man does not accomplish the work of God; rather it is the power of the Spirit of God working through any man that makes the difference.
30. Never underestimate God who is in control of the nations and salvation history and whose judgments are flawless. His ways are perfect so do not reject or ignore Him.

Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

### Review of the Reading

1. What was the fifth vision that Zechariah saw that night? (Zechariah 4:2-30)

2. What is the significance of Zerubbabel bringing out the capstone to shouts of "God bless it! God bless it!"? (Zechariah 4:7)
3. Did God promise Zerubbabel that he would start the temple but someone else would finish it? (Zechariah 4:9)
4. What is a mighty mountain in context of Zechariah 4? (Zechariah 4:7)
5. What did the two olive trees to the right and left of the bowl of the lamp stand represent? (Zechariah 4:13-14)
6. What was the sixth vision Zechariah saw that night? (Zechariah 5:2)
7. What was the seventh vision that Zechariah saw that night? (Zechariah 5:6-8)
8. What was the eighth and final vision that Zechariah saw that night? (Zechariah 6:1-5)
9. On whose head will be placed the silver and gold crown? (Zechariah 6:11)
10. Who is the Branch and what will he do? (Zechariah 6:12-15)

### Thought Questions

1. Zerubbabel suffered through many setbacks and discouragements in rebuilding the temple when finally things started to come together. Was this happy result because of Zerubbabel's skill and wisdom or was there some other force behind his success?

2. In Zechariah 4:10 we find the words: "Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plump line in the hands of Zerubbabel." What lesson should we in the Churches of Christ today learn from these words?
  
3. The last three visions found in Zechariah chapters 5 and 6 were visions of judgment. Does God judge His people in the church today similar to what we find in Zechariah or does judgment only apply to the Old Testament, and, therefore we shouldn't worry about the Summit Church of Christ being judged?
  
4. When talking about the Messiah or the Branch we find that he will build the temple of the Lord and those who are far away will come to help him build the temple of the Lord (Zechariah 6:15). However, this was conditioned on "if you diligently obey the Lord your God." Does this passage teach us today that without obedience we will not receive the full promises God intends for us either individually or as a church?

Devotionals from Zechariah chapters 4, 5 and 6

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**Zechariah****Read Zechariah Chapters 7 and 8****Lesson Purpose: What does true religion look like?**

Chapters 7 and 8 of Zechariah occur in about 518 B.C. during the fourth year of King Darius midway in the rebuilding of the temple which was completed in 516 B.C. With the temple reconstruction going very well indeed a delegation from Bethel appeared in Jerusalem to ask the priests of the house of the Lord Almighty and the prophets a question. The question was: "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?" Now this simple question was answered by the Lord Almighty to explain what true religion meant. A little background is necessary at this point. The Old Testament ordered only one fast on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:29). But the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar's army established four major fasts to mourn the consequence of the nation's sin. These fasts are shown in the block below:

1. 9<sup>th</sup> day of 4<sup>th</sup> month (June)-mourned and fasted the breaching of the city walls by Nebuchadnezzar.
2. 18<sup>th</sup> day of 5<sup>th</sup> month (August)-mourned and fasted the burning of the city and the temple.
3. 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month (September)-mourned and fasted the murder of Gedaliah the governor.
4. 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month (December)-mourned and fasted the day Nebuchadnezzar set the siege of Jerusalem

Now all these fasts were established by the Jews in exile to remember what had happened to them and what their loss was as a nation. It was a grievous time in the history of God's people. So when reconstruction had been ongoing for two years, naturally the people of Bethel asked themselves why should we continue to fast when the temple that we mourn the loss over will soon be rebuilt? This question made perfect sense to ask the Jewish leaders and they expected a simple yes or no answer. However, God didn't give that answer to

them, but rather God asked all the people of the land a question: "When you fasted and mourned in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> months for the past 70 years, was it really for me that you fasted? And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?" In other words the fasts themselves were rituals not for worshipping and serving God, but were mere formalities to serve themselves by feeling self-pity for all the bad things that had happened to them. This was a self-centered spirituality not unlike what we experience in our own time. God told Zechariah to tell the people what he wanted from them was: administer true justice, show mercy and compassion to one another, do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. And in your hearts do not think evil of each other (Zechariah 7:9-10). The Jews had refused to do this and continued to sin, and because of their sins the land was left desolate. Unfortunately the people of Bethel revealed that the real problem the Jews had was in worshipping God for their own interests and not because they loved God, and desired to serve others because of Him. Micah said it best in 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." When we come to God in worship, we must be sorry for our sin against God, and not simply the consequences of our sin on ourselves as the Jews were guilty of.

In chapter 8 Zechariah turns to how the Lord intends to bless Jerusalem by stating that He will return to Jerusalem which He calls the City of Truth and the mountain where the temple was located which was called the Holy Mountain. Remember in Ezekiel 10 the glory of the Lord departed the temple, but in Zechariah 8:3 God promises to return to be with His people. As a result both the old and the young will be seen in the streets again because of the peace and stability brought by the Lord's presence. In fact God says He will bring back His people and He will be faithful and righteous to them as their God (Zechariah 8:8). The people are now committed to rebuilding the temple, and God tells them to let their hands be strong so that the temple may be built. God will not deal with the remnant as He has dealt with them in the past because of their work on His temple, and He assures them that they will be a blessing again. The Lord had determined to do good again to Jerusalem

and Judah, and He admonished them not to fear. The Lord commanded them to do these things: speak the truth to each other, render true and sound judgment in your courts, do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely because He hates all of this.(Zechariah 8:16-17)

Further the Lord commanded them to turn their fasts to feasts to become joyful and glad occasions in keeping with God's renewed presence and blessing of the land. In Zechariah 8:20-23, I believe we have a foreshadowing of the work of the church which was realized in the 1<sup>st</sup> century following Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection. The key to me is that to continue to see this vision realized people must see that God is with us (Zechariah 8:23). If we are to evangelize we must have a message and we must be a living witness to that message.

The lessons from Zechariah Chapter 1-8 that we must all learn are shown in the box below:

31. Any nation, man or woman to start over must return to the Lord and turn from their evil ways, and then He will return to us.
32. When we return to the Lord, He will meet us with mercy.
33. Zechariah's prophecy looks forward to God adding the gentiles to His kingdom to be His people.
34. Sin is like wearing filthy clothes and only God can do something about it through Jesus Christ who will remove sin in one day! That one day is the day of the cross where our precious Savior gave Himself up for all of us who are soaked in sin.
35. The power of man does not accomplish the work of God; rather it is the power of the Spirit of God working through the man that makes the difference.
36. Never underestimate God who is in control of the nations and salvation history and whose judgments are flawless. His ways are perfect so do not reject or ignore Him.
37. True religion is a matter of godliness or becoming like Him, and we are called to love one another as God loves us.
38. God's purpose for His people has been, is and will always be the evangelization of the nations. He desires that all men come to Him.

Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

### Review of the Reading

1. What is the significance of the calendar reference which is one of three in Zechariah?(Zechariah 7:1)
2. Who came to see the priests and the prophets?(Zechariah 7:2)
3. What question did they want answered? Why was that of interest to them? (Zechariah 7:3)
4. God gave them the direct answer to the question they asked. TRUE or FALSE (Zechariah 7:4-5)
5. What did the Lord Almighty really want from his people? (Zechariah 7:8-10)
6. Why was the pleasant land left desolate by God? (Zechariah 7:11-14)
7. Did the Lord love and care for Zion even though he had punished her ever so severely? (Zechariah 8:1-3)
8. What would be a physical sign of God's blessing? (Zechariah 8:4-5)
9. God will make the Jews a blessing to all the nations and not a curse. Why is that so? (Zechariah 8:9-15)
10. What will happen to Jerusalem in the future? (Zechariah 8:20-23)

### Thought Questions

1. Why didn't God give the people of Bethel a straight and direct answer to their question?

2. Can the churches of Christ fulfill God's purposes in this world if we do not help and serve the disadvantage in this world OR is this now more suited to government in our complex times?

3. In Zechariah 7:13 it says "When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen, says the Lord Almighty." Does this spiritual principle still apply or has the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ change it?

4. What are some things we can take from the end of Zechariah 8 that are important in an evangelistic model for the church?

a) Treat people right in both the public and private spheres of life (Zechariah 8:16-17)

Circle one and explain your answer

- highly important
- important
- helpful
- not very important
- no relevance to evangelism whatsoever

b) Be a people of joy (Zechariah 8:18-19)

Circle one and explain your answer

- highly important
- important
- helpful
- not very important
- no relevance to evangelism whatsoever

c) Personal witness and testimony to others of our faith (Zechariah 8:20-22)

Circle one and explain your answer

- highly important
- important
- helpful
- not very important
- no relevance to evangelism whatsoever

d) Our personal example of a godly life which attracts people because God is with us (Zechariah 8:23)

Circle one and explain your answer

- highly important
- important
- helpful
- not very important
- no relevance to evangelism whatsoever

Devotionals from Zechariah chapters 7 and 8

**Zechariah**

**Read Zechariah Chapters 9, 10 and 11**

**Lesson Purpose: 1<sup>st</sup> Oracle on the sovereignty of God and the Good Shepherd**

Chapters 9 thru 14 are written at a different time than the first 8 chapters, and they focus on prophetic events which are in the future long after the rebuilding of the temple which was completed in 516 B.C. (Ezra 5:15). I believe the prophet Zechariah at advanced aged penned Chapters 9-14 of the Book of Zechariah. Although Matthew 27:9-10 refers to Jeremiah as the author of Zechariah 11:12-13, this passage of scripture also refers to Jeremiah 32:6-9. Many scholars think that Matthew used both Jeremiah and Zechariah when pointing to the fulfillment of prophecy regarding Judas's betrayal of Christ. Since both Jeremiah's and Zechariah's prophecies were used it appears that Matthew attributed to the most prominent prophet Jeremiah in referencing the Old Testament passages addressing Judas's betrayal. In my judgment, there is no compelling reason to believe anyone other than Zechariah wrote chapters 9-14.

Chapter 9 begins with a prophecy that is fulfilled some 200 years into the future when Alexander the Great wins a great victory over the Persians at Issus in 333 B.C. and then brilliantly veers to the south to deny ports to Persia's navy by defeating coastal defenses. Zechariah inspired by the Holy Spirit accounts in great precision Alexander's victorious march south in Zechariah 9:1-8. Most dramatic is Zechariah's prophecy of the fall of Tyre which was built on an island and survived a 13 year siege by Nebuchadnezzar (Zechariah 9:3-4). Alexander built a causeway to the island from debris of the old city then attacked and set fire to Tyre. The world gives Alexander the Great credit but he was enabled by a Sovereign God. Alexander did not invade Judah or Jerusalem during this campaign.

Zechariah 9:9-10 is a messianic prophecy fulfilled by Jesus when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey in Matthew 21. That the Messiah enters the city on a

donkey in gentleness is a strong contrast to the bravado of men such as Alexander who rode large warhorses.

Zechariah 9:13 is thought to refer to the Jewish uprising against the Greek Seleucid dynasty by the Maccabee's which resulted in 100 years of Jewish independence until 63 B.C. when the Romans took control of the Jewish nation. Zechariah 9:16 is important because it assures the Lord will save His people on that day which I believe to be a reference to the Jewish victory over the Greek Seleucids and Antioch Epiphanes IV who Daniel refers to as the one who sets up the abomination that causes desolation (Daniel 12:11).

Zechariah Chapter 10: 1-2 begins with a chastisement of the Jews to seek the Lord in prayer for His help in bringing the rains, rather than go off and seek idols, diviners, and other ungodly sources for help. The Lord Almighty's anger burns against the bad shepherds who are not leading the people properly in verse 3. In Zechariah 10:4 we have another reference to the Messiah or Good Shepherd as a cornerstone, tent peg, and a battle bow a prophecy which will be fulfilled 500 years later. I believe Zechariah 10:7-12 is a prophecy that foretells the future Church as He gathers His people together so that they might be strengthened in the Lord to walk in His name (Zechariah 10:17).

In Zechariah 11 we have one of the darkest prophecies of the entire Bible with the rejection of the Messiah, the good shepherd for a paltry 30 pieces of silver. I believe Zechariah 11:1-3 refers to the total destruction of the land by the Romans in the run-up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. Zechariah 11:4-9 describes what occurs leading up to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem when Jewish factions and intrigues resulted in rebellion against the Romans and assured their utter destruction as described in these verses of Zechariah some 500 years before the events themselves. In Zechariah 11:8 it says "I got rid of three shepherds in one month" which I think refers to Christ's earthly ministry and the destruction of Jerusalem and Temple when the functions of the priesthood, prophets, and kings ceased as the Jewish theocracy came to a brutal end. Zechariah 11:9 appears to be a graphic description of what happened inside the City during the Roman siege.

**Zechariah 11:10 shows Zechariah breaking the staff Favor which symbolized the favored status of Israel as the chosen people of God. This happened to set the stage for the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish nation. Some scholars think the afflicted of the nation referred to the Christians who were still in Jerusalem when Titus lifted his siege and remembering the words of Jesus to flee to the mountains in Matthew 24:16 escaped the city before the Romans destroyed it. Zechariah 11:12-13 simply breaks your heart when the people are asked what the Messiah is worth and the answer comes back 30 pieces of silver which was the lowly price of a slave gored by an ox (Exodus 21:32). The Lord Almighty incensed with the final rejection of the Messiah by the Jews tells Zechariah to throw the 30 pieces of silver to the potter. All of this prophecy was fulfilled when Judas returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests who then bought the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners in Matthew 27:3-10. In Zechariah 11:14, Zechariah breaks the staff Union symbolizing that God has broken the brotherhood of the Jewish nation which was realized in the terrible ordeal of the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman army. Finally, in Zechariah 11:15-17, Zechariah is asked by the Lord to play the foolish and worthless shepherd who will not care for the lost or seek the young or heal the injured or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep. I choose to think the identification of this worthless shepherd to be the Roman emperors noting that the Jews in response to Pilate telling them to take Jesus their king yelled back: "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" Pilate then asked "Shall I crucify your king?" "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. In less than 40 years Caesar would desolate the nation, destroy Jerusalem and its temple, and bring an end to the Jewish nation as a theocracy. The leaders chose Caesar rather than the Messiah, and Caesar proceeded to destroy the Jewish leadership and nation.**

**The lessons from Zechariah Chapter 9-11 that we must all learn are shown in the box below:**

- 39. God is sovereign in the affairs of men. The historicity of prophecy is accurate!**
- 40. Christ is the good shepherd. (Is it any wonder that Jesus uses this motif in John 10?)**
- 41. Prophecy is so detailed and accurate in Zechariah that it affirms the authenticity, consistency, and inspiration of scripture.**

Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

Review of the Reading

1. How will Tyre be destroyed? (Zechariah 9:4)
2. Was Judah overrun by Alexander the Great in his march south to Egypt? (Zechariah 9:8)
3. What is the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 and how was it fulfilled?
4. When in history did the Jews and Greeks fight and why did they fight? (Zechariah 9:13)
5. Why was God angry with the leaders and shepherds of Israel? (Zechariah 10:1-3)
6. Who is referred to in Zechariah 10:4?
7. What were the names of the two staffs in Zechariah chapter 11 and what did they symbolize?
8. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple even though God opposed ending the Jewish nation in this sorry way. True or False
9. The Jews paid 30 pieces of silver for the Messiah. Was this a significant amount of money? (Zechariah 11:12-13)
10. What would the worthless shepherd do? (Zechariah 11:15-17)

## Thought Questions

1. When you read the prophecies in Zechariah such as Alexander's invasion of the coastal cities (Zechariah 9:1-8), and the king riding on a donkey in Zechariah 9:9 what impact does it have on your faith considering these events were fulfilled respectively some 200 and 500 years later?
2. One of the great sins of the Jews was "they went looking for love and help in all the wrong places". What lessons of spiritual discipline and leadership should we learn from Zechariah 10:1-3?
3. The breaking of the staffs Favor and Union in Zechariah 11 represented God's disfavor with his people making them fully vulnerable to Satan and the Roman army. Is it possible that God would withdraw His protective power today from Christians leaving us vulnerable to satanic attack?
4. What does it say about us as the human race that we only valued Jesus Christ the son of the living God and savior of mankind as worth only 30 pieces of silver? What must have gone through the mind of the pre-incarnate Christ knowing this would be His future ordeal?

5. Why would any people choose a worthless shepherd over a good shepherd when clearly it is in their self-interest to follow a good shepherd?

Devotionals from Zechariah chapters 9, 10, and 11

**Zechariah**

**Read Zechariah Chapters 12, 13 and 14**

**Lesson Purpose: 2<sup>nd</sup> Oracle on the Lord's final victory**

Chapters 12-14 of Zechariah are some of the most exciting and challenging passages of our Bible. The 1<sup>st</sup> oracle of chapters 9-11 describes how God's sovereign will is imposed to bring the Messiah to the Jewish people only for them to revile and reject Him. The 1st oracle is a testament to God's sovereignty in the affairs of men as events 200-500 years in the future are prophesied with full accuracy. Jesus uses many of the verses in his earthly ministry to document the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecies. The 2<sup>nd</sup> oracle of chapters 12-14 focus on the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 at the hands of the Roman army and also alludes to the last days and the full victory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He established His church. Particularly chapter 14 is a most difficult chapter for critical Bible study and requires one to conclude what is referred to by the term "on that day" to properly position one's textual interpretation. I choose based upon my study review of God's word and informed scholars to believe that Zechariah is prophesying about the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. I also find in Chapter 14 possible allusions to the circumstances that the Holy Church of God will find itself in during the last days as it repels satanic attacks and stands firm to the end as the "bride of Christ" awaiting His blessed return. In conclusion the inspirational authenticity of the Book of Zechariah is fully vouched for through the use of his prophecies by Jesus Christ and the apostles as they applied them to the earthly ministry of the Son of God.

(Author's Note: My brother in Christ Chuck Gambill was most helpful in my struggles with Zechariah 14 as I used his superb scholarship from our Summit library to gain my own insight on what God was telling me in this challenging chapter of His word.)

Chapter 12 begins the mention of "on that day" some 15 times in chapter 12, 13, and 14. The determination of what that phrase means is critical to our interpretation of these chapters in Zechariah. As previously mentioned I believe "that day" to be the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Most American evangelical scholarship supports a pre-millennial view of these chapters and believes "that day" to be Christ's second return to earth to set up a kingdom in Jerusalem where He will reign for a 1000 years. I reject this denominational prescribed view.

I believe chapter 12:1-9 focuses on Jerusalem or spiritual Israel which is the church of Christ and all that the Church must face in opposition and conflict through the Messianic era ending with the destruction of Jerusalem. In 12:10 we have reference to Pentecost and the beginning of Christ's church as those look on the one who is pierced and grieve bitterly for him. Clearly the one who is pierced is answered in the fulfillment of prophecy in John 19:34-37 where Jesus's legs were not broken which was highly unusual for a crucifixion, but his side was pierced which was also highly unusual for a crucifixion, and further validates this extraordinary prophecy of Zechariah. The last verses 11-14 refer to great mourning by the people similar to the day King Josiah was killed in battle on the plain of Megiddo. The mourning will not be a national event but each family will mourn the loss of the Messiah. I believe this speaks to the universal recognition of what was done to the one whose side was pierced by wicked mankind. We all will mourn the death of Christ on the cross later this morning as a member of God's universal church of Christ! I believe this too is a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy.

Chapter 13 begins with "on that day" clearly connecting the theme of the last chapters referring to a fountain open to the inhabitants of Jerusalem or the church of Christ which will cleanse men from their sin and impurity. I believe this fountain to be the blood of Christ as the fountain of living water (John 7:37-39, John 4:10-14, Revelation 21:6). In the Church idolatry and false prophets will be banished. False prophecy will be so reviled that families will not tolerate it and no former false prophets will acknowledge that they practiced it. Finally in Chapter 13:7-9 we have Zechariah's prophecy of the

smitten shepherd which Jesus refers to when the mob approached him at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:31). It is clear from these verses in Zechariah that Jesus going to the cross was only done because it was the purposeful will of God. The last two verses refer in my judgment to the sanctification process of the Lord's church and His people (1 Peter 1:6-7, Acts 14:22).

Chapter 14 is connected to the preceding two chapters with the use of the phrase "on that day" which means to me that this chapter too is addressing the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Roman military formations led by Titus in A.D. 70. Verses 1 and 2 can be understood in no other way given the graphic descriptions of the great violence which occurred in the City at that time. One key point is that the referral to "the rest of the people will not be taken from the city" I believe describes the Christians who miraculously escaped when the Romans unexpectedly lifted the siege of Jerusalem.

Josephus recounts that the Roman general Cestus Gallus withdrew from the siege of Jerusalem without explanation, and the Christians remembering the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:15-21 fled the city during this interval of time. The rest of the population that was not killed were put in chains and exiled to mines in Egypt. Estimates of up to 1.1 million people were killed during the siege and about 100,000 enslaved by the Romans and sent to Egyptian mines which represented certain death as well. Jesus says in Mathew 24:21: "For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again." I find it unbearable to read the accounts of what occurred in Jerusalem because of the filth, treachery, and abominations of the Jews in the doomed city. I accept Jesus at His word and will not debate that this was the worst event for all time past, present, and future.

Verses 3-5 are most difficult for me to fully understand, however my view is that the Lord provided a way of escape for His people since our Lord never commands us to do anything (flee the city) without providing for a means to do that very thing. The Christians in Jerusalem at the time fled to the area of Pella which according to prophecy must have extended to Azel. As we already know Jesus during his earthly ministry stood many times on the Mount of

Olives, and therefore I disagree with those who say this could not be the literal destruction of Jerusalem since these events have not yet occurred.

Verses 6-7 apply to the events following the destruction of Jerusalem that can be correlated well with Jesus's words in Mathew 24:29.

Verse 8 I believe refers to the church of Christ or the New Jerusalem and the living waters represent the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39), and Christ's triumphant message that was to be preached throughout the world (Matthew 28:19-20).

Verse 9 points us to the Christian age where only Christ is king and only Christ is preeminent above all things, nations, and beings (Colossians 1:15-20, 1 Corinthians 14:24-28).

Verses 10-11 I believe refers to the church of Christ which will never be destroyed by mankind. I cannot tell you that these United States will persevere through the next generation, but I will say with all authority that Christ's church will be here when He returns. The church of Christ is secure in the will of God as we remain faithful to His word as Jerusalem was in Zechariah's prophecy.

Verses 12-15 I believe to be associated with the destruction of Jerusalem and refers to the terrible suffering of the Jews who were trapped in Jerusalem to endure unimaginable events during the siege as well as those other nations who had opposed and persecuted the church of Christ up to that time. I see Jerusalem as representative of Christ's church. Even the animals will be impacted as the plague of destruction will spare no living thing on that day who opposes Christ and His church.

Verse 16 I believe refers to the nations including the Jews who respond to the invitation of Jesus Christ and worship Him in His holy church. The feast of the tabernacles was simply an Old Testament form of a mission for old Israel in worshipping God. Now the church of Christ (new Israel) has the responsibility to worship God through Jesus Christ based on the New Testament. That even today we see the countless numbers converted

throughout the world from the kingdoms of men to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is testimony to the validity of Zechariah's prophecy.

Verses 17-19 I believe points us to those who refuse to worship Jesus Christ since they will not experience the blessings (rain) that are available in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1). As Christians we live in a dispensation of God's grace that is only available to those in Christ, and if we stay in the world (Egypt) we will forgo the blessings and be subject to God's just punishment on those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ.

Verses 20-21 I believe refers to the church of Christ where everyone is Holy because of being washed in the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13-15).

Nothing is secular or profane in the Lord's church because all is holy including each baptized believer. There will be no Canaanite (person controlled by the world-system) in the Lord's Church. Unfortunately we find those in the Body of Christ who claimed to walk in Christ but cling to the world system. The Lord knows whose are His and who are not, and this too will be revealed by their rebellious and compromised lives and the judgment to follow.

The lessons from Zechariah Chapter 9-14 that we must all learn are shown in the box below:

42. God is sovereign in the affairs of men. The historicity of prophecy is accurate!
43. Christ is the good shepherd. (Is it any wonder that Jesus uses this motif in John 10?)
44. Prophecy is so detailed and accurate in Zechariah that it affirms the authenticity, consistency, and inspiration of scripture.
45. Every generation of Christians will be tested and purified by what we must endure, and only clinging to Christ with true obedience will we achieve our victory in Jesus!

Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

### Review of the Reading

1. How many times is the phrase on that day used in chapters 12-14?
2. Who is the one who was pierced? (Zechariah 12:10)

3. What event does Zechariah 12:10 refer to?
4. What is this fountain that will cleanse the inhabitants of Jerusalem from sin and impurity? (Zechariah 13:1)
5. How is Zechariah 13:7 used by Jesus in the New Testament?
6. What will happen to the third of the people in the land that are not struck down? (Zechariah 13:9)
7. What event is referred to in Zechariah 14:1-2?
8. Who will be king over the whole earth? (Zechariah 14:9)
9. On that day there will be a Canaanite in the land. (Zechariah 14:21)  
True or False

### Thought Questions

1. Admittedly these chapters are difficult to understand in their prophetic context. Is our correct interpretation of these prophetic utterances by Zechariah essential to our soul salvation, and therefore must be a test of fellowship?
2. What is the significance of "on that day" in the interpretation of Zechariah chapters 12-14?



**Malachi****Read Malachi Chapter 1****Lesson Purpose: Cheating God**

The Book of Malachi is one of my favorite books of the entire Bible. It is a rich book for understanding the mind of God and observing His perfect and flawless ways in guiding salvation history for mankind. Malachi is the last book written in the Old Testament canon, and as such becomes the last book under the old covenant that prepares us to transition some 400 years later to the life of Jesus Christ at the beginning of the New Testament era. Malachi means messenger or missionary, but we know nothing of Malachi's personal profile or history. In fact Malachi addresses circumstances and problems in Jewish society similar to those experienced by Ezra/Nehemiah, but he provides no names that would allow us to specifically date the writing. I believe Malachi writes after Nehemiah's mission to complete the walls of Jerusalem which would translate to a date of writing from 430 to 400 BC. Malachi is dealing with some of the same problems Ezra and Nehemiah dealt with but there were other issues in Jewish society that had sprung up such as tithing and offering inferior sacrifices that were new spiritual issues that only Malachi addressed. Malachi was God's prophet and he appeared at the end of the Old Testament era to proclaim God's word to His people on their lifestyle and spiritual condition before Him. The big issue that faced Malachi was the corruption of the priesthood who were the spiritual leaders of the nation. Both the priests and the people (who were badly led) were defensive toward God, casual in their respect for God, and greedy and self-serving by temperament and action. In short they neither revered nor obeyed God not one twit. They cared more for their own comfort, ease, and pleasure and as a result the Jewish nation had sunk to new lows in moral and spiritual character. During the time of Malachi with both priests and people alike offering blemished animals before God, putting their Jewish wives away in divorce while marrying foreign wives and not tithing; the Jewish nation was mired in a deep

spiritual crisis. In fact cynicism ruled the day and many thought God to be irrelevant because they said "it is futile to serve God" and "evildoers prosper" so why serve God? (Malachi 3:14) The nation was in serious spiritual decline after all that had been done for them and all they had been through in rebuilding the temple and walls at Jerusalem. Malachi's teaching is focused on the problems that these people faced and the sin remedy God proposes to correct them. All spiritual correction requires reverence for, and submission and obedience to the will of God. It was true in Malachi's day and it is true for us today. The lessons from Malachi that we all must learn include:

46. God demands and expects our very best at all times, in all ways, with all people to honor Him.
47. Each one of us has a powerful influence and we must live a godly life or we will become a stumbling block and cause people to fall away because of us.
48. God hates divorce.
49. God expects us to put Him first ahead of things/money, and he challenges us to "test" Him on this.
50. God will remember us and what we have committed to Him even if others don't remember.
51. God's word is inspired and perfect in its presentation and saving- impact on our lives.

As you read chapter 1 you will see the love, patience, and mercy of God on display with a disrespectful and ungrateful people. May this never be so for anyone of us toward God. Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

### Review of the Reading

1. What is God's first teaching point to the Jews? (Malachi 1:2)
2. What was the response of the Jews? (Malachi 1:2)
3. What Old Testament example did God use to demonstrate His love for the Jews? (Malachi 1:2-5)

4. What did the priests show toward the name of God? (Malachi 1:6)
5. How did the priests show this to God? (Malachi 1:7-8)
6. Was God pleased with their sacrifices? (Malachi 1:9-12)
7. How were the priests cheating God? (Malachi 1:13-14)

### Thought Questions

1. The priests whenever presented with a word from God would speak back to Him. What type of attitude of the soul does this reveal?
2. The priests of Malachi's day gave diseased and crippled animals for a sacrifice. What possibly could be their motivation?
3. We don't sacrifice animals in the New Testament era but is it possible we can still cheat God? If so, how is it done today?
4. If serving God and worshiping Him ever becomes a "burden" as it was clearly for the priests in Malachi 1:13 what should our remedy be?
  - a. Quit the church
  - b. Ask the elders for a new assignment
  - c. Complain to our friends and seek their understanding and sympathy
  - d. First get on our knees before God and empty ourselves in repentance and seek His guidance for what we should do.
5. Why do you think churches (the people of God) have such ups and downs over history like the Jews in Jerusalem experienced during Malachi's

**ministry which came such a short period of time after Ezra's and Nehemiah's reforms?**

### **Devotionals from Malachi 1**

Malachi 1:6-8 "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. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the Lord's Table is contemptible. 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." (NIV)

One of the really unlovable traits of people is when we come face to face with the full bloom of an ungrateful person. It is a most difficult challenge to look past the selfish attitude and distasteful lack of appreciation for others in dealing with such people, and personally it stretches me to the breaking point of my civility. What to do with such a person? How precisely should we respond to such feelings? Unfortunately the Lord God Almighty deals with this attitude on the part of mankind all too frequently, and in our devotional text we have a full grown case of the priests of God who were ungrateful and disrespectful toward Him. These priests were absorbed by selfishness, an uncaring spirit toward others, and were eaten up by material greed. How does the Lord deal with each one of us when we are ungrateful to Him? Let's examine this attitude of ungratefulness that we may recognize its characteristics and what we must do about it in our own lives not to allow it to seep in and overwhelm us. The ungrateful heart is always recognized by some disturbing characteristics that will not be hidden for long in this world if we are ungrateful like the priests of Malachi's day:

- (1) *The ungrateful heart will not honor God.* The priests would not honor God though it was both the spiritual and natural thing for them to do because they disrespected God.
- (2) *The ungrateful heart will demonstrate its contempt for God and the things of God in selfish actions.* The priests showed contempt and disrespect for God by offering blemished animals or the worst of the animals so that they might save the best for their own economic benefit. This sounds familiar even today to hold back from God our very best and give him the leftovers in terms of our means, time, energy, and priorities.
- (3) *The ungrateful heart will not care that it has offended God or caused God loss or harm.* The priests would never give such animals to the governor or the high priest, but they casually passed them off to God.

*Casual Christianity always leads eventually to a spiritual apathy and an uncaring spirit that labors at the shell of Christianity without living out the substance of it. This will not do! Never for a moment should you think that God doesn't know your heart and mind. What must God think about us when He faces our ungrateful hearts? If we recognize ungrateful thinking in our minds immediately drop to our*

knees and implore God in repentance for our right thinking and a grateful heart. Seek the grace of God and offer right sacrifices of ourselves to Him. There is no substitute for the sacrifice of our bodies as living sacrifices to transform our casual Christianity into the passion of the servant (Romans 12:1-2). TODAY FATHER I REPENT OF AN UNGRATEFUL HEART AND I SEEK TO BE YOUR SERVANT BY GIVING YOU MY VERY BEST IN WHO I AM, WHAT I DO, AND HOW I DO IT. AMEN!

Malachi 1:14 “Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king,” says the Lord Almighty, “and my name is to be feared among the nations.” (NIV)

Cheating is a dreadful thing that often afflicts society. Sometimes we cheat our friends or colleagues in games such as the golfer who cannot count strokes properly. Sometimes we cheat on our employers by working five hours while being paid for eight hours. Tax cheating is something that is tried more than you would think as well. But when you get right down to it, nothing is more alarming for a Christian than to try and cheat God. In our devotional text we are focused on the corruption of the Jewish priesthood who were to be righteous examples before the people, but who were sacrificing inferior and diseased animals to the Lord in violation of the spiritual principle that we must give our very best to God! *How does anyone of us get so arrogant and full of ourselves to think we can cheat God and get away with it with impunity?* The answer is clear from our devotional text that a person will cheat God if they do not reverence His awesome power and respect His influence and control in their lives. When people get to a point that they do not give God the honor and glory due Him, then it is a very small step to give him the inferior and hold back the superior for themselves. I don't know about you but I can't stand cheaters who hurt and deprive people for their own selfish interests. Ahab and Jezebel come to mind in their cheating and fraud of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21 which resulted in Naboth's death and the stealing of the vineyard by King Ahab. As terrible as such a human tragedy is it does not rise to the level of cheating God by withholding our very best from Him. In Malachi's day the priests were offering inferior sacrifices, divorcing Jewish wives, and withholding financial tithes to God all of which constitute cheating the Lord Almighty. We are always called to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5), and in that self-examination we should know the signs of the cheater:

- (1) *A cheater of God is selfish and concerned foremost with satisfying their own needs before all else.*
- (2) *A cheater of God loves material things and places them as first priority in life.*
- (3) *A cheater of God does not reverence God or hold Him in awe. A cheater of God cares not for the sacred but desires the profane as did Esau. (Hebrews 12:16-17)*
- (4) *A cheater of God blames God and never himself for his sin and failings. A cheater of God plays the blame game because they are defensive, unwilling to learn, and uncaring to make remedy in their lives.*

*It is a sobering reminder to read at the end of the Old Testament era that the remnant contained those who would cheat God after all that God had done in love for Israel. Let it serve as a vivid reminder to all of us that if we notice the deadly creep of a cheating spirit that we must immediately*

repent and return to the Lord. Nothing this world offers is worth having if we lose our salvation and eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ. TODAY I WILL GIVE MY VERY BEST TO GOD AND PUT HIM FIRST IN ALL PHASES OF MY LIFE THAT I MIGHT BE AN EXAMPLE AS A SERVANT OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST BEFORE OTHERS.

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**Malachi****Read Malachi Chapter 2****Lesson Purpose: Honoring God**

In Chapter 2 of Malachi we have a continuation of God's critical evaluation of the priesthood and the nation. Looking at the lessons that we all must learn from Malachi we see the importance of honoring God by putting Him first as well as the spiritual damage the priesthood inflicted on the people by being a bad and unfaithful influence on them. Another lesson for all of us is that God hates divorce as He condemns the wicked practice of divorcing Jewish wives to marry foreign women.

52. God demands and expects our very best at all times, in all ways, with all people if we are to honor God.
53. Each one of us has a powerful influence and we must live a godly life or we will become a stumbling block and cause people to fall away because of us.
54. God hates divorce.
55. God expects us to put Him first ahead of things/money, and he challenges us to "test" Him on this.
56. God will remember us and what we have committed to Him even if others don't remember.
57. God's word is inspired and perfect in its presentation and saving- impact on our lives.

In our reading of Malachi 2 we see that because the priests did not set their minds to honor God's name, then God sent a curse on them. The spiritual principle that is visited here in full context is found in 1 Samuel 2:30 regarding Eli's family: "therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares: 'I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever'. But now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained". There is a spiritual

reciprocity explicit on this point that if we honor God then God will honor us, and if we fail to honor God then He will not honor us! Malachi then takes the readers back to the example of Levi, ancestor of the priesthood, to provide an understanding of what the true priest should be like. The key for Levi and all of us is that we must first reverence God's name if we are to honor Him. Unfortunately the current priesthood would not reverence God's name and honor Him. The priests' example was a bad influence on the people, and their teaching reflected their lack of commitment which caused many to turn away and stumble because they had violated the covenant with Levi (Malachi 2:8). The sad result was that the spiritual leaders were despised and humiliated before all the people.

Malachi then turned his attention to an issue that plagued Jewish society of divorcing Jewish wives in order to marry foreign women; a practice that God point blank said he hated. In fact God makes it clear for all of us when He says: "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16). God's intention had been and will always be that men not break faith with the wives of their youth. As we complete Chapter 2 of Malachi we see a people who did not have a vision or a relationship with God as seen by them asking "where is the God of Justice?" (Malachi 2:17) The people did not see any advantage in serving God because they reasoned wickedly that God calls all who do evil good (Malachi 2:17). When men become so muddled in their thinking that they can no longer honor the nature and character of God then deep spiritual decay has taken hold in the land.

As you read chapter 2 you will see the importance of honoring God, being faithful to His word, and setting an example in our living and teaching to bring others to Christ. Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

### Review of the Reading

8. Why was God displeased with the priests? (Malachi 2:1-2)

9. What Old Testament character does God refer to in demonstrating how the covenant between God and the priesthood should be kept? (Malachi 2:4)
10. What were some of the practices of Levi that honored God's name? (Malachi 2:5-6)
11. What were the priests guilty of in their teaching? (Malachi 2:7-8)
12. Were only the priests were impacted by their teaching and no one else? (Malachi 2:8-9)
13. What detestable thing had been committed in the land according to Malachi? (Malachi 2:11-12)
14. Why was God no longer paying attention to the peoples' offerings? (Malachi 2:13-16)
15. How had the people wearied God? (Malachi 2:17)

### Thought Questions

6. Why should we believe that God honors those that honor Him?
7. Levi was a spiritual man who honored God. What practices by Levi should Christians today practice?
8. How do we cause people to stumble and turn away from the Lord today?
9. What does God mean when He says "I hate divorce"?

10. The Jews were complaining that evil people are good in the eyes of the Lord, and asking where the God of justice was. Does this happen even today in the churches of Christ? If so, why is it so dangerous to our spiritual well-being?

### Devotionals from Malachi 2

Malachi 2:1-2 “And now this admonition is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor my name,” says the Lord Almighty, “I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor me.” (NIV)

There is one spiritual truth that all of us must carry in our minds and close to our hearts according to our Lord: “Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.” (1 Samuel 2:30) This principle had its roots in the House of Eli and his unfaithful children who defiled the worship of God. Eli’s line was removed by death just as God had said when Eli’s children refused to honor Him. So it is in our devotional text with the worldly priests who served themselves rather than serve God that the implications of this message are clearly described for us. The priests dishonored God in the previous chapter of Malachi by offering injured, crippled, and diseased animals to the Lord in clear violation of His commandments. *The reason for the priests’ failure is made clear that they did not set their hearts to honor God.* The reason these priests did not honor God is because they didn’t reverence Him or even care about what type of sacrifice was due Him. These priests were wholly disconnected from a relationship of trust and love with God, and they sought to take advantage of Him. No wonder God’s criticism of these men is so scathing and punitive even to the degree that God will curse their blessings! In fact God had already cursed their blessings because they never set their hearts to honor Him. Later in chapter 2 Malachi uses the example of the first high priest Levi the brother of Moses to demonstrate what was required in the nature and the character of the priesthood. What is required to set our hearts to honor God?

- (1) *First, we must reverence His name and stand in awe of Him.* If God and the things of God are not our first priority and are not sacred to us we will see the tasks of God as a burden and not as a privilege.
- (2) *Second, we must be faithful to the instruction of God in His word by living obediently before him.* We must be faithful to teaching God’s instructions as He has commanded.
- (3) *Third, we must walk righteously before Him and use our influence to turn others from sin by our faithful example of being God’s person.*

If we are to faithfully set our hearts to honor God then we will need a real love, zeal, and commitment to put our Lord first at all times, in all things, with all people. This is easy if God is close to us and His Spirit is living on the inside of us. *But if we choose to compromise with the world system, and focus on our own comfort, ease, and pleasure we will never honor God and our blessings will dry up, blow away, and become useless to us.* TODAY I CHOOSE TO SET MY HEART TO HONOR GOD BY PUTTING HIM FIRST IN ALL THINGS AT ALL TIMES THROUGH REVERENCING HIS NAME, OBEDIENTLY FOLLOWING HIS INSTRUCTION, AND LIVING RIGHTEOUSLY BEFORE MEN. AMEN!

Malachi 2:14-16 "You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as his garment," says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith." (NIV)

*Whenever the blessings of God begin to dry up in our lives then we must stop and do some forensic work to determine when and how have we gotten off track in our trust and obedience to the Lord.* This is a spiritual discipline that we all must practice if we are to be repentant in our nature and committed to a life of obedience to God in our character. There is always some small pebble of stone or sin stuck in our shoe that is causing the irritation. When God pricks your conscience seek God's face with a humble spirit, repentant heart, and inquiring mind to learn the truth of our disobedience before the Lord Almighty. In our devotional text the Jews of Malachi's day were upset because God no longer paid attention to their sacrifices or accepted them with pleasure from their hands. So they ask the Lord "why"? The answer speaks to the backsliding that had occurred in the land when the Lord said He was acting as a witness between these Jews and the Jewish wives of their youth who they had broken faith with and put away in divorce in direct opposition to the marriage covenant. Further God declares that "I hate divorce." It can't be clearer than that to any person who considers his or herself willfully committed to being a servant of the Lord almighty. There are always consequences of our disobedience no matter what we may think or attempt to rationalize in our mind. When it comes to marriage our God makes it clear that in marriage He has made them one both in flesh and spirit and they are one before Him. Why is this so important? Because God was seeking godly offspring. The purposes of God in this world are achieved through godly people forming marriages of a covenant relationship before God and producing godly offspring so that God might be honored. *Husbands and wives are partners before God and joined in the sacred covenant of marriage, and to deal casually or recklessly with breaking faith with the wife of our youth before God is something He hates.* In the case of the Jews, God had ceased to bless them because of their treachery and sin of divorce in their marriages. God's antidote for addressing this sin and securing a remedy before God is to not allow it to happen by guarding ourselves in our spirit and not to break faith with the wife of our youth! We can parse words, deny the word of God, and work our way through tortuous excuses, but this will not do and God's displeasure will impact our relationship with Him. The best advice we can give anyone

considering marriage is that the act is sacred before God, involves a true partnership between the man and the woman, and its purpose is to produce godly off spring. *The focus of the marriage covenant first and foremost is upon God and then one another. Always seek to marry a follower of Jesus Christ because it is the better path to enjoying the marriage covenant and not breaking faith with the wife of our youth.* The blessings of the Lord cannot be secured by selfish divorcement and remarrying other women either in Malachi's day or our own. No man or the woman can play the hypocrite on this matter. **GOD I WILL ENJOY THE WIFE OF MY YOUTH AND BE FAITHFUL TO HER SO THAT AS PARTNERS IN CHRIST OUR FAMILY MIGHT BE A BLESSING IN THIS WORLD AS WE SERVE YOU!**

**Malachi****Read Malachi Chapters 3 & 4****Lesson Purpose: God is in control and Jesus Christ is on the way**

In Chapter 3 of Malachi we enter the Messianic prophecy of Malachi as we read about the messenger that will prepare the way before the Lord, and the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple. The first mention refers to the prophet Elijah who will come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives as stated in Malachi 4:5-6, and the second mention refers to Jesus Christ. Malachi is the last book written in the Old Testament canon, and as such becomes the last book under the old covenant that prepares us to transition some 400 years later to the life of Jesus Christ at the beginning of the New Testament era. Jesus connects the New Testament directly back to these passages in Malachi stating that Malachi 4:5 referred to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13-15). We know that our Lord and Savior spent time as an infant, child, and an adult in the temple and its surrounding areas. Also our Lord was like a refiner's fire when he cleansed the temple area of the money changers in Matthew 21:12-17. From this view alone the Book of Malachi makes the inspired transition over 400 years of history from the old covenant to the new covenant. I am in awe of how God purposefully threads His flawless word of salvation history, and nowhere is this flawless inspiration of our Bible on clearer display than in the last two chapters of Malachi.

Chapter 3 also addresses one of the great passages in the Bible when God asks the Jews to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so there would be food in His house (Malachi 3:10). But what is unique in the whole Bible about this request is that God challenges the Jews to test Him in this, and if they do then He will throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that they will not have room for it! One of the most important lessons we must learn in Christianity is that God is in control and He alone is sufficient for meeting our needs. This lesson must be learned or we will never trust or obey or serve God in our lives because we will always be focused on

self and the accumulation of money and things to take care of us. In fact Jesus devotes much of his teaching to this very issue of the proper role of money and things (security) in the lives of his followers.

I find the "scroll of remembrance" in Malachi 3:16 a most comforting teaching in that in the presence of God the names of those faithful to Him will be written down so those who feared the Lord and honored His name will never be forgotten. Only a sovereign Lord could assure this to all men who call upon His name and serve Him only! In Malachi 4 we are referred to the great day when there will be a difference between those who honor God and those who don't. On that day we see the ungodly destroyed by fire, but those who revere His name will benefit from the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings (Malachi 4:1-2). Malachi makes it very clear that the people of God will be so blessed on that terrible day that they will be like calves released from the stall that leap in joy. As we survey the lessons we must learn from Malachi I feel our series of three lessons has addressed much of what God desires that we learn from the Book of Malachi.

58. God demands and expects our very best at all times, in all ways, with all people if we are to honor God.
59. Each one of us has a powerful influence and we must live a godly life or we will become a stumbling block and cause people to fall away because of us.
60. God hates divorce.
61. God expects us to put Him first ahead of things/money, and he challenges us to "test" Him on this.
62. God will remember us and what we have committed to Him even if others don't remember.
63. God's word is inspired and perfect in its presentation and saving- impact on our lives.

As you read chapters 3 and 4 you will see a glimpse of God's big picture for the salvation of the nations and the all sufficiency of God in the affairs of mankind. Enjoy your lesson study and may God richly bless you as a result.

### Review of the Reading

16. Who is the messenger that will prepare the way before the Lord?  
(Malachi 3:1, Malachi 4:5-6)
17. What will happen when the Lord comes to his temple? (Malachi 3:2-4)
18. What were some of the one another sins that were occurring in Malachi's day? (Malachi 3:5)
19. Does the Lord change? (Malachi 3:6-7)
20. How did priests and people rob God? (Malachi 3:8-9)
21. Why were the Jews to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse?  
(Malachi 3:10-12)
22. What were some of the Jews saying about God? (Malachi 3:14-15)
23. What is a scroll of remembrance? (Malachi 3:16)
24. What or who is the sun of righteousness? (Malachi 4:2)

### Thought Questions

11. How do we rob God today and what is the cause of it?
12. What does God mean when he says "test me in this"?
13. Does Malachi teach a "prosperity gospel"?

14. Most of us neither know nor remember what just a few people do for the Lord's church. How do we know God will not forget what we all do in His church? What does this teach us about service in the kingdom?
15. Is there any spiritual relevance in the last word of the Old Testament?
16. What is the greatest message of truth for the 21<sup>st</sup> century church from the Book of Malachi?

### Devotionals from Malachi 3 and 4

Malachi 3:5 "So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty. (NIV)

If you do not honor God and serve Him with determination it will become self-apparent that your relationships with others have crooked ways too. When you don't put God as first priority in your life inevitably those around you will suffer because you have put self-first. It was evident in the days of Malachi that the Jews were advanced in social decay not unlike our own day where materialism, hedonism, and agnosticism are the norms influencing our society. No one ever hides anything from the Lord no matter how hard we might try to confuse others with our sins. *You will never be truly right with others if you are not right with your Lord.* Our devotional text exposes the social rot that existed in Jewish society in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, and this unwholesome condition demanded judgment that God would bring to these wicked people! What were their sins against each other that deserved God's judgment? Malachi lists six "one another" sins that describe the deep slide of the Jews in the land: sorcery, adultery, perjury, defrauding of wages, oppression of widows and orphans, and depriving aliens of justice. Each of these sins can be devastating to any human being but now these sins had become a habit, a way of life, and the Jews suffered from it as a society. *At the root of all these sins against people was the lack of reverence for God.* Malachi writes that these people do not fear God. A society will grow uncaring, violent, and cynical once God is ignored or marginalized in the land. *When we seek to serve ourselves rather than God the destination is always the same regardless of people, place, or time: we are all unhappy!* But we must always remember that God will right the wrong on His time and in His way. As we see in Malachi 3:1-2 the Lord will come to His temple and he will purify the Levites which is a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ some 400 years into the future. Even now we see Jesus cleaning out the money changers from the temple (Matthew 21:12-17)

in fulfillment of the prophetic word. My friends not one of us can make ourselves better people by a tad much less to transform our character and nature to be what God call us to if we are ruled by these sins. *The decision for each one of us is to choose to reverence God, submit ourselves to Him and walk obediently before Him allowing His Holy Spirit to live on the inside of us.* Then and only then in this dark world of sin will the true light of the world shine forth through us. TODAY I REFUSE TO FEED SELF AND I CHOOSE TO REVERENCE GOD AND SUBMIT TO HIS WILL IN OBEDIENCE THAT I MIGHT LOVE OTHERS AND STAND AGAINST THEIR MISTREATMENT AND MANIPULATION IN THIS WORLD. AMEN!

Malachi 3:6-9 "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. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse-the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me." (NIV)

One of God's greatest traits is His immutability in that He does not change. Our devotional text affirms this powerful reality with the words "I the Lord do not change"! The writer of the Hebrew Letter writes about Jesus Christ in Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." The fact that God is faithful to His promises and to his commitments is both hopeful and sobering in this world. God means business and we can live our lives based on the sure knowledge that God will do what he says he will do! Malachi points to the sorry history of the Jews who turned away from God time after time, but God did not destroy them because of His commitment to Abraham when he called Him (Genesis 12). Throughout history God is ever true to His purposes and plan for salvation history unlike the sporadic and uncertain actions of man. God's nature is one that loves us and desires for us to be reconciled to Him, and we see it on display in our devotional text. God pleads with the Jews to return to Him since He hasn't left them but the Jews had left God. In their audacity and arrogance the Jews seek to question God by asking Him "How are we to return?" God gives the answer to that question that brings man to a decision point: "Will a man rob God?" The Jews were more concerned with their own comfort, ease, and pleasure than they were in the things of God, and the manifestation of this was their love for money which resulted in not tithing. *This devotional text is not here to erect a defense of tithing in the New Testament age rather it is there to demonstrate that each man must make a choice in this world of either God or himself.* If anyone of us want to return to God we must lay everything down, deny self, and pick up our cross and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23-27). Money simply represents those things that crowd out our love for God because of our lack of trust in Him to supply sufficiently all that we need. This is a most difficult test if our minds are focused on the world and our physical needs. Many falter and fail at this point, as the Jews of Malachi's time that refused to tithe, because they would rather feed their selfish worldly needs than return to God. May it not be so with each one of us! GOD, I KNOW YOU DO NOT CHANGE AND WHEN I STRAY YOU REMAIN THE SAME IN YOUR LOVE URGING THAT I RETURN TO YOU BY GIVING UP ALL THINGS THAT WOULD GET IN MY WAY.

Malachi 3:10 "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (NIV)

God's instruction to the Jews on His commandment to tithe is unique in the Bible. God instructs man to bring the entire tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in his house. Let us be clear that the food in the storehouse of the temple was needed by priests to live so there were real physical needs that must be met or hunger would result. But most importantly for our devotional verse when viewed with our spiritual mind points us to a challenge by God to the Jews to "test me in this". *Nowhere else in God's word do we find instruction to put God to the test.* But here in the matter of tithing God tells His people "test me"! Further God says I will throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that they won't have room for it. *A spiritual principle for all of us to remember who would be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ is that we will never out give God on anything!* Paul writes that the Macedonian churches excelled in giving for the collection to the Jerusalem Christians because "they gave themselves first to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:5). *God is making a "big teaching point" in our devotional text that things cannot trump faith or there is no faith at all.* The question each one of us must answer is a simple one: do I store up for myself just to be sure I will never be in want or do I trust God and give to Him as he commands? Jesus answers that question in the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:20 when God calls the man who had built bigger barns for himself a fool because on this very night his life would be demanded from him. What are we to make of all of this? What God is teaching us is that we must trust Him and Him alone to sustain us in this life by obeying God and leaving all the consequences to him. Whenever we straddle the fence or seek both God and money as a life priority it simply will not work because we know that "you cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). *God's teaching on money and His instruction to test Him on this is so critical because the affections of our heart will be determined by where our treasure is either with God or in ourselves and the things we possess (Matthew 6:19).* When I decide that God will take care of me and bless me immeasurably more than I can ever ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20) then we will enter the rest of God because we are confident that our God is sufficient. It doesn't matter for what ends or purposes we simply know that our God is sufficient for any situation, circumstance, or problem. If we take God seriously we will discipline our decision making on what to give by prayer with the Father. If God asks us to test Him on the matter of giving then we should do it in faith! **FATHER I WILL GIVE ACCORDING TO MY ABILITIES BECAUSE I TRUST YOU TO BLESS ME AND SUSTAIN ME IN THIS LIFE. I KNOW I CAN NEVER OUTGIVE MY LOVING GOD. AMEN!**

Malachi 3:16 "Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name." (NIV)

What do you remember about any person? Do you remember years of faithfulness and activity within the church? Do you remember how that person impacted your life in a singularly important way? It's important to remember those around us for how they have contributed and influenced the spiritual wellness of our lives. No man is an island and we all know too well that each one of us is the beneficiary of the hard work and support of those who loved and cared about us. In Proverbs 3:27 we find a keystone verse: "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act." *When someone does a good, honorable, and faithful thing we should remember it and let that person know as quickly as possible in an encouraging way about it. I personally don't think we as*

*members of Christ's body practice this instruction enough in our ministries of encouragement. As men and women we simply don't have the capacity to remember perfectly all that goes on around us. Unfortunately some get their feelings hurt because we don't recognize them for their contributions not because we don't want to, but we just don't remember. This was a harsh time in the life of the Jews when sarcasm and cynicism was the attitude of many if not most of the population. Just before our devotional text we know what the people truly thought about God for Malachi reveals it to us in Malachi 3:14-15. Malachi writes that the people thought it was futile to serve God because the arrogant prospered and those who challenged God escaped. As a result many disrespected God as irrelevant in their lives. So those Jews who remained faithful talk to one another, and the Lord listened to them and heard them. **One of the greatest benefits we have in following Jesus Christ is that Jesus will LISTEN and HEAR our requests.** In our age where so many leaders religious and otherwise fail to listen and hear it is a blessing that our God pays attention to what we say! The concern of the people was that God would not remember their faithfulness when overwhelmed in a sea of unfaithfulness that saw serving God a futile. So the Lord had written before Him in His presence a "scroll of remembrance" to remember those who were faithful to Him. What were the criteria to be included in the "scroll of remembrance"? There were two including to fear the Lord, and to honor His name. **Simply put to be included in the scroll of remembrance one had to reverence God and honor his name through obedience to His word.** God tells us that we want to have our names written on that scroll of remembrance because **GOD WILL REMEMBER THOSE NAMES AS HIS** when he makes us his treasured possession and acts to spare us. Think about it, your name is written in the scroll of remembrance in the presence of God never to be forgotten! **TODAY FATHER I CHOOSE TO FEAR AND HONOR YOUR NAME BECAUSE I SEEK TO HAVE MY NAME WRITTEN ON YOUR SCROLL OF REMEMBRANCE, FOR I KNOW YOU WILL NEVER FORGET ME.***

Malachi 4:2 "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall." (NIV)

Malachi 4 is a Messianic prophecy to my understanding in its entirety. God has just told His people that they will see again the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. The day is coming when every evildoer will be stubble and not a root or a branch will be left. That "day" is described as a great fire that travels the landscape appearing unstoppable as its voracious flames devour all vegetation in its path leaving behind only burnt and scarred ground. If you watch nature programs you have been exposed to the power of fire's transforming nature over the landscape as part of the earth's natural process. All of that is good and well until you're in the path of that destructive blaze and need a means of escape. *Our devotional text provides that way of escape because for those who reverence, respect, or fear the Lord's name then the sun of righteousness will rise not to inflict a raging fire, but it will rise with healing in its wings. The sun of righteousness I believe to be Jesus Christ and for those wholly connected to Him the day of destruction will be a day of healing and joy as they leap like calves set free from the stall.* What a difference in outcome between those who serve God and those who do not. Why be consumed by the roaring unchecked blaze as opposed to being warmed by the healing warmth of the "Son" of righteousness? The Day of the Lord is coming and there will be a separation between those who love

God and serve Him and those who do not. We see this played out in history with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 by the Roman Army. We will see this separation again when Jesus returns to judge us (Hebrews 9:27-28). *God's urgent plea is that each one of us must be in Christ! How do we get into Christ? Please read Galatians 3:26-27 "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST have clothed yourselves with Christ."* We enter Christ through baptism because it is then and only then that we come in contact with the blood of Christ that will wash away our sins (Acts 22:16). **FATHER, I KNOW THAT THE DAY IS COMING WHEN THERE WILL BE A SEPERATION BETWEEN THOSE WHO SERVE YOU AND THOSE WHO DO NOT, AND I CHOOSE TO BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST THAT I MIGHT EXPERIENCE THE HEALING IN THE WINGS OF THE "SON" OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. AMEN!**

Malachi 4:5-6 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." (NIV)

The last verses of Malachi are great transitional verses from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Jesus states that this verse referred to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13-14) when describing the prophet Elijah who would come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Further an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist and told him that these verses from our devotional text referred to the infant son his wife Elizabeth soon would give birth to (Luke 1:11-17). It is no accident in the enduring thread of the word of God that Malachi points us forward some 400 years to the coming of Jesus Christ and the prophet Elijah that would be his forerunner: John the Baptist. Coming at the very end of the Old Testament it is a matter of Holy Spirit inspiration that brings this verse at its conclusion to perfectly transition from the failure of the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets, Kings, and the people of Israel to achieve righteousness on their own merits. It simply could not be done for it was impossible because all men are flawed and imperfect. But as Paul writes it was our schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24 KJV) to train us and lead us to Christ. *The Book of Malachi ends pointing to the only salvation answer for all men, for all time, for all places which is Jesus Christ the Son of the Living God.* As Malachi prophesied before that great day of the Messiah's entrance into the world and in perfect timing would come the prophet Elijah who was to be John the Baptist the cousin of Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament starts with this prophecy and ties it back to the coming of the Messiah in Malachi 4. Our Bible is elegant in its order, meaning, and structure and nowhere is this more on display than at the end of the Old Testament and its transition to the New Testament some 400 years later. Only the supernatural and all-knowing God of the Universe could have stitched the Bible together with such consistency and meaning for humankind. Even the last word of the Old Testament finds great spiritual significance because the word is "curse". The last word to the Jews under the old covenant is the word curse! I find it remarkable and a sign of the divine hand of God on our Bible that the first word to men from Jesus is "blessed". **MY FRIENDS LET US NOT DOUBT OR PARSE OR EQUIVOCATE ON THE UNERRING, ALL POWERFUL, LIFE CHANGING, SOUL SAVING WORD OF GOD BUT SIMPLY TRUST AND OBEY IT!**

# ***A People of the Book***

## ***8-Year Curriculum***

|      | January - March                          | April - June  | July - September                        | October - December                                   |
|------|--|---|---|--|
| 2007 | <i><b>Matthew</b></i>                    | <i><b>Genesis</b></i>                                     | <i><b>Galatians &amp; Ephesians</b></i> | <i><b>Isaiah</b></i>                                 |
| 2008 | <i><b>Exodus</b></i>                     | <i><b>I &amp; II Timothy, Titus</b></i>                   | <i><b>Hebrews</b></i>                   | <i><b>Minor Prophets I (Hosea-Obadiah)</b></i>       |
| 2009 | <i><b>Mark</b></i>                       | <i><b>Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy</b></i>             | <i><b>Romans</b></i>                    | <i><b>Jeremiah &amp; Lamentations</b></i>            |
| 2010 | <i><b>I &amp; II Thessalonians</b></i>   | <i><b>Joshua, Judges, Ruth</b></i>                        | <i><b>James, I &amp; II Peter</b></i>   | <i><b>Minor Prophets II (Jonah-Habakkuk)</b></i>     |
| 2011 | <i><b>Luke</b></i>                       | <i><b>I &amp; II Samuel</b></i>                           | <i><b>I Corinthians</b></i>             | <i><b>Daniel</b></i>                                 |
| 2012 | <i><b>Acts</b></i>                       | <i><b>Special Study: The Foundations (Psalm 11:3)</b></i> | <i><b>Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther</b></i>    | <i><b>Minor Prophets III (Zephaniah-Malachi)</b></i> |
| 2013 | Gospel of John, I, II, & III John        | Job   | Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon | Psalms   |
| 2014 | Philippians, Colossians, Philemon & Jude | Kings & Chronicles  | Revelation                              | Ezekiel  |
| 2015 | II Corinthians                           |   |   |  |

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