

A background image showing a person's hands writing in a notebook with a pen. A Bible is visible in the foreground, partially open, with the word "BIBLE" and a cross symbol on its cover. The scene is softly lit and slightly blurred, creating a focused and studious atmosphere.

**A PASSAGE THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT  
YEAR TWO, QUARTER THREE**

# **Minor Prophets**

**A Thirteen Lesson Bible Study  
by Jeff S. Smith**

# A PASSAGE THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT

## Year One

## Year Two

### First Quarter: "In The Beginning"

1. Creation (Genesis 1-2)
2. Sin (Genesis 3-4)
3. Noah's Ark (Genesis 6-10)
4. Promises to Abraham (Genesis 11-12, 15-18)
5. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 13-14, 18-19)
6. Abraham, Sarah and Isaac (Genesis 20-24)
7. Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25-28, 32-33, 36)
8. Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29-31, 34-35)
9. Joseph Sold Into Slavery (Genesis 37-38)
10. Joseph Imprisoned (Genesis 39)
11. Joseph Interprets Dreams (Genesis 40-41)
12. Providence (Genesis 42-45)
13. Reunited (Genesis 46-50)

### Second Quarter: "From Egypt to Canaan"

1. Call of Moses (Exodus 1-5)
2. The Nine Plagues (Exodus 6-10)
3. The Passover (Exodus 11-13)
4. Crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14-18)
5. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 19-31)
6. The Golden Calf (Exodus 32-40)
7. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 1-10)
8. Holy Living (Leviticus 11-27)
9. Leaving Sinai for Canaan (Numbers 1-10)
10. Loyalty and Disloyalty (Numbers 11-21)
11. Balaam and Balak (Numbers 22-36)
12. Moses's Review (Deuteronomy 1-4)
13. Moses's Final Charge (Deuteronomy 5-34)

### Third Quarter: "Taming Canaan"

1. Entrance Into The Land (Joshua 1-4)
2. Jericho (Joshua 5-6)
3. Ai and Other Conquests (Joshua 7-21)
4. Covenant Matters (Joshua 22-24)
5. Failure to Drive Out Canaanites (Judges 1-2)
6. Deborah and Other Judges (Judges 3-5)
7. Gideon (Judges 6-9)
8. Jephthah (Judges 10-12)
9. Samson and Delilah (Judges 13-16)
10. Tribal Depravity (Judges 17-21)
11. The Courtship of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 1-4)
12. Samuel's Beginnings (First Samuel 1-3)
13. The Ark of the Covenant (First Samuel 4-6)

### Fourth Quarter: "The Throne of David"

1. Institution of the Monarchy (First Samuel 7-12)
2. The Reign of Saul Begins (First Samuel 13-16)
3. David and Goliath (First Samuel 17)
4. Saul Persecutes David (First Samuel 18-20)
5. David's Flight and Fight (First Samuel 21-24)
6. Abigail and David (First Samuel 25)
7. Saul's Downfall (First Samuel 26-28)
8. David's Rise (First Samuel 29-31)
9. David Becomes King (Second Samuel 1-5)
10. David's Successes (Second Samuel 6-10)
11. David and Bathsheba (Second Samuel 11-12)
12. Absalom's Rebellion (Second Samuel 13-19)
13. David's Decline (Second Samuel 20-24)

### First Quarter: "Israel and Judah"

1. David's Demise (First Kings 1-2)
2. Solomon's Splendor (First Kings 3-10)
3. Solomon's Demise (First Kings 11)
4. Rehoboam and Jeroboam (First Kings 12-16)
5. Elijah (First Kings 17-19)
6. Ahab and Jezebel (First Kings 20-22)
7. Elisha (Second Kings 1-4, 6)
8. Naaman the Leper (Second Kings 5)
9. Bloody Reigns (Second Kings 7-12)
10. Fall of Israel (Second Kings 13-17)
11. Hezekiah (Second Kings 18-21)
12. Josiah (Second Kings 22-23)
13. Fall of Judah (Second Kings 24-25)

### Second Quarter: "The Major Prophets"

1. The Book of Isaiah (Part 1)
2. The Book of Isaiah (Part 2)
3. The Book of Isaiah (Part 3)
4. The Book of Jeremiah (Part 1)
5. The Book of Jeremiah (Part 2)
6. The Book of Jeremiah (Part 3)
7. The Book of Lamentations
8. The Book of Ezekiel (Part 1)
9. The Book of Ezekiel (Part 2)
10. The Book of Ezekiel (Part 3)
11. The Book of Daniel (Part 1)
12. The Book of Daniel (Part 2)
13. The Book of Daniel (Part 3)

### Third Quarter: "The Minor Prophets"

1. The Book of Joel
2. The Book of Jonah
3. The Book of Amos
4. The Book of Hosea
5. The Book of Micah
6. The Book of Zephaniah
7. The Book of Nahum
8. The Book of Habakkuk
9. The Book of Obadiah
10. The Book of Haggai
11. The Book of Zechariah
12. The Book of Malachi
13. Review

### Fourth Quarter: "Wisdom Literature & Post-Exile"

1. The Book of Psalms
2. The Book of Proverbs
3. The Book of Job (Part 1)
4. The Book of Job (Part 2)
5. The Book of Ecclesiastes
6. The Song of Solomon
7. The Book of Esther (Part 1)
8. The Book of Esther (Part 2)
9. The Book of Ezra (Part 1)
10. The Book of Ezra (Part 2)
11. The Book of Nehemiah (Part 1)
12. The Book of Nehemiah (Part 2)
13. Intertestamental Period

# A PASSAGE THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT

## Year Two, Quarter Three

### *Minor Prophets*

A PASSAGE THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT is designed to take a Bible class all the way through the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament in two years' time. Sacrifices were made to arrange this pace, especially in obscure passages such as some found in the Pentateuch, major prophets and wisdom literature. Topical class books can supplement the cursory study of these books at other times, however, so that no part of God's writ is slighted.

### *Lessons*

1. The Book of Joel.....	1
2. The Book of Jonah.....	3
3. The Book of Amos.....	5
4. The Book of Hosea.....	7
5. The Book of Micah.....	9
6. The Book of Zephaniah.....	11
7. The Book of Nahum.....	13
8. The Book of Habakkuk.....	15
9. The Book of Obadiah.....	17
10. The Book of Haggai.....	19
11. The Book of Zechariah.....	21
12. The Book of Malachi.....	23
13. Review.....	25

**Copyright**

- This title is Copyright © 1998, Jeff S. Smith, All Rights Reserved
- All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## *Lesson 1: Joel (c. 830 B.C.)*

Joel's prophecy was occasioned by the tragic aftermath of a plague of locusts, which was exacerbated by a drought and severe wildfires. From this insect invasion, the prophet draws a lesson on repentance and righteousness. Unless the nation was turned back to its Lord, the locusts would be followed by more severe judgment—an invasion of enemy nations.

Joel's theme is the invincibility of God and his ultimate cause on earth. The prophet calls on the people to consider the locust plague as a mere warning of punishment to come if they persist in denying the will of God. He pleads with them to repent of their sin and avert the awfulness of the day of Jehovah upon them. That day will be a moment of deliverance for God's people and these Hebrews should make themselves of that class.

The enemies of Israel are the Philistines, Phoenicians, Egyptians and Edomites. Joash, the boy king, was probably still growing up. Hazael, king of Syria, was beginning to make trouble for Israel and Shalmaneser III of Assyria was advancing in a drive to conquer the west.

The most noted part of Joel's work is in the second chapter, in which he predicts the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Peter witnesses the fulfillment of this prophecy in Acts 2 as the Spirit falls like tongues of fire upon him and the eleven. Because of these wonderful promises to those who overcome, Joel is a book marked by hope, though it begins very gloomily.

Joel's book can be divided into two sections. The first part (1:1-2:17) records Joel's words concerning the meaning of the locust invasion and its call to repentance. The second part (2:18-3:21) records God's direct words of assurance to those who are converted back to him and destruction to all those who are not.

We know precious little about Joel, save that he was the son of Pethuel; we know less of his father. Still, we can discern great courage in the prophet, in that he spoke to a stubborn people about the impending judgment of God against them. Judah's economy was teetering toward collapse as the Lord chastised his wayward people and Joel knew why. Exposing sin is never easy, but Joel does it with boldness and humility.

Furthermore, he showed knowledge of the temple and its worship and knew how to take advantage of the opportunity to preach repentance.

Joel's message merits our study today because repentance is too little emphasized in a society where the words "wrong" and "sin" have been sanitized into "inappropriate." The impetus of Joel's message should be reinvigorated for every soul of man that is at odds with God's will.

Finally, his prophecy concerning the Holy Spirit gives insight regarding the apostles' experience on the first Pentecost after Jesus's resurrection.

1. What was the great national tragedy (Joel 1:1-12)? Deuteronomy 28:15-45 speaks of something similar. According to verse twenty of that chapter, what was the general purpose for this?

2. What act did Joel describe in the call to lament, wail, and fast (1:13-20)?

3. Describe the sorrow and destruction Joel foresaw. What “people” would comprise the invading horde (2:1-11)? From verse three, describe the destruction this army would bring.

4. Was there still hope to avert this disaster (2:12-17)? Why wouldn’t outward acts be enough?

5. A major shift in the tone of this book occurs in Joel 2:18-27. In general, what would God do and why would he do it?

6. What did Peter understand Joel 2:28-32 to describe (see Acts 2:1-21)? According to Joel 2:32, why shouldn’t a diligent servant of God fear the day of the Lord (see Second Peter 2:9, First Corinthians 1:8)?

7. Why would God judge the various nations for their part in harming Judah, if it was according to his plan and will (3:1-17)?

8. What blessing was there for God’s people (3:18-21)? Explain verse 21.

9. Identify and summarize a New Testament passage about repentance.

## *Lesson 2: Jonah (c. 800 B.C.)*

Jonah has been the target of many critics throughout the ages. Some who believe on the Lord nevertheless see Jonah as a myth. As children we are taught about Jonah, but as we grow older we tend to forget that there are some very valuable lessons to learn from the Old Testament. In Jonah there are four situations in which we as Christians find ourselves. The book of Jonah is divided into four brief chapters and can be seen as a summary of Jonah's various standings as a soldier in service to God.

Two powerful kings ruled in Palestine as Jonah wrote. Uzziah reigned in Judah while Jeroboam II sat on the throne of Israel. A period of relative peace had begun as Israel pushed back her enemies in the north and Judah stayed hers in the south, but that peace would prove short-lived—Assyria was beginning to oppress the surrounding nations and her capital of Nineveh was gaining note for its wickedness and brutality. The Jews of this era were characterized by luxurious living and narrow nationalistic views.

The theme of Jonah has carried through to the New Testament – God is not willing that any should perish (Second Peter 3:9). The people of God are to remember this always and not become so haughty in their salvation that they believe others to be beneath them or it. Christians can be cut out as easily as they were grafted into the vine of Christ (Romans 11:19-22).

Jonah was a preacher of good news for Israel and effective in his delivery, though unwilling to serve initially. He thought God mistaken at times and chose the quixotic tactic of flight. Jonah's reluctance to preach in Nineveh was understandable, for God had restricted Israel from social connections with other nations and Assyria had proven herself to be a tyrannical people. Although modernists dismiss the story of Jonah as a farcical impossibility, the Bible considers him a real person (Second Kings 14:23-28 and Matthew 12:38-41). His prophetic contemporaries included Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah.

Our age is marked by broad tolerance of religions, sects and philosophies. Christians are often afraid to say that Jehovah is the only true and living God and that all others are false. They are intimidated into accepting all belief systems as equally viable. Humanism and Islam have gained much ground as the devil has infected the world with a tolerance that will lead to its demise.

Jonah teaches that there is one true God and that all men must approach him with worship and the hope of grace and mercy. He also shows it is utter folly to attempt to flee from the presence of God. God will find us.

Additionally, the prophecy reminds us of the zeal of our youth and tests our conversion to be like little children. It is people and souls that matter, Jonah learns. No matter who they are or where they came from, God made them and they deserve the chance to hear the gospel.

1. What was God's charge to Jonah and how did he respond (1:1-3)? Why?
  
2. What was the origin of this storm (1:4-9)? Who was praying here—the heathen or the man of God? How did Jonah respond to the sailors in verse nine? What was particularly hypocritical about his identification?
  
3. To whom did the sailors pray before (1:10-16)? Now, to whom? Was the calming of the storm an answer to the prayer of sinners?
  
4. What was the second thing God has prepared for Jonah (1:17-2:10)? Did he show gratitude or sorrow over this? Were there any signs of penitence?
  
5. What was Jonah's command from God this time (3:1-4)? Did he obey? What was his message?
  
6. Did anyone in this brutal city repent (3:5-10)? How can God repent, according to verse nine (see also Joel 2:14)?
  
7. How did Jonah react to his success (4:1-4)? Why?
  
8. What was the third thing God made for Jonah (4:5-11); how did he react?
  
9. What was the fourth thing God prepared and Jonah's reaction? What was God's lesson for him?
  
10. What does this book teach us about the acceptance of other gods and religions today?

## *Lesson 3: Amos (c. 760 B.C.)*

Syria had subjected Israel for a time, but then Syria fell and Israel was free. Israel had peace from 805-740 during which Jeroboam II restored her borders to those of David's day. King Uzziah did likewise for Judah, but with Israel's prosperity came injustice, luxury and greed. Religious rites were present in abundance but there was little true righteousness. This age of success and prosperity became an era of moral decay.

After all God had done for this people in rescuing them from slavery and giving them a home, the Hebrews had not returned faithfulness and worship to him. They became as cruel as their enemies and reveled in selfishness and rebellion. Israel became overconfident in the presence of God, forgetting that his fellowship with them was conditional upon their loyalty, and so God took the spoiled child over his knee and prepared to teach her a lesson.

This prophetic work was a promise of impending punishment on the nation of Israel. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." That phrase must have seemed an oxymoron to the self-absorbed Hebrews, but being the nation of God gave Israel not only special privileges but also the special obligations that come with stewarding such wealth. The people of God had grown complacent and had failed to carry out that responsibility and so God was now allowing their punishment at the hands of an invading army.

Amos stepped out of the obscurity of a common shepherd for these few brief moments in the spotlight to encourage restoration in Israel. He stood apart in his country because he saw clearly the sad conditions of his day and spoke indignantly about such corruption. He indicted his countrymen from top to bottom and raised the specter of impending divine retribution.

You can take the prophet out of shepherding, but you can't take the shepherding out of the prophet. We hear the object lessons from his regular occupation throughout this book. Whether he was hearing a lion or watching the sunrise, we know that he was a man not afraid to sweat.

Amos was the "burden bearer" who took upon himself the task of speaking the oracles of God to a corrupt population. He left his home in Tekoa, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, to lead an assault against the excesses of the big city.

We could note five timeless lessons from Amos:

1. Justice between men is right before God.
2. Privilege implies responsibility.
3. Failure to take responsibility demands punishment.
4. Nations and people must live up to the knowledge granted them.
5. Even elaborate worship, if heartless, is an insult to God.

1. To what eight nations did Amos prophesy doom (1:1-3:6)? Why would the last two be punished? What special gift had Israel ignored (3:1-2)?
  
2. Describe the picture of destruction Amos paints (3:7-4:5). Why were the matrons to be punished (4:1-3)?
  
3. How had God attempted to correct Israel (4:6-13)? Why? What was Israel's reaction?
  
4. Does it seem like the people will listen to Amos (5:1-20)? According to verses 14 and 15, what did they need to do? What does the Day of the Lord hold for the people?
  
5. List four things God would refuse from Israel (5:21-27). What did God desire more than these?
  
6. What did God think of their pride (6:1-14)? What illustrated it (verse 13)?
  
7. What three things did God show Amos (7:1-17)? What was Amaziah's reaction? Would Amos concede to Amaziah's command in verse twelve?
  
8. What does God show Amos next (8:1-14)? According to verse two, what did this signify? Describe the coming famine of verse eleven.
  
9. Amos has prophesied the destruction of Israel at the hands of Assyria. When was this fulfilled?
  
10. What are the ramifications of this prophecy (9:1-15)? Where is it quoted in the New Testament?

## *Lesson 4: Hosea (c. 753-687 B.C.)*

The theme of the book of Hosea is God's patience and wrath; it is wrapped up in a human metaphor of marital infidelity, which stands for man's disloyalty to his obligations to his Creator. Hosea addressed the northern kingdom of Israel, called Ephraim after its largest tribe, but also the sins of Judah, and wrote sometime between 753 and 687 B.C.

Hosea used his good love for his faithless wife, Gomer, to illustrate the incomparable love of God for man. It was a prophetic reminder that God was watching and desired to extend his mercy when man wants it.

Hosea wrote a few years after Amos and the corruption in Israel had only worsened in the interim. Her sin was described as deeper even than adultery; it was harlotry. By the late eighth century, the people had become ignorant of God's laws and were paying homage to the Baals instead.

Hosea teaches us about the nature and character of God, noting that the people's ignorance about him was at the root of their problems. There is but one God and he is omnipotent, righteous and loving.

He also tackles the pride of the Hebrews in being the historic people of God. This privilege had always been conditional upon their keeping his covenant and they were now violating it. Their privilege was at risk.

The name "Hosea" means salvation, deliverance or help. His message promises deliverance to those who overcome the spiritual harlotry that marked Israel in this age, the polytheism and heartless worship.

Little is said about Hosea's background. We learn, however, that he had a solid insight into the religious, social and political corruptions of his day. His tender love for Israel is like God's and his longsuffering devotion to his harlot wife completely parallels God's patience with his people.

It is obvious Hosea occupied some position of distinction and some have said that he must have been a priest because of his knowledge in that area. While the matter cannot be understood perfectly from the text, we can see that Hosea held nothing back when it came to accusing the priesthood of its part in Israel's downfall.

Hosea's troubled marriage is at the epicenter of this book. He was directed by God to marry Gomer, a woman of harlotry. Hosea was loyal to her, though she constantly cheated on him with other men. Through this horrible experience, the prophet learned firsthand the suffering, unrequited love that Jehovah felt for Israel, his bride.

Hosea is much different from Amos, in that his message is marked by love and sympathy. Hosea was very emotional, yet still indignant about sin.

The world today is rife with false gods and religions and our Lord is still crying out for loyalty. Even churches are sometimes guilty of giving themselves to the devil, to the world, and to the worship of the individual. Such is spiritual adultery and God is again the rejected bridegroom.

1. What seemingly strange command does God give Hosea (1:1-11)? What does Hosea do? What are the names of her offspring and their significance?
  
2. How does the spiritual condition of Israel compare with the fidelity of Gomer (2:1-23; see also Isaiah 57:3-10)?
  
3. What did God instruct Hosea to do about Gomer (3:1-5)? Explain.
  
4. According to Hosea 4:6, why were the people to be destroyed (4:1-19)? The earlier verses describe some of the effects of this—what are they?
  
5. According to Hosea 5:11, what had Ephraim heeded (5:1-15)? Was this good enough for God? How will God treat Israel?
  
6. Hosea issues a call to repentance and a prayer for “rain,” but how is Israel’s faith like a morning cloud (6:1-7:16)?
  
7. What object must go (8:1-9:17)? How does this sin compare to Gomer’s (9:1)? Identify the condemning and explanatory statements of 8:7 and 8:14?
  
8. After all this talk of destruction, why didn’t Hosea cease his call to repentance (10:1-13:16)? How did God feel about Israel (11:1-9)?
  
9. Would Israel be restored (14:1-9)? From where will refreshment come? What does James 4:4 call “friendship with the world”? Explain.

## *Lesson 5: Micah (c. 750-687 B.C.)*

Assyria had become a world power by the 730s B.C. Tigleth-Pileser's westward march led him into Syria and Israel by 738 and the kings of these nations were forced to pay tribute. Israel's King Pekah had revolted but Judah refused to join the revolt. Therefore, Syria and Israel allied to attack Judah. King Ahaz then asked Assyria to help him. Tigleth-Pileser attacked Damascus and took much of Israel also in 732. Hoshea became a vassal king, ruling from Samaria. He rebelled and Shalmaneser, who succeeded Tigleth-Pileser, punished him by sacking Israel in 722.

New revolts against Assyria ensued. Sargon II and Sennacherib ruled that nation for the rest of the eighth century and in 701, Sennacherib's armies came to defeat the armies of Egypt and Judah. They took all but Jerusalem because God protected the city by smiting 185,000 Assyrians at her walls (Second Kings 19:35, Isaiah 37:36).

Most everyone from prophet to prince to judge to businessman was corrupt; the religion had become shallow and mingled with idolatry and witchcraft. The theme of the book is aptly stated in the sixth chapter: Man should endeavor to uphold justice, mercy, and a humble walk with his God.

In his book, Micah stresses the holiness of God and his authority in a simple, yet forceful manner. It is this simple – as long as the people of God are willfully obedient, God will favor them, but if they stray by heart or hand, God will eventually abandon them. God's favor cannot be obtained by sin or by thoughtlessly observing ritual. It is attained by grace and living the right kind of life based on those weightier principles. The prophet helps to add to the Old Testament portrait of the Messiah as well, giving a vital piece of the puzzle that we might identify him.

Micah lived about twenty miles outside of Jerusalem near a great highway, which ran from Assyria to Egypt. He had a keen insight into the meaning of world events and spoke with strong, simple clarity. He used the sword of the Spirit to peer beneath the Hebrews' superficial religious reforms and find a rotting carcass of corruption. As surely as God was dissatisfied, so was Micah.

Micah was a prophet contemporary with Isaiah, but they differ mainly in background. Isaiah was a city fellow and Micah was of the country, a man at home with the soil and alien to the corruption and pace of the big city. He spoke as a common man to the sin of the dignitaries of Israel and filed a lawsuit against her on Jehovah's behalf.

The forcefulness of Micah 6:8 is almost as timeless as Ecclesiastes 12:13. The rebuke is loving, yet bold to all those living outside Christ and outside the church. It is, however, just as pointed to those who think themselves all right, when in fact, their religion is not heartfelt any longer. Like the saints in Laodicea, we are cautioned against becoming lukewarm.

1. What two capital cities would be punished (Micah 1:1-16)? What fate would befall one of them, according to verses 6-7?
  
2. What were the transgressions of those in authority (2:1-13)?
  
3. What three classes of people were indicted in chapter three (1-12)? What was the sin of each? Was Micah among this group? How do you know?
  
4. What did the prophet describe (4:1-13)? Compare it to Isaiah 2:2-4.
  
5. Micah prophesies primarily to Judah about its destruction. Compare 1:16 and 4:10. What did Micah prophesy about Judah's fate? What would be the fate of her enemies, according to Micah 4:11-12?
  
6. What major prophecy was detailed at the beginning of Micah 5:1-15?
  
7. What did God desire of his people more than sacrifice (6:1-8)?
  
8. Why have not all decided to walk humbly with God (6:9-16)? Whose statutes do they follow instead?
  
9. Who was trustworthy in Israel (7:1-13)? Whom could Micah trust?
  
10. How would God show mercy to the world again (7:14-20)?

## *Lesson 6: Zephaniah (c. 640-609 B.C.)*

Josiah was the king of Judah between 640 and 609 B.C. He followed God throughout his life and upon being shown a copy of the Law of Moses, he undertook remarkable reforms in the nation. Zephaniah does not emphasize Josiah's reforms—possibly because both prophet and king knew that the result would be outward reform but no real inward change.

Assyria had been the power for nearly a century as Zephaniah worked, but the empire had cracks in its seemingly impenetrable armor. The city-state of Babylon declared its independence in 626, hinting at the world power she would soon become. Judah's aggressor was rising from the corpse of Israel's.

The sins of Judah that the prophet noted include corruption, injustice, luxury, and Baal worship. The leaders were evil—traitorous people, warped judges, profane priests and vicious princes. The time for judgment was at hand.

Zephaniah's prophecy was wrapped up in the impending "Day of the Lord," in which Judah and every nation that interacted with her would face a devastating temporal judgment meant to startle men back toward the Lord.

Zephaniah's name means literally, "Jehovah hides" or "Jehovah has hidden" or "treasured." God would hide the redeemed in the hollow of his hand and hide himself from the lost. It was up to man to choose where he wanted to be.

Zephaniah traced his ancestry back four generations to King Hezekiah, meaning that the prophet was of royal lineage, giving him a unique perspective and place among the minor prophets.

It would seem he lived in Jerusalem, though what he did there is completely unknown. Perhaps he dwelt in the king's household, but there is no way of knowing.

Josiah's reforms did not impress Zephaniah, or at least, he made no reference to them. Zephaniah had the vision of a righteous man and saw through the pretense of superficial reform to the lingering worldliness and idolatry of the people.

The impending judgment upon Judah is typical of the coming judgment upon all mankind; there is one last great Day of the Lord yet to come upon the earth, in which all souls will be judged. Learning from Zephaniah's warnings about Judah's prospects should cause modern man to search his own soul and make it ready for inspection.

As he traced the pattern of God's judgment against all nations, he reminds us that the sovereignty of Jehovah is universal and that every knee will bow and accept reward or punishment without redress in that day. Only through the blood of Jesus can a man be rescued from his sin and redeemed.

1. What was the sin God immediately pointed out (Zephaniah 1:1-6)? How are some of the Levitical priests included? Compare to Hebrews 10:38.
  
2. What message did God have for the transgressors (1:7-13)? What will be the fate for those who think God cannot act in the affairs of men (verse 12)?
  
3. Describe the Day of the Lord as it is portrayed in Zephaniah 1:14-18.
  
4. What was the message to the people of this “undesirable nation” (2:1-7)?
  
5. What was God’s forecast for the powerful Assyrian empire (2:8-15)? What had Nineveh said in her heart that hastened her downfall (verse 15)?
  
6. To which wicked city does God turn his attention when he leaves Nineveh (3:1-7). How are these four higher classes pictured in verses three and four?
  
7. How had God tried to chastise Judah to avoid destruction? How had she responded?
  
8. What was this pure remnant for the future (3:8-13)?
  
9. Even as great national sorrow and destruction were coming, why was there still the possibility of joy (3:14-20)?
  
10. When did Zephaniah’s prophecy about Judah’s destruction find fulfillment? What about his prophecy of the pure remnant of God’s people?

## *Lesson 7: Nahum (c. 663-612 B.C.)*

The book of Nahum primarily addresses the residents of the great Assyrian capital city of Nineveh. Throughout her history, Nineveh was known as the most brutal and bloody city in the world. Finally her wickedness caught up with her and she felt the hot anger of God.

Nahum prophesied about Nineveh's fall while Assyria was at the apex of her power—Esarhaddon II was taking the throne as Nahum wrote. Oppression and injustice reigned in Nineveh and Assyria and as the nation was the world capital for brutality, Nineveh became the symbol of all the enemies of God.

No Bible book emphasizes the wrath of God quite like Nahum. Even the judgments on the ancient world in Genesis are not accompanied with the furious explanations that God gave the Ninevites. Nahum, however, leaves the rebuke of Judah to his contemporaries, focusing instead upon the great and dreadful inhabitants of Nineveh, whose ancestors had repented when Jonah memorably arrived 160 years earlier.

Nahum prophesied in the same basic era as Zephaniah and Habakkuk, but his message was directed toward the heathen of Nineveh rather than the people of God in Judah. His name, which means “Consolation” implies to the beleaguered Judah that her oppressor would meet its end. It was no consolation to its direct audience in Nineveh.

Nahum calls himself a resident of Elkosh, probably a village in Judah or southern Palestine. Because we know nothing of his home, we have no help in discovering his occupation either.

Nahum was evidently a very poetic writer, possessing the ability to carry his reader fluidly from point to point. While his style is forceful and his subject matter grave, Nahum made it exciting and appealing.

Nahum emphasized the aspect of God that most people would like to forget—his wrath and ability to judge and condemn the unrighteous, sentencing them to doom. Many people prefer to focus on his love and mercy and ignore the consequences of his immutable justice. Man would do this at his own peril, for God's love of truth and righteousness demands his corresponding hatred for falsehood and wickedness. His justice demands that the unmerciful be judged without mercy.

While the reader may cringe at the punishment meted out upon Nineveh, he must remember that the doom pronounced upon the ungodly in this age is no less terrifying. To those who know not God or refuse to obey the gospel they hear, God will come with flaming fire of vengeance (see Second Thessalonians 1:1-8).

Nineveh's downfall in 612 is a lesson in apostasy, for she had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but relapsed over time. The Christian must watch out for his own soul, lest it return to the mire (see Second Peter 2:20-22).

1. What notable Hebrew prophet had preached to Nineveh before? How long ago? What was the result then?
  
2. What did God plan for the wicked (Nahum 1:1-11)? Why is his patience mistaken for impotence or indifference (Romans 2:1-4, Second Peter 3:9)?
  
3. What did God have in mind for Nineveh (1:12-15)? What had Nineveh done to deserve punishment? How would this benefit Judah?
  
4. The restoration of feasts, predicted in verse fifteen, was fulfilled in Second Chronicles 35. What discovery made this possible, according to Second Chronicles 34:14-21?
  
5. Describe the sarcasm with which the prophet addresses Nineveh (2:1-2)?
  
6. Compare the state of the Ninevites before punishment with their condition after punishment (2:3-12).
  
7. What phrase ought to have struck fear into all within earshot (2:13)? What does it mean for people today (First Peter 3:12, Psalm 34:16)?
  
8. What will become of the haughty and bloody city (3:1-11)? Look especially at verses three and five. What other grand city had fallen despite apparent invincibility?
  
9. When would a remnant of Nineveh return to restore their city (3:12-17)?
  
10. When was this prophecy about the fall of Nineveh fulfilled (3:18-19)?

## Lesson 8: Habakkuk (c. 640-609 B.C.)

As Habakkuk wrote, Judah was sliding down the hillside toward doom and destruction. Her wicked sister, Israel, was gone and Judah was little better morally. The debauchery in Judah troubled Habakkuk because God did not seem to be responding, but God's intention, when revealed to the prophet, astounded him even more.

Babylonia had been restored by Esarhaddon during his Assyrian reign. After his death, Ashurbanipal took the throne and held it when Habakkuk was working. Babylon would assert its independence from Assyria and then dominate its former motherland, showing a lust for violence and property.

Good king Hezekiah was succeeded by the evil Manasseh in Judah. A generation later, King Josiah turned to God early in his life and made sweeping reforms, though the people's hearts never really changed as much.

Instead of taking Jehovah's message directly to the audience, Habakkuk took the complaint of the people to God. The righteous minority in Judah loathed the iniquity that surrounded them and they wondered in frustration why God did not act against their declining society. Habakkuk's book is a familiar cry of sorrow in the midst of sin. It takes the entire book, but Habakkuk eventually resigned himself to God's will.

Much about him is strained with mythology; what we learn of him must come from his own writings. His name literally means "embrace" and his book shows the desire of God to embrace the righteous in safety. We can learn nothing of his home or occupation from this record. Habakkuk was an honest doubter who thought God was wrong or too patient or even unjust. The sin around him repulsed him.

Habakkuk teaches us how to live in a world that is marked out for annihilation, to tarry here as sojourners and pilgrims and escape to heaven in the end. For those troubled with questions concerning the apparent bliss of the wicked and suffering of the just, Habakkuk gives us the insight and broader, more perfect, perspective of God.

We learn that God will indeed bring the thoughts and deeds of the wicked to nothing in his time. Unrighteousness will not go unpunished and charity will not go unrewarded (Hebrews 6:10). We must be patient and hope for the best for all men.

Habakkuk teaches that faith is truly about faithfulness. Those who believe God will be loyal and obedient to him without reluctance.

Habakkuk asks the hard questions and receives the plain answers. We should not trouble ourselves with such early concerns but place our citizenship in heaven and our hopes in the hand of the Almighty who knows how to preserve his children and enrich them in the end. Cunningham Geike wrote, "To solve the problem for his fellow-countrymen still faithful to Jehovah is the great aim of his book" (*Hours With The Bible* 354).

1. What was Habakkuk's first question (1:1-4)? What was his state of mind?
2. With what shocking words did God reply to Habakkuk (1:5-11)? According to verse nine, what was the Chaldean (Babylonian) mind set on?
3. How did Habakkuk respond (1:12-2:1)? What was his next concern?
4. God provided a major theme in Habakkuk 2:2-4. Whom did he chastise and whom did he declare upright? Compare verse four to its New Testament references in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38-39.
5. How would God repay the Chaldeans for punishing his deserving people (2:5-8)? What three woes are described (2:9-11, 2:12-14, 2:15-17)?
6. What sin did God punish in his woe (2:18-20)? Explain the importance of keeping silent before the Lord (see also Zephaniah 1:7).
7. Chapter three marks a climactic change in tone and language. What did Habakkuk ask God at that point in the narrative (3:1-2; see Psalm 85:6)?
8. What persuaded Habakkuk of God's justice in dealing with his people in this way (3:3-16)? What emotion did Habakkuk admit when he initially heard about God's Babylonian intentions?
9. When did the Chaldeans sack Judah (3:17-19; Second Chronicles 36:15-21)?

## *Lesson 9: Obadiah (c. 570 B.C.)*

Although some scholars place Obadiah's prophecy in the ninth century before Christ, evidence seems somewhat stronger for a date around 570 B.C., as Babylon had just sacked Judah and her capital of Jerusalem. This book was clearly a reaction to an invasion of Jerusalem and the theme was a condemnation of Edom for her part in the plunder. Babylon began to conquer Jerusalem in 606 B.C. and continued until the devastation was complete in 586 B.C.

Obadiah was not called to preach God's will to Judah, or even to Babylon for that matter; he was instructed to prophesy to the nation of Edom. Edom was a sister state to Judah; she had descended from Esau, Jacob's brother of Genesis days (Genesis 36:1). Although Jacob and Esau were able to reconcile their differences (Genesis 32), Judah and Edom continued to spar throughout their histories (see Second Samuel 8:13-14).

As Babylon came raging into Judah, Edom committed grave sins against her sister. Edom did not instigate the invasion, but she was guilty of standing on the other side (verse eleven). Edom had claimed neutrality as her sister state was attacked but her neutrality proved utterly false.

Edom was a proud nation that felt secure in her own defense. She looked with derision and resentment upon Judah and mocked her when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, but did not escape God's notice and both Babylon and Edom were made to pay for their parts in the invasion (see also Jeremiah 49:7-22, Psalm 137:7).

Obadiah was sensitive enough to be hurt by the lack of brotherly love shown by Edom to Judah. He was courageous enough to denounce people who had once held land in the territory where he now lived. He was confident in God's power.

His name means "Servant of Jehovah" and his courage bears this moniker out well. Nothing more, however, is known of this man.

Some question Obadiah's authenticity as a prophet of God because he focuses so much upon vengeance, but this message of vengeance is nothing unique to Obadiah and it only reinforces the history of closeness between the Jews and God. His vengeance is upheld throughout the scriptures as just and certain.

The sermon against pride can begin here in Edom, who found that hubris leads to a certain fall (Proverbs 15:25, James 4:6). Prideful vanity and independence will be exposed and judged when a man departs from God. Obadiah also cautions the modern reader against fraternal injustice, treating a brother contemptuously. He warns us about sharing in the spoils of sin and that a man will reap what he sows. Finally, we learn that there is always a means of escape for the just.

1. Enmity between Edom and Judah began long before this time. What happened in Genesis 25 that caused strife between Esau and Jacob? What happened in Genesis 27 that exacerbated the problem?
  
2. In Numbers 20:14-21, how did Edom hinder God's people?
  
3. Some commentators date Obadiah around 845 B.C. What invasion of Jerusalem took place at this time, according to Second Chronicles 21:16-19?
  
4. What deceived Edom (Obadiah 1-4; see also First Corinthians 10:12)? How could they hide from God (see also Hebrews 4:11-13)?
  
5. How thorough would the destruction be (5)? What three sources of strength would be insufficient (6-9)? What lesson is this for our generation?
  
6. For what crime would Edom be punished (10-11)? How can believers today become similarly guilty (see Proverbs 24:11-12, First John 3:16-18)?
  
7. List eight things God says Edom should not have done (12-14).
 

a.	e.
b.	f.
c.	g.
d.	h.
  
8. What was then "the day of the Lord" (15-16)? What is it now (First Corinthians 5:5, First Thessalonians 4:13-5:2, Second Thessalonians 2:2, Second Peter 3:1-13)?
  
9. What did the future of Jacob hold (17-21)? On the other hand, what will become of Esau? When did these prophecies find fulfillment?

## *Lesson 10: Haggai (c. 520 B.C.)*

By 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar had demolished Jerusalem and the temple. The Babylonian line of rulers became weak after Nebuchadnezzar and lost power to Cyrus of Persia, and in 538, Cyrus issued a decree that the exiles should return to their homeland and rebuild their temple. The exiles had laid the foundation for a new temple by 536.

Opposition, however, developed from the Samaritans and Cyrus was persuaded to revoke the decree. The Jews returned to their own houses and left the temple unfinished for the next sixteen years, but by 520 B.C., Haggai and Zechariah appeared and began to urge them to get back to work and complete the construction of the temple. The people were poor and discouraged as a result of unproductive crops while much effort was being expended with little results. Faith had waned because of the disappointment, although there was great nostalgia for the days of Solomon's temple.

Haggai's name, which means "Festival," was among the remnant that returned from Babylon with Governor Zerubbabel and the High Priest Joshua to rebuild the nation, its temple and religion. He also appeared in the fifth and sixth chapters of the book of Ezra; still, we know little more about him than that he was a bold prophet.

Haggai was single-minded—building the temple was all he seems to have had on his mind. Haggai recognized that God had sustained this remnant and returned them to Jerusalem for the purpose of reconstructing Judaism from its ashes. He became the conscience of the remnant, pointing to their paneled houses and unproductive fields and forcing them to consider that their selfishness toward God was cutting off his blessing.

Haggai was impressive and irresistible in his call to action. He was tired of all the excuses and sloth that put work off for leisure and wasted precious days in God's service. Along with Zechariah, Haggai exhorted the remnant returning to Israel to get busy and overlook their other troubles. If they would be found doing the labor of the Lord, he would bless them richly.

Haggai was a man of strong conviction who spoke bluntly and plainly. He saw a work that needed to be done and challenged men to do it.

Today's temple is not made with hands, nor composed of bricks and mortar. Instead the temple of God today is his church, built with living stones upon the foundation of the Savior and his apostles and prophets. Even if the church might not possess the size and splendor of days gone by, it is not ours to long for the past, but to carve out the present and prepare for the future.

There is a work for saints to do today, to spread the gospel and place stone upon stone in that temple, by saving souls. We must not become distracted by selfish concerns that draw us away from labors that have eternal ramifications.

1. What did God say was the people's attitude toward rebuilding the temple (Haggai 1:1-2)? What group of people would discourage them from this work (Ezra 4:1-6)?
  
2. What command does God issue in Haggai 1:3-11? What were their living conditions like? According to verse nine, why was this so?
  
3. How did the leaders and people respond to Haggai (1:12-15)? Compare verses fifteen and one. How long did it take Haggai to stir up the people?
  
4. How long had the people been working on the temple at this point (2:1-5)? The third chapter of the book of Ezra details the laying of the foundation. Why might some of the people have wept (Ezra 3:8-13)?
  
5. Haggai prophesies about the latter temple being greater than Solomon's temple and is quoted in Hebrew letter (2:6-9). Understanding the context of Hebrews 12:22-26, what latter temple would bring peace and glory to God?
  
6. Now how long had the people been working (2:10-14)? What point did God intend by asking about seed in the barn and how they had fared?
  
7. Why hadn't God blessed them yet (2:15-19)? When would things begin to improve?
  
8. What would God do with the strength of Gentile kingdoms (2:20-23)?
  
9. Whom was it that God has chosen to be a signet ring? Compare this with Matthew 1:12-13. What was the significance?

## *Lesson II: Zechariah (c. 520 B.C.)*

The book of Zechariah deals with the same subject as Haggai – rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. Where Haggai used blunt rebuke, Zechariah employs figures and symbolism to enhance that initial message.

The remnant of the Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity to reconstruct the Hebrew way of life. It was necessary that the lineage and worship be continued so that God could send his Messiah into the world in the future. Zechariah aids Zerubbabel and Haggai in encouraging the people to get busy and build the temple upon the foundation they laid over a decade before, and in spite of the apathy and resistance that had developed.

Moreover, Zechariah's temple message has a deeper bearing upon God's plan for humanity. He gives a vivid description of the coming Messiah who would bring blessing to all humanity.

Zechariah labored in the same era as Haggai and did similar work. He was a different man, though, and proclaimed visions of future glory. Zechariah began two months after Haggai; the temple was finished in 516.

Zechariah uses figures and symbolism to enhance the blunt message of Haggai. His speech looks beyond the temple construction to the office of the Messiah to come. It is the longest and most difficult of the minor prophets.

Zechariah was described as a young man with visions of future glory. He preached in figures and symbolism, in contrast to Haggai, who was blunt and plain. He readily looked beyond the immediate temple to the Messiah.

Zechariah was a priest in God's service, but called into prophecy about a month after the temple work was restarted. Zechariah could see beyond the conflict of the day to a time when the temple would be finished and functioning again, but he looked beyond even that physical structure to the spiritual temple and its Messiah.

In an age of doubt, Zechariah offers us ample evidence of the divine hand. These prophecies were given more than 500 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem to a woman named Mary, yet they paint a graphic portrait of the Nazarene carpenter who would die upon a Roman cross as a ransom for all. After reading these predictions, there can be no doubt that Jesus truly was the son of God.

Most striking is the prophecy about the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas Iscariot and their eventual use to buy the potter's field. Therein, we see men so antagonistic to Christ that they killed him, testifying that he was the fulfillment of these predictions.

Zechariah reminds us that the church is the people, not the building. As a collective, believers are the temple of God.

As in the book of Haggai, we learn that the Lord's work demands our top priority and diligence. It should not be left undone so that we can focus upon this earth and ourselves.

1. What challenge and reward does God present to the people (Zechariah 1:1-6)? What important lesson should they have learned from their fathers?

2. Describe the eight visions that Zechariah has in the next several chapters.

**PASSAGE**

**VISION BRIEFLY DESCRIBED**

- 1:7-11
- 1:18-21
- 2:1-5
- 3:1-5
- 4:1-14
- 5:1-4
- 5:5-11
- 6:1-15

3. How long has God been angry with Judah (1:7-20)? What was said of the nations God used to punish Judah? What does God plan for Jerusalem now?

4. Whom was God to bring forth (3:6-10)? Compare this to 2:11 and 9:9-10.

5. What relative of Zerubbabel built the original temple? Who was being crowned here? What offices are merged in this type of the coming Messiah?

6. What was the problem with the people's fasting and religion (7:1-14)? How could this apply to our lives?

7. What are the four conditions (8:14-23)? Would it be only Jews coming?

8. Identify the Messianic prophecies that occur in the following verses:

**PASSAGE**

**PROPHECIES BRIEFLY DESCRIBED**

- 3:9, 13:1
- 9:9
- 11:12
- 12:10
- 13:7-9

9. What would flow from Jerusalem (14:8-11; John 7:37-38)? What will be the King's realm? When was the temple finally completed?

## *Lesson 12: Malachi (c. 445-432 B.C.)*

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament record and is dated a century after Haggai and Zechariah. Israel still had many spiritual problems, divorce and heartless worship chief among them.

Over a century had passed since the exiles returned to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the temple. Ezra had returned in 457 B.C., followed by Nehemiah, who rebuilt the walls of the city. Greek culture had begun to bloom in the fifth century B.C. as Europe was succeeding Asia as the world's intellectual center. Palestine was in serious economic depression and the social order had failed, too. Divorce and injustice were rampant.

The people had lost faith in the words of Haggai and Zechariah, but they did not return so ardently to the simple idolatry of old, the worship of molten calves and emblems. Instead, idolatry was now practiced in the form of materialism and selfishness. Divorce was a part of this.

The priests misled the people and offerings to Jehovah were held back in their empty worship. They gave the crumbs to God and expected to reap a bounty of blessing.

Malachi's other lasting message is that a forerunner was coming one day in the future that would prepare the way for the Messiah. From this point, the Jews began to look for these two to arrive.

There is some dispute whether Malachi was a real person or if the name designates an anonymous messenger, as his name could indicate, but no other prophet wrote anonymously and it is unlikely he did either.

Malachi had the courage to speak on problems like divorce while giving the Jews one last chance to keep the Sinai covenant. It is doubtful he knew that he was inscribing the last written prophecy of the age, but he wrote with such urgency anyway.

Malachi allowed God to cry out for justice and sincerity. True worship, from the heart, was the center of his plea.

Malachi's message concerning true worship hints at the doctrine of Christ given in John 4. Acceptable worship must come from the book *and* the heart. It must be scriptural and heartfelt for God to receive it. Worship without thought is vain, as is worship that is without Bible blessing.

In a time of increasingly common divorce, Malachi points out that God hates divorce. What he joined, man should not be putting asunder.

Finally, we see the prediction that John the immerser would precede the Christ and prepare his way by preaching a message of repentance and converting the hearts of men back to the right. John was the answer to this Elijah prophecy and yet another sign that Jesus was divine.

The Old Testament closes, leaving the world to wait for 400 years for God to speak again. The Jews continued to read and search for the Christ.

1. From what Genesis character did Edom descend (Malachi 1:1-5)? After being defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, what did Edom plan to do (verse 4)?
  
2. How had the priests despised and defiled God (1:6-14)? What did he challenge them to? What group would one day make pure offerings to God?
  
3. The people of Malachi's day found worship a weariness. In what ways? How do Christians make worship a weariness today?
  
4. What did God want given to his name that the priests were denying through their actions (2:1-9)? What was God's position on this (verse 3)?
  
5. What was the priesthood's purpose; how had they served that purpose?
  
6. How had the people broken God's marriage commands (2:10-16)?
  
7. What two erroneous statements had wearied God's patience (2:17)?
  
8. Who was to be the messiah's forerunner (3:1-7)? Who was to be the messenger of the covenant? What would be his purpose?
  
9. How had the people robbed God (3:8-18)? What would become of the faithful few?
  
10. What did God want the people to do as they waited for the Messiah (4:1-6)? Who was God going to send (Mark 1:1-8)? What does Luke 1:17 say his purpose was?

## *Lesson 13: Comprehensive Review*

1. Why had the locust plague come upon Israel in the book of Joel? How did Peter understand Joel's prophecy (2:28-32; see Acts 2:17-21)?
2. Where did God want Jonah to go? What lesson does God teach Jonah in chapter four of his book?
3. What special gift had Israel taken for granted according to Amos 3:1-2? Who would go on to destroy Israel and when?
4. What does the relationship of Hosea and Gomer represent? Discuss the faith of Ephraim and Judah described in Hosea 6:4
5. What was to happen in the latter days (Micah 4:1-4)? Explain.
6. What would be the fate of those who believe God cannot act in men's affairs (Zephaniah 1:12)? What was Zephaniah's key message to the people (2:1-3)?
7. How long had it been since Jonah worked in Nineveh when Nahum prophesied?

8. What were Habakkuk's two questions in chapter one of his book? What was Habakkuk's request in chapter three?
9. What nation was being punished for her part in plundering Judah, according to the book of Obadiah? Who were Israel's and Edom's famous distinct patriarchs? When did Edom fall?
10. What was Haggai's message from the Lord in Haggai 1:5-7? What was the construction job described in Haggai? When was it completed?
11. What was God's challenge in Zechariah 1:3? According to Zechariah 7:1-7, what is more important to God than fasting?
12. What does Malachi tell us God hates (2:13-16)? What else does God hate, according to Malachi 1:6-14?
13. What two persons would God send, according to Malachi's prophecy?

**RECONSTRUCTION**

**Joel**



830

**Jonah**



800

**Amos**



760

**Hosea**



753-  
687

**Micah**



750-  
687

**Zephaniah**



640-  
609

**Nahum**



663-  
612

**Habakkuk**



640-  
609

**Obadiah**



570

**Haggai**



520

**Zechariah**



520

**Malachi**



445-  
432

**FALL OF JUDAH**

**FALL OF ISRAEL**

Revised December 29, 2016 8:04 AM

Copyright © 1993

Jeff S. Smith

All Rights Reserved

[www.electronicgospel.com](http://www.electronicgospel.com)

Reproductions may be freely made and used, provided proper credit is given to the author and no charge is ever made in association with this material without the express written consent of the author.