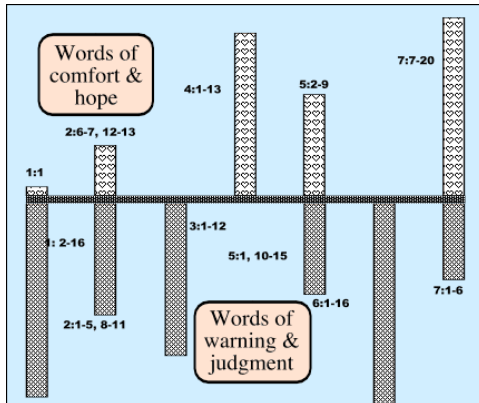


## The Voice of the Minor Prophets – Part 2

### Lesson 1: Micah

Background: Micah (name means “Who is like Yahweh”) was fourth in a line of the great prophets of Amos Hosea and Isaiah who prophesied in the late 8<sup>th</sup> Century, BC against the decadence of Judah and corrupted religious practices. He prophesied against both Northern and Southern Kingdoms around 700 BC during the reign of Hezekiah and is quoted in the book of Jeremiah (26: 18 – 19)



The primary message is a warning to change their ways or disaster will strike. He specifically accuses them of moral failure, oppression of the poor, injustice and decadent religious practices. Even though Hezekiah was a relatively good king and introduced religious reform, he did not impact the moral and ethical

bankruptcy of the people.

The book alternates between words of doom and words of hope (see diagram) and Micah urges the nations to change their ways and seek after the true ways of God. They were faking it as God’s people. God is going to clean out the useless chaff and keep only the good kernels of wheat to rebuild his people as a holy nation. You will recognize some favorite verses of Scripture and the promise of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah.

### Read Chapter 1

1. “Hear” is a key word in Micah. “Shema O Israel” is the Deuteronomic Command to listen and obey. Think of the 10 commandments and the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5 - 7. *Do we really take God seriously? Do we hear him?* This is the question of Micah. Vs. 3 – 4: is this a God that should be ignored? How do we obey the heart of God without becoming legalistic?
2. Vs. 5: Samaria and Jerusalem were the centers of worship and that is the center of their downfall – they have failed to worship the true God and take him seriously at his word. Vs. 9 “For her wound is incurable” is a very hopeless statement. *What things in our society seem incurable?*
3. Who are your friends? Micah describes surrounding neighbors of Judah and Israel and their fates as well. “An acquaintance will share in your prosperity, but a friend will share in your adversity.” What qualities are important to you in a long-lasting friendship?

## Read Chapter 2

4. The words, “because it is in their power to do it” is a very indicative statement of the injustice happening in so many aspects of life. People take advantage of others simply because they can – they have the power to do it. The first 5 verses speak of premeditated evil, not thoughtless harm but deliberate acts of injustice. *Name some “sanctioned” evil in our society where the powerful deliberately take advantage of the weak. (Perhaps banks?)*
5. When Micah warns of their impending downfall because of their social ills, the prophets say, “don’t say such things”. But Micah responds in verse 7b that such warnings are good for righteous people because they want to change and do well. Those who would prefer to ignore the warnings do not care that their actions harm others. *How well do you receive a challenging word that your behavior needs to change? Are you defensive or open to learn and change?* The people of Israel do not listen. In verse 11, the people would rather hear good news, “prophesying plenty of wine and beer”!
6. Vs. 12: But God does promise deliverance for those who will listen – the “remnant”. There is a common theme in the Old Testament of God preserving the faithful as a remnant of believers through which his people may be renewed. It is often not the majority rule but the minority that truly hears God’s voice and responds. *Can you think of any modern day examples of this – of the minority speaking truth to the larger body?*

## Read Chapter 3

7. Micah contrasts his ability to prophecy in verse 8 – 12 with the false rulers and prophets of verses 1 – 7. These are hard verses to read as they show the depth of corruption existing among those who were supposed to be looking out for the welfare of the people. The very ones in verse 1 who should know justice are the perpetrator of horrible crime. There is no softening of this message. *Share any examples of ways religious leaders might profit from the church or cause people harm. (Consider the scandals around the residential schools).*
8. The Israelites and leaders of the time believed that no matter how God punished them for their sins with drought, pestilence, war, etc, Jerusalem would never fall because it was God’s holy city. This prophecy of Micah that Zion would be destroyed seemed heresy. *Do we have any sacred space or place that we believe is beyond destruction?* What is some of the theology surrounding Israel today? Why do Christian nations side more with Israel than with Palestine? Are they counting on a false promise that Israel must be a nation before Christ will come again? Share any thoughts you have on this topic.

Read Chapter 4: 1 – 5

9. Verses 1 – 3 are a direct quote from Isaiah 2: 1 – 4. The rest of Micah reflects material from Isaiah 40 and other known sources. It is believed that the rest of the material in Micah was accumulated and added near the end of their time in exile. God's judgment has already been executed and the people are now in Babylon awaiting their salvation. Micah gives them hope that indeed, God will allow them to begin again as his people. *In what ways are we exiled from God's perfect dream for us of peace on earth? What is our hope?*
10. The rest of the chapter acknowledges that the people once again lack a ruler and the promise of a true king is made. *Why did Israel want their own king so badly?*

Read Chapter 5: 1 - 5

11. This is the most famous passage in Micah as it identifies Bethlehem as the town from which the Messiah will come, connecting this hope with the line of David. *Recall if you can, the significance of the town of Bethlehem.* {Here was David's birth-place, and here also, in after years, he was anointed as king by Samuel (1 Sam. 16:4-13); and it was from the well of Bethlehem that three of his heroes brought water for him at the risk of their lives when he was in the cave of Adullam (2 Sam. 23:13-17)}
12. In verses 7 – 8 tells how God's people should act as there are scattered throughout a foreign land. God's people are dispersed throughout other nations. *What advantage does this offer? As Christians, we often feel in exile as God's kingdom is yet to be realized in full. How ought we behave in our "exile"?*
13. Verses 9 – 15 make a peace-loving person cringe, for they talk of swift and severe revenge of the remnant against their captors. Do you feel that this idea of revenge is still valid in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus? Discuss your thoughts on revenge and forgiveness.

Read Chapter 6: 1 - 8

14. Micah now paints a picture once again of what God wants for his people. Define together through the negative and positive statements listed in this chapter how God desires his people to act.
15. The sadness in the voice of God for the rest of the chapter is reflected in the words of Jesus. Read Matthew 24: 37 and compare. How is it that we are so immersed in the love of God and yet so blind to his desires for us?

Close with Chapter 7: 8 – 9, 18 - 20

16. When we have sinned, what is our best response and hope for healing?

## Lesson 2: Nahum – Vengeance is Mine

The book of Nahum is in direct contrast to the book of Jonah, though Nahum and Jonah share the same thoughts. Nahum is an extravagant poem written about the hopeful demise of Nineveh, capital of Assyria. He predicts its destruction with relish and that makes the book difficult for us to pull out life lessons and spiritual truths. Where Jonah was corrected for wanting Nineveh to be destroyed, Nahum is allowed to vent his rage against this wicked place, trusting that God will indeed make them pay for their evil ways against Judah and Israel. In some ways, this book has been viewed as the least beneficial of all Scripture, but there are some truths to consider. First of all, God is the Lord of history and his hand is in all things, seen or unseen. Secondly, he leaves his desire for vengeance in the hands of his God.

Time line of Assyria and Judah:

- 841 BC** Israel pays tribute to **Assyria**.
- 750-705 BC** Peak of the Assyrian empire.
- 729 BC** Babylon is occupied by Assyrians
- 721 BC** Israel is conquered by Assyria.
- 612 BC** Downfall of the Assyrian empire.
- 597 BC** Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem.
- 597-587 BC** Jews are deported to Babylonia
- 587-539 BC** Jewish exile in Babylonia. Old Testament is written
- 539 BC** Fall of Babylon, conquered by Cyrus of Persia. Return of the Jews

Read through the whole book of Nahum

1. In our English translation, we miss the fact that chapter 1 is an acrostic poem from the Hebrew alphabet, beginning with Alpha (A) and going through 16 – 22 letters in alphabetical order. It is believed that chapter 1 was added as a preface to the original poem of Nahum which begins at chapter 2 through to the end of the book. So the book of Nahum consists of two poems. Chapter 1 – 9 reminds us that God is not to be trifled with and he is both powerful and active for the righteous and severe on his enemies. *How do you feel about this description of God?*
2. The book of Nahum is considered “a glorious piece of impetuous poetry . . . (and) one of the great masterpieces of classical Hebrew poetry ranking with the Song of Deborah (Judges 5) and David’s lament (II Sam. 1: 19 – 27)”. This may be more why it is included in the canon than its actual message.

Outline:	1: 11 – 14	Nineveh’s crime and punishment
	2: 1 – 5	The attack
	2: 6 – 10	The flight and capture
	2: 11 – 13	Nineveh’s crimes
	3: 1 – 4	Woe to the blood city
	3: 5 – 19	The Fall of Nineveh

(Quote and outline taken from The Interpreter's Bible, Pg 956)

3. Note that Nahum does not call for a rise in arms or for Israel and Judah to fight Nineveh. He leaves the fate of the city in God's hands, believing that they will come to their own undoing because of their evil ways. *What is the message that we can glean from this approach?* Read Matthew 26:52
4. How would Nahum have felt if God had asked him to preach the same message of Jonah and the city repented? How do you deal with your own righteous anger against evil and injustice?

### Lesson 3: Zephaniah and a lesson in History

Time line of Assyria and Judah:

**841 BC** Israel pays tribute to **Assyria**.

**750-705 BC** Peak of the Assyrian empire.

**729 BC** Babylon is occupied by Assyrians

**721 BC** Judah is conquered by Assyria.

**612 BC** Downfall of the Assyrian empire.

**597 BC** Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem.

**597-587 BC** Jews are deported to Babylonia

**587-539 BC** Jewish exile in Babylonia. Old Testament is written

**539 BC** Fall of Babylon, conquered by Cyrus of Persia. Return of the Jews

When Judah became a vassal state of Assyria, Manasseh, King of Judah compromised much in order to please the Assyrians. He allowed the worship of all of their gods and the God of Abraham became one of many. He allowed the high places for worship of these idols and corruption was rampant. His name is synonymous with evil for he was such an evil king. His successor only lived for two years before being assassinated and so the young boy, King Josiah became king.

It is believed that Zephaniah was a great grandson of King Hezekiah and cousin to Josiah. Josiah was the good king who brought in many spiritual reforms and commissioned the writing of the Book of Deuteronomy that summarized the laws of Moses to remind the people how they were to live. Unfortunately, his reforms were too little, too late. With the fall of Assyria came the conquering Babylonians and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Zephaniah was a student of the writings of Isaiah as he quotes their writings. He speaks out against religious corruption and the corruption of the palace, but has little sensitivity to the plight of the poor, perhaps because he was an aristocrat. He speaks out primarily against spiritual rebellion and syncretism and moral treachery.

The book opens by speaking out against idolatry, warns of God's wrath and impending judgment. It closes with defining true worship that leads to rejoicing and blessing.

#### Read Chapter 1: 1 – 13

1. In verses 2 – 3, these words seem to contradict the promise given to Noah that God would never destroy the world again. At times it seems that there is nothing in the world worth saving. *How do you feel about this present age? Are you generally hopeful that good will win the day or does it feel like evil is overtaking the world? Sometimes we might feel like God needs to start over again, like Zephaniah.*

2. Verses 4 – 6 show that the people tried to serve all the gods instead of the one true God. *What are ways we try to follow the ways of Jesus and the ways of the world at the same time?*
3. Verse 12 – what are some of our sins of complacency or lethargy?

### **Read vs 14 – 2:3**

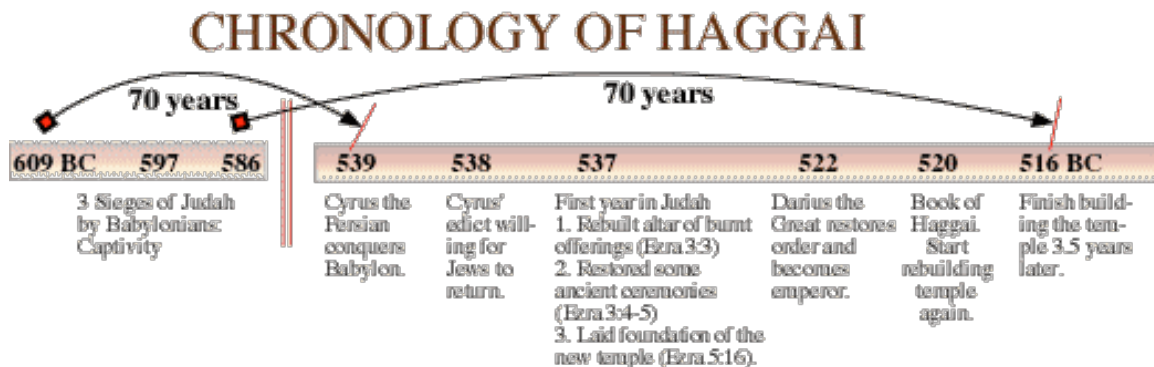
4. “The Day of the Lord” seems to refer to a time when “time” as we know it is no more. With all of the cycles the world seems to go through – empires rising and falling – people turning to God, then falling away – wars increasing, it seems that that only the “end of time” will stop the cycle of violence and unfaithfulness. *There is one cure – humility. What does that word mean to you? Define humility? In what ways can the church today demonstrate humility?*
5. The rest of chapter 2 declares the destruction of the enemies of Judah from the four directions. Phillistia from the west; Moab and Ammon from the East; Ethiopia to the South and Assyria from the north. There is no doubt that God will have victory over his enemies. *Can you find any glimmers of hope in the midst of the words of judgment?*

### **Read Chapter 3**

6. Though the external enemies of Judah are under God’s judgment, so too are the internal enemies of Judah. Their problems are not rooted in the rule of Assyria but their unfaithfulness to God in the midst of struggle. There is no excuse for abandoning true worship because of external pressure. *Do we offer any excuses because of the ways of society that we cannot be as faithful to God’s ways? (Example might be Sunday shopping).*
7. Vs. 9 translates, “I will restore to the people a pure speech”. Reflect on Isaiah 6: 5. *What is the heart of Isaiah as revealed in these words? What attitude allows God to work in us to purify us? Read Acts 2: 1 – 4 . The vision of Zephaniah is that all will call upon the name of God in one unified language. How does this differ from Pentecost?*
8. Once again, the voice of doom turns to the voice of hope and some of the most treasured verses are found in Chapter 3: 14 – 17. Read these verses three times, each time with a different reader and allow them to soak into your very soul. What do they mean to you on a personal level? Where do you need to feel God’s delight or his quiet or his salvation? Share as you are able or journal your thoughts.

## Lesson 4: The Book of Haggai: “The Rebuilding of the Temple”

The people of Judah were exiled into Babylon for 70 years. When Persia conquered Babylon, King Cyrus allows the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem if they chose. Many remain in Babylon but a remnant makes its way home. What they find is very discouraging, as the temple has been completely destroyed along with their homes and businesses. They have to rebuild from scratch. Now another 20 years has passed and Haggai comes with a message. The people have built back their homes and businesses but they have not rebuilt the temple – the center of worship. The people offered their worship and sacrifice in the ruins of the temple and seemed to feel no urgency to rebuild. Times were hard and the people were barely surviving. But Haggai saw the appointment of Zerubbabel, a Jewish descendant of David as a sign of the messiah’s imminent return, thus he felt great urgency to rebuild the temple. He saw that their hard times were partly because they had misplaced their priorities and if they put God first, good times would return.



### Read Chapter 1: 1 - 11

1. Darius is now king of Persia. Note the specific dating of Haggai’s message according to his reign. Skimming both chapters, over what length of time did Haggai speak to the people?
2. The prophet makes a strong connection between their failure to flourish and their neglect of the temple. What is your belief about tithing? Do you connect being faithful in giving with receiving blessings in your own life? Are their consequences to not being faithful with our tithes and offerings.
3. Consider Exodus 23: 19. The theology behind the idea of first fruits is that we give to God the first and the best – not what is left over after we have worked out our budget, or what is left at the end of the month. By this act of faith – giving first of the best, it reveals that we trust God to see us through to the end? Do you have any stories where God has blessed you for trusting him with your finances?

4. Are there times that we put our own needs and wants ahead of the church? Is the church and the temple the same thing? What is the principle in this passage that we can extend to the days of the Christian church?

**Read Chapter 1:12 – 2:9**

5. Can you ever recall a time when you felt your church totally unified in a specific ministry? What was the energy like or spirit of the movement and what was the result? Do we seek unity enough in working together or are we too individualistic in our approach to Christian service?
6. The people are feeling quite discouraged because this temple is nowhere near the splendor and glory of the old temple. What might God be teaching them in this comparison?
7. Does the size or splendor of the temple change the presence of God in their midst? What priority is God asking the people to get straight?
8. It is my personal belief that God never wanted David to build a temple in the first place because he wanted to dwell amongst the people, not in a place. That is why he always dwelt in a tent – symbolically traveling with the people. Solomon caused great hardship on the people with heavy taxes to build his palace and the temple. Is that really what God desired? Consider how Jesus fulfills the place of the temple? Is it possible that God through Haggai is foretelling the greater splendor in referring to the coming of Jesus? (Consider 1 Chronicles 17: 4 – 14)

**Read the rest of chapter 2**

9. The priests are asked two questions: the first has to do with what makes a person holy – does just touching an object that contains something holy make you holy? The question is really asking if just having a temple makes the people holy. What really makes the people of God holy?
10. The second question asks what can defile something that is holy. Just because the people had repented and carried out the will of God today, it doesn't mean that they will continue to be a holy people – they can easily be defiled by sinful acts that lead to death. Read Galatians 5: 16 – 21. In this list of activities that lead to sin and death, to which sins are Christians most vulnerable?
11. “Give careful thought” – that phrase is used three times. What is God asking the people to think about very carefully?
12. Once again, the book ends with great promise that God will bless his people when they choose to put him first. What are ways that we,

the people of God could better show that God and his kingdom come is our first priority?

## **Lesson 5 and 6: Zechariah and the Messianic Age**

Written in 520 BCE, Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries and Zechariah began his ministry just a few months after Haggai's prophecy ends. He continues to urge the rebuilding of the temple and to build hope among the post-exiles that have returned to Jerusalem. Both these prophets can be credited with the founding of Judaism as we know it and the longing for a messiah to re-establish them as God's chosen – a holy nation set apart for greatness. Their dislike for the Samaritans in the North (as those who did not stay pure during the exile) grows as their sense of exclusiveness as God's people being established.

As God's prophet, there is a sense of "once removed" for Zechariah, as he receives visions rather than God's direct voice and the visions are not interpreted by God, but by angels. The people have felt God's absence through the exile and as life in Jerusalem continues to be a struggle, God's presence is thin. Soon, no prophet will hear God's voice as we move closer to the 500 years of "silence" before the coming of Jesus.

The predominant reference to angels is unique to Zechariah as well as the first mention of "The Satan" (the accuser) beyond the book of Job. Later, in II Chronicles, the use of Satan as a proper name is found. The visions themselves will feel foreign to us but were likely common images to his contemporaries and were intended to give hope for the coming of their messiah-king, whom both Haggai and Zechariah felt was their King Zerubbabel. Chapters 1 – 8 are only felt to be original to Zechariah and even these chapters have been slightly altered by a later editor but their authenticity, as the words of Zechariah are not in question.

### Read Chapter 1

1. Verses 1 – 6 call the people to once again repent so that they do not fall to the same fate as their forefathers. It is important to learn from past mistakes. Is there any change that you have consciously made to avoid mistakes made by your parents or extended family that you could share? What are some lessons that the church has learned? (eg – less "fire and brimstone" more love sermons).
2. Vision 1: the Four Horsemen (vs. 8 – 17) The four horsemen patrol the earth to see if there is any unrest among foreign nations (unrest was a sign of the coming age of the messiah) but at the moment there is peace, which signals that the time of the messiah is not yet. The delay is frustrating to Judea, but God assures them that he is still jealous for them and that their enemies will soon suffer for their sins. What might be some instances where your timing and God's timing don't seem to coincide?

3. Vision 2: Four Horns and Four Smiths (vs 18 – 21) The four horns (the horn was a sign of power or strength and four points of a compass) represent the four countries hostile to Judea (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome) but also reflects the whole “heathen” world to Zechariah – all directions. Do we long for destruction of our enemies or the salvation of those foes? Is there a difference from a New Testament perspective of vengeance?

#### Read Chapters 2 – 3

4. Vision 3: In these chapters, Jerusalem is measured and found worthy – there is hope and God is preparing to strike the enemy down. The wall around Jerusalem has not been rebuilt because God will be their protection – a wall of fire. This is a reminder that defense of God’s truth is God’s business. We need not build walls to keep people out. In what ways do Christians try to defend God and in the process become exclusive or offensive to those outside the faith? Where might we become defensive and fearful rather than trusting God’s truth?
5. Vision 4: A new high priest could be chosen for the new temple from the remnant that had stayed in Jerusalem and kept up the ritual practices in spite of the ruins, or chosen from ones that had returned from exile back to Jerusalem. There appears to be tension between the groups and some are questioning Joshua, who was a returned exile. Joshua is put before “The Accuser” and found worthy of the call. It is now his job to unite the two groups in worship, a tough job for any pastor! What are some of the divisions in church life that a wise leader must bring together or work with to build a healthy community? Consider your own pastor and the differing opinions he/she must bring into unity. Pray for their ministry right now.

#### Read Chapter 4

6. Vision 5: The Seven-Branched Lamp stand and Two Olive Trees. The lamp stand with its seven lamps is a symbol representing Yahweh, watchful over all the earth. The two olive trees represent Zerubbabel and Joshua, the two anointed ones, who stand under Yahweh’s protection and are filled with his spirit. These men represent both the secular and the sacred rule of Judah. Baptists hold to the separation of church and state. What does that separation mean and why is it important to religious liberty? Where might it be of value for the two to work together?

#### Read Chapter 5

7. Vision 6: The Flying Scroll – the removal of sin from the land is a necessary prelude for the coming messianic age. If Jesus had waited for the

sins of the world to be removed, would he have ever come as Messiah? How do we understand the timing of when God chose to send his Son into the world?

8. Vision 7: The Woman and the Basket: All the sin of the community is personified in a woman, (wickedness in Hebrew is in the grammatical feminine form – thus is represented by a woman) gathered up and carried back to Babylon, the home of wickedness. If only dealing with evil were that easy!!! This is the image of the scapegoat – that the sins of the people were transferred onto a goat and sent off into the wilderness. Here their sins are placed on this woman and carried off to a different wilderness. How did the coming of Jesus, his death and resurrection deal with sin? What is our salvation?
9. Name some times when the church has misread the signs and expected the end times when they have not occurred.

Read Chapter 6

10. Vision 7: The Four Chariots ( compare with the first vision of the four horses) The four chariots represent the same four countries as the four horns. Mountains represent barriers to God's purpose – powers that resist God. Red represented the Chaldeans who overthrew the Assyrians. Black represented the Persians who destroyed the empire of the Chaldeans. White was the Greeks who destroyed the Persians. Speckled represented the Romans and Greeks together who subdued Egypt and Syria. There is similarities to the visions in Revelations but there, red means war, black means famine, pale means death and white means surrender. I believe the primary message of the vision is that empires come and go and not to look to their success or failure, but to trust in the one that God will appoint to lead. In our day of politics, what kingdoms are ripe for a fall and which are rising in power? How does that make you feel about the future?
11. Zechariah is then told to collect the gold and silver from those who were keeper of the holy treasures while in captivity and to make a crown for Zerubbabel when he will become king. In all of prophecy there is a "now" and a "yet to be" and so though Zerubbabel was seen as the immediate king, it foreshadows the greater Branch – the coming of Christ as the final king of Judah and all kingdoms. It is important that the center of worship – the temple – be established before the ruler is established. If Canadians were able to get our hearts centered on God, how would it affect our politics or would it?

Read Chapter and 8

12. Bethel was in Samaria and a rival worship site. The people want to know if they should carry on the rituals of exile (they fasted as a remembrance of their sorrow over the destruction of the temple). Zechariah reminds them that rituals mean nothing without hearts of obedience. Consider verses 9 and 10. How were these practices meant to build a strong community and how does failure to do these things undermine community? Ritual is only of value when the community is faithful to God and his ways. What are some rituals we practice that lose their meaning when the community of faith is weak?
13. In Chapter 8, Zechariah paints a picture for those from Bethel of what Jerusalem and the temple will be like once everything is restored. It is interesting to note that he gauges the well-being of the city not on what kind of businesses or wealth will happen, but rather how the elderly and the children are cared for. (8: 4 – 5). How “well” is Canada? How well is your own church? Your own family?
14. What do the words, “Let your hands be strong” in vs 9 and 13 mean to you? How are we part of making this final vision of peace come true with our Messiah, Jesus Christ?
15. The prophecy ends with the wonderful words of incarnation, “God is with you”. It took another 500 years for those words to be realized in Christ. They continue to be our words of hope today as we pray for his kingdom to finally come and his will be ultimately done.

*Chapters 9 – 14 are not considered to be the work of Zechariah but were penned through various world events from period of Alexander the Great following the battle of Issus in 333 BCE through the time when Palestine was a state of Egypt (311 – 198 BCE) They record the continued hope for the Messiah and the final establishment of God’s kingdom and its extension to all peoples of the earth. It continues to be an encouragement to all believers awaiting the return of Christ.*

## **Lesson 7: Malachi**

The latest prophecies of this Old Testament period were anonymous. In order to preserve the idea of 12 Minor Prophets (12 being a sacred number) they took three anonymous prophetic writings and tacked 2 of them onto the end of Zechariah as chapters 9 – 14, and the third prophecy makes up the book of Malachi. Malachi has more unity than the other two and deserves to stand alone. The name “Malachi” simply means “my messenger”. (I had a friend at seminary who named her car Malachi for that reason!) Though not necessarily the name of the author, this book is believed to be the work of one writer. Nothing is known beyond the name.

Malachi was written around 450 BC and speaks to a time after the rebuilding of the temple but the people of Judah appear to be just going through the motions of worship, without their hearts. It was written just prior to the time of Nehemiah who brought about many reforms as referred to in the book of his name. We are again reminded that the time after the exile and the return to Jerusalem was a very difficult and uninspiring time. Their hopes for a fresh start and return to greatness are nowhere being realized. Even the faithful ask such questions as “What is the good of keeping this charge?” (3:14) or “Where is the God of justice? (2:17) or “Does God really love us?” (1:2). The priests conducted worship with indifference and neglected to give proper instruction to their people.

The writer uses the literary style of question and answer to work through the struggles Judah is facing and he tries to rationally hammer out some of the issues. The same struggle of why the chosen people of God must continue to suffer so much echoes throughout the centuries. Malachi gives three answers to this question: Yes, God still loves you but sin has its consequences; God is working now as seen in the fall of Edom, and in the end, justice will prevail.

### **Read Chapter 1**

1. This book refers to God as “Lord of Hosts” or “The Lord Almighty”. Malachi wants us to know that there is but one true God and he is Lord over all – there is no compromise in their worship. What is the name of God that is most meaningful to you?
2. Edom were the descendents of Esau and though the Israelites and the Edomites were blood relatives, there was great enmity between them, especially when the Edomites would not come to Judah’s aid when Jerusalem was under siege. Verses 2 – 5 referred to a specific event when the Nabataean Arabs permanently expelled the Edomites from their

old territory. Malachi used this event as an illustration that God is still on their “side”. How do you feel about these words, “I loved Jacob but hated Esau”? Does God have favorites? Does he “hate”? Edom was considered the symbol of cruelty and faithlessness. Look also at Romans 9: 13 – 15. Is God’s favour simply arbitrary or is there any basis behind who receives favour and who does not?

3. The offerings given by the priests were sub-standard – instead of the first fruits and the very best animals, they were giving the substandard offerings. If offerings are a sign of gratitude, what does this say about the hearts of their leaders? Are we giving our best to God in time? Effort? Resources?
4. How do you understand verse 11? Compare this with John 10:16. Is Judah correct in claiming special status with God or are there others that offer more honest, heartfelt worship than these “chosen” ones? What is God looking for in his people?
5. Verse 13 speaks of weariness? Does worship ever become a weary duty? How do we keep our worship fresh and our thanksgiving abundant?

## Read Chapter 2

6. There is a sadness in verses 1 - 9, along with the anger first expressed. The words are very harsh, and then there is a sense of remembrance of what the initial covenant was meant to be. It would be like reflecting back on early days of marriage when you couldn’t do enough for each other, but now hardly notice if the other is in the room. It echoes Chapter 2 of Revelation where the church has “lost its first love”. Share a time when you were most exuberant in your faith and has anything changed since then?
7. The Priest had the important role of teacher and their role was vital as God’s messenger to the people. How do we view the role of the pastor today? In what way is his word authoritative and in what way do we need to challenge and test that authority?
8. Vs 10 – 12 speaks of mixed marriages and the difficulties that brings in keeping true to the faith. Malachi calls for excommunication. Why is he so harsh? What behaviors or attitudes might compromise the Christian faith that would warrant some kind of expulsion?
9. We see a greater explanation in verses 13 – 17 in that Jewish men were putting aside their older Jewish wives and taking young foreign wives, ignoring the sacredness of the covenant. They were influenced by the polygamous culture around them and losing sight of God’s desire. Why has divorce become so prevalent in our society?

### Read Malachi 3

10. Malachi saw two stages to the coming of the Messiah – first he messenger and then the Messiah. The messenger could be simply referring to the prophets ( his own name) or to idea of the Elijah figure that was fulfilled by John the Baptist. The messenger is coming but will the people like what they hear? The refiner’s fire will burn away the impurity and leave only what is pure and holy, and then the people will offer fit sacrifices and offerings. When the temple has been cleansed and the house prepared for its Master, then God will come and set right the injustices which make men doubt his goodness. Are there any practices or attitudes to worship that God would love to burn away and purify in our own situation?
11. In verses 4 – 8, the prophet lists the social behaviors beyond the practices in the temple that need cleansing, as they still do today. The meaning of verse 6 is unknown to commentators. God is faithful but the Israel continues to be faithless and so they must return. The word literally means to “retrace one’s steps”. The people must return to the road from which they have wandered. In verses 9 – 12, the people ask the prophet to be more specific – “How have we wandered?” and so more accusations are laid at their feet. The people are robbing God. How have they robbed God? What are the consequences? How do we rob God of what is his?
12. More questions from the people, “How have we spoken against God”? They have said, “It is vain to serve God.” Have you ever wondered the value of serving God and how have you answered your doubts? Do “rugged individualists” seem to fair better in our world than those who seek to follow God?
13. The reply is that even if it doesn’t seem like justice is happening today and the faithful are being rewarded, God is keeping note of who is faithful and the righteous will be considered his special possessions. It feels good to please a parent and how much more it is blessed to please God! Jewish people did not have a great sense of “life after death” and expected rewards to be here and now. This is the first hint of a new theology of eternal life that would later be developed by the Pharisees. Is eternal life enough for you as reward?

### Read Chapter 4

14. This “hymn” is designed not so much to strike terror in the hearts of the wicked but to comfort the devout, so we shouldn’t take too literally the picture of destruction that is uncomfortable for our day and age. “Sun of Righteousness” is an image borrowed from Egypt where the winged disk of the sun represented a source of protection and blessing. Perhaps our

hope today is not so much that the wicked would be trampled but that they would be saved and come to right relationship with Jesus.

15. Verses 4 – 6 are considered an appendage added by the editor of the 12 minor prophets as a summary statement. How would you sum up the message of the 12 prophets for the church today?