

*THE HISTORY AND DESTINY OF GOD'S SON:*  
***THE MINOR PROPHETS***



By Dr. A.J. Culp  
Foreword by Dr. Tyler Smiley, Senior Pastor

 **Lakewood**  
PRESS



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The History and Destiny of God's Son: The Minor Prophets  
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## FROM THE SENIOR PASTOR

The classic C. S. Lewis series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, is a brilliant work that not only entertains children and adults with wonderful stories of adventure and the amazing land of Narnia, but also the stories carry strong allusions to the claims of biblical Christianity. The word pictures that Lewis creates in his writings have helped countless people better understand who the Lord is, what we are hoping for in our lives, what true courage looks like, and, of course, how great and mighty is our True King.

In one of my favorite scenes of the first book of the series that Lewis wrote—titled *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*—is when Mr. and Mrs. Beaver are telling the two young girls about the king of Narnia, named Aslan:

“Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion.”

“Ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

Scenes like this one are powerful and provoking in the best of ways. Each of the seven books tells a unique and different story about Aslan, Narnia, and a variety of beloved characters. Of course, each book can stand on its own, and most who have read have them have an opinion of their favorite ones. But, as with any good series of books, greater joy comes by going further into the series. So, after you are gripped by Narnia and Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, you can then go back and read *The Magician’s Nephew* to learn how Narnia came into existence, or read *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* to learn what real Narnian courage looks like in the smallest of characters. In other words, you can love Aslan by reading any one of the seven books, but to fully understand the story of Aslan and Narnia you must read them all.

One of the things that Dr. AJ Culp has helped me to see is that the books of the minor prophets in the Old Testament function in much of the same way. These books are individually so good and moving, that any one of the prophetic writings can grip your heart for the Lord. And within the books, there are scenes and phrases that bring to us a great-

er and deeper knowledge of the Lord. Since we are speaking of lions, one of the word pictures from the prophet Amos has always been so gripping to me. Through the prophet Amos the Lion of Judah reveals himself in this powerful way: “The Lord roars from Zion.” Those five simple words express so much truth about the majesty and power of our God, and about his grace in making himself known to us.

In this booklet, you will see how Dr. Culp writes about the *Book of the Twelve*, which was the way 12 books of the so-called “Minor Prophets” were organized in a particular way to reveal a fuller story of God. Certain books, or chapters, or verses from these 12 may stand out in your mind as formative or favorite, but what we will see over the course of this study is that when you put all 12 of these books together it tells an even bigger and greater story about our God and his True Son. In a similar way to The Chronicles of Narnia, when you read these 12 books together as a cohesive whole you will see this story of our great God, and what he did to accomplish salvation for his people.

Ultimately the *Book of the Twelve* leads us to see our desperate need for the True Son of God. Once when Jesus was explaining his use of parables he ended his explanation by stating, “For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:17 ESV). This “longing” that the prophets had, and the fulfillment of their hopes in Jesus Christ is story we get from these 12 prophets of God. I hope you will join us on this amazing journey as we walk beside these prophets, longing for God’s Son, and seeing our hopes fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A word of thanks is in order for Dr. Culp’s ministry in creating the content of this book. What he has provided here is a true blessing. And a special word of gratitude to Joy Willis who has done remarkable work, yet again, in designing and producing the booklet you now hold in your hands (or are reading digitally).

Grace to you, and Glory to the King,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T Smiley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Dr. Tyler Smiley, Senior Pastor  
Lakewood Baptist Church



# INTRODUCTION

**I**N “A Boy Named Sue,” Johnny Cash sings of a boy with a girl’s name. The boy was given this name by his father, who walked out on the family shortly after naming him. As such, the boy assumes his name was the final act of a cruel and cowardly father, meant to haunt him all his life. And haunt him it does, so much so that he vows to kill his father if he ever finds him. Later in life, the boy does meet his father, but in this meeting, he learns his father’s reason for naming him. The father planned on leaving the family and knew the boy would need to be tough to grow up without a father figure, so he gave him a name that forced him to become fierce. Of course, the song ends with the boy saying he still hates his name because of the trouble it has caused him!

The Minor Prophets have suffered a similar fate, though not intentionally. In the 4th century AD, St. Augustine began calling this collection of prophetic texts the ‘minor prophets.’ He did so simply because they were small in comparison to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, not because they were insignificant. Yet that is not how others understood the label. The label, over time, led people to assume the texts were insignificant and random, as if the Minor Prophets were like a box of off-cuts at the lumber yard, containing small, strangely shaped pieces.

This is deeply unfortunate, for nothing could be further from the truth. To begin with, these texts are not minor in significance, demonstrated by The New Testament’s use of them. The second chapter of Matthew alone quotes the Minor Prophets twice in showing Jesus was the prophesied Christ:

When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

## DAILY READINGS

MONDAY DEUT. 29:1–29; 30:1–10

TUESDAY AMOS 5

WEDNESDAY 2 KINGS 17:1–23

25:1–21

THURSDAY EZRA 1; 5:1–2

FRIDAY NEHEMIAH 1; 9

*For the first week of our study, the daily readings will be used to introduce the historical setting in which these prophets lived and ministered. These readings range from pre-exile (before the Israelites were exiled from the promised land), through the time of exile, and into the post-exile period (when the Israelites were returning to the land and rebuilding the temple).*



“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel’” (Matthew 2:3–6; Micah 5:2).

This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called My Son” (Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1).

These kinds of quotes are a theme of the four Gospels, which refer directly to at least eight of the twelve Minor Prophets. There are also direct quotations in Acts, Hebrews, and Paul’s epistles, not to mention allusions in James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. In other words, the New Testament does not treat the Minor Prophets as minor!

Furthermore, ‘Minor Prophets’ is not even the true name. The true name of this collection, dating back to ancient times and still used by Jews today, is the Book of the Twelve. So, while they appear separate in our English Bibles, in the ancient manuscripts they were found on a single scroll in a certain order. Undoubtedly, the twelve smaller books were originally independent; but at some point, in the ancient past they were brought together to form a single book called the *Book of the Twelve*, with the twelve prophetic voices acting like chapters in a larger book.


The ordering of the prophets is the same as we find in our English Bibles today: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The question, then, is why? Why were these individual prophetic books brought together to form one single book?

Among scholars, a number of proposals exist, but one makes the most sense: the *Book of the Twelve* parallels Israel’s covenant relationship with God. There are a couple of reasons for seeing it this way. Firstly, the order of the twelve follows the basic chronology of Israel’s history: pre-exile, exile, and post-exile. In this way, the Twelve begins in the 8th century BC with Hosea, moves through the 7th and 6th centuries, and ends in the 5th century BC with Malachi. Secondly, the order of The Twelve also mirrors the message of Israel’s prophets in general: *sin, judgement, restoration*.

As a whole, therefore, the *Book of The Twelve* is a snapshot, a thumbnail sketch, of Israel’s covenant relationship with her covenant Lord.

HOSEA  
JOEL  
AMOS  
OBADIAH  
JONAH  
MICAH



**SIN**

NAHUM  
HABAKKUK  
ZEPHANIAH



**JUDGMENT**

HAGGAI  
ZECHARIAH  
MALACHI



**RESTORATION**

This view also makes sense of the New Testament's use of The Twelve. Just as The Twelve captures the essence of Israel, who is called God's "firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22), so it looks forward to the hope of redemption of Israel through the final and true firstborn son, Jesus Christ. That is why, for example, the Gospel of Matthew quotes The Twelve as evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, for it sees in him the fulfilment of prophecy concerning Israel. Jesus's life paralleled Israel's life in key ways, but it also differed. Where Israel failed as God's firstborn son, Jesus succeeded. Jesus was the ideal son. In essence, the Minor Prophets speak of the history and destiny of God's son, and Jesus Christ fulfills this: in his life and death, he redeemed a historically sinful people; in his resurrection, he provided a picture of the future hope of those who trust in God.

**QUESTIONS  
FOR PERSONAL  
REFLECTION &  
DISCUSSION**

1. Before reading this, what was your own perspective on the Minor Prophets? Had you considered their theological significance before?
2. Had you ever considered that whole collections of books, rather than just individual volumes, might have carried a message in Scripture? What questions does this raise in your mind about interpreting the Bible?
3. If the Book of the Twelve was shaped with a particular message in mind, how would that affect our interpretation of individual books within the collection? That is, what questions should we now ask about a book such as Amos, for example?
4. If the Book of the Twelve was a prophetic collection about the history and destiny of God's firstborn son, how would we expect it to be used in the New Testament?



# WEEK TWO: HOSEA

**R**omans 9 is one of the most magisterial chapters in all of Scripture. It begins with the Apostle Paul's anguish over his fellow Israelites, with the apostle recounting the people's privileged history as God's people but also their failure to live worthily of this regal calling. He summarizes the problem by uttering the immortal words, "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Romans 9:6). By this, of course, the Apostle Paul means faith, rather than ancestry, is what makes someone a child of God. As such, it "does not depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Romans 9:16). The true children of God, Paul says, are those who throw themselves upon God's mercy and live by faith. And all this, he explains, is why the gospel had begun extending beyond Israel to the Gentiles

In the remainder of Romans 9, the Apostle Paul sets out to show this is not a new idea but was in fact the ancient plan of God. Paul does so by quoting key texts from the Old Testament prophets, especially Hosea and Isaiah. His use of Hosea is our focus here:

As he says in Hosea,  
"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people;  
And I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one" and,  
"In the very place where it was said to them,  
'You are not my people,' There they will be called  
'children of the living God'"  
(Romans 9:25-26; Hosea 2:23; 1:10).

DAILY READINGS	
MONDAY	HOSEA 1-2
TUESDAY	HOSEA 3-4
WEDNESDAY	HOSEA 5-6
THURSDAY	HOSEA 7-8
FRIDAY	HOSEA 9-10

Here the Apostle uses Hosea to highlight the universal scope of God's work and the vastness of his mercy. It turns out God's affections were never tribal, his intentions never parochial. He always intended to restore all of creation, from sea to sea and nation to nation. Israel was meant to be the beginning, not the end, of this restoration.

Yet it is interesting to note that, in the book of Hosea, these passages do not refer to the nations, but to Israel specifically. Their focus is narrow. Why, then, does the Apostle Paul apply them to all the nations of the earth? This is a key element in Paul's argument, which we shall return to soon. For now, we need to give a brief overview of the book of Hosea itself.

The prophet Hosea ministered in Israel in the 8th century BC. His writings stand out for a number of reasons, not least because his poetry and language are some of the most sophisticated in all the Old Testament. Along with the dialect of his Hebrew, Hosea's geographical references suggest he hailed from the northern kingdom. Apart from this, however, we know very little about his life and background.

Virtually all of what we do know comes from the book bearing his name, a book in which Hosea's family life was meant to represent God's relationship with Israel. The prophet himself married a prostitute, a woman named Gomer who endlessly chased after other lovers. And the couple had three children together, including a daughter named Lo-Ruhamah (meaning "not loved") and a son named Lo-Ammi (meaning "not my people"). The couple's marriage and family, therefore, stood as a living analogy of God's relationship with Israel. Despite the two parties having bound themselves together, Israel, like Gomer, continued to chase after other lovers (i.e., other gods). And the generations of Israel, like the prophet's children, turned their backs on God and were far from him. Yet God, like Hosea, continued to pursue his wife and even purchased her back from slavery, and he promised that, ultimately, he would restore her and her children to himself. They would be a family again.

The book of Hosea, therefore, provides a perfect opening to the Book of the Twelve for it encapsulates the covenant relationship. It poignantly pictures, on the one hand, Israel's defining proclivity, her sin of chasing after other lovers. And it pictures, on the other hand, God's defining tendency, his love for Israel and reckless commitment to her. And, in so doing, the book of Hosea ultimately highlights God's defining attribute: *his radical mercy*. The only reason Israel has hope for a future with God is because he is radically merciful.

And this is what the Apostle Paul focuses on in Romans 9. If God's people are a prototype for his designs for the rest of humanity, then his dealings with them will predict his future dealings with all humanity. So, when Hosea speaks of God's promise to take a people who are "not loved" and "not a people" and, through mercy, transform them into a people who are loved and embraced, he is speaking narrowly of Israel. But within that promise was a prototype for God's future dealings with all of creation, and so the Apostle Paul is right to apply Hosea's prophecy to the nations of the earth. As Paul says earlier in Romans,

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23–24).

This idea was not original to Paul; it began long before, as the book of Hosea makes clear. What is new in the New Testament is the identification of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

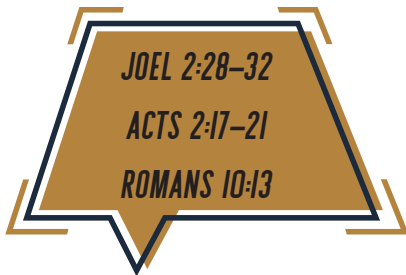
**QUESTIONS  
FOR PERSONAL  
REFLECTION &  
DISCUSSION**

1. Take some time to reflect on a key idea here: that Israel was a prototype, a model of God's intention for the rest of creation. What, then, does this suggest about the purpose of being God's "chosen people"?

2. Contemplate the governing image of Hosea: God as a husband who relentlessly pursues his adulterous wife, Israel. Since this image extends to God's people today, how does this make you feel as a Christian? That is, in times of struggle, doubt, and sin, how does this image comfort and strengthen you?

3. Now consider this imagery alongside the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32. Since most scholars think that, in this parable, the bitter older brother is the character that represents God's people, what might this reveal about the inclination of those "inside" the community toward those "outside"? How does this serve as a warning to us?

4. In fact, the idea of God's radical mercy extending to all people is at the center of much of the New Testament, especially in its discussions on why the Gentiles were now being grafted into the people of God. In short, God's mercy extends to all that he loves, and he loves all of creation. This is easy to accept when we are the recipients, but difficult to accept when certain people—who we deem unworthy—are the recipients. Please reflect on the following: Who today would be the most difficult to believe are recipients of God's mercy? That is, what kinds of people would we find most difficult to believe are now Christian? (For starters, it might be helpful to think of the most despised in our culture: those convicted of violent crimes, pedophilia, elder abuse, etc.).



## WEEK THREE: JOEL

As the early Church met to celebrate one of Israel's key religious holidays, something extraordinary happened:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:1–4).

The people who witnessed this were amazed, and they tried to understand what was happening. So wild were the scenes that some believed they were witnessing an early-morning drinking party!

At this, the Apostle Peter stood up to address the crowd, to explain exactly what was happening. These events, he argued, were none other than the fulfillment of God's ancient promises. Here Peter quotes from two Old Testament books in particular: Joel and the Psalms. Before we get to the use of Joel, however, we need to highlight some important background. This background was assumed by the early Church but will go unnoticed to most Christians today.

Crucially, Pentecost was one of three ancient pilgrimage feasts celebrated by the Jews, the others being Passover and Tabernacles. Three times a year, the people were to journey to Jerusalem to celebrate and worship together. By the time of the New Testament, each of these feasts commemorated a key event in Israel's journey from Egypt to the Promised Land:

- Passover = the exodus
- Pentecost = the revelation at Mt. Sinai
- Tabernacles = the wilderness wanderings

When they gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost, therefore, they found themselves in the company of crowds of other pilgrims, who were celebrating God's covenant-making and Torah-giving at Mt. Sinai.

Yet by New Testament times, the people understood that these feasts looked not only backwards to Israel's defining moments, but also forward to a time when God would restore Israel and call the nations unto himself (see Zechariah 14:16). There was some awareness, therefore, that ancient Israel's life was *prototypical*, that it was not just the pattern of the past but also the pattern of the future.

So, when the disciples gathered for Pentecost, they did so in commemoration of God's covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, on the one hand, and in expectation of his coming work of the New Covenant, on the other. And they would have known, too, the primary difference to expect when the New Covenant replaced the Old, since it had been made clear in the prophets: in the Old Covenant, God's law was written on tablets of stone, but in the New Covenant, it would be written on the tablet of the heart (Jeremiah 31:31–34). And the way in which this would happen was no longer through a mediator instructing the people in Torah, but through God's spirit indwelling people (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

<i>DAILY READINGS</i>	
<i>MONDAY</i>	<i>HOSEA 11–12</i>
<i>TUESDAY</i>	<i>HOSEA 13–14</i>
<i>WEDNESDAY</i>	<i>JOEL 1</i>
<i>THURSDAY</i>	<i>JOEL 2</i>
<i>FRIDAY</i>	<i>JOEL 3</i>

The description of the Pentecost event in Acts 2, therefore, subtly indicates how the Old Covenant has given way to the New. The event was akin to the original revelation at Sinai, for the Spirit's descent, described like "tongues of fire," echoes Yahweh's voice coming from the fire on the mountain. But the very coming of the Spirit upon people also indicates that it, rather than Yahweh's words written in the Book of Law, is now the medium through which God will instruct his people.

Yet this event reaches back farther still than Mt. Sinai; it reaches all the way back to the Tower of Babel, where, due to human sin, God confused the languages of the people of earth. Here, then, we witness the undoing of that event, as God enables people to speak in a common tongue, understood by all. On the first Pentecost since Christ's death and resurrection, therefore, the disciples did not, per tradition, renew their vows to the old covenant; instead, they received the Holy Spirit and became members of the New Covenant.

And that is what Peter describes in Acts 2, quoting from Joel to show that the Spirit's descent upon all people is a sign of the New Covenant's arrival:

"In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.  
I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.  
The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.  
And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved' (Acts 2:17–21, quoting Joel 2:28–32).

The wild scenes, Peter says, are not the result of revelry but of the Holy Spirit's descent upon the people, which signals the coming of the New Covenant.

Yet even this harkens back to the original revelation at Mt. Sinai. There, after the people had left the mountain, the Lord put his Spirit not only on Moses but on the seventy elders as well, so that they might minister on his behalf. But when Joshua saw this, he, like the onlookers in Acts, worried that things might spiral out of control and he begs Moses to stop it. But Moses rebukes Joshua, saying, "I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29). In other words, Moses expresses the desire for God's people—his "firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22)—to have the Spirit so that they might better represent God on earth. Moses's wish is finally fulfilled in Acts 2, when the church is born.



**QUESTIONS  
FOR PERSONAL  
REFLECTION &  
DISCUSSION**

1. Read Acts 2:1–12 and reflect upon this: Beyond the fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32, why do you think it was important for the apostles to see tongues of fire and the foreigners to hear the apostles speaking in their own language? That is, what was the significance of each experience for each group?

2. Considering that ancient religions viewed access to the divine—whether by priests or prophets—as a privileged and powerful role, what might it say about God’s kingdom offering such access to all people?

3. And why, do you think, God’s kingdom is based on all people having access to his Spirit? Please read Exodus 19:3–6 and Deuteronomy 31:9–13 and discuss why this might be the case.

4. Please read 1 Peter 2:9 and discuss, firstly, our own calling in the world today and, secondly, ways in which we accomplish this calling.



## WEEK FOUR: AMOS

In its infancy, the early Church had to navigate a series of identity issues. One of the key issues was its relationship to Judaism, from which it was born but now becoming increasingly distinct from. This issue came to a head when the gospel began extending to the Gentiles, for people began to wonder, “How can Gentiles become members of God’s covenant community?” That is the issue in view in Acts 15.

Acts 15 chronicles a foundational event called the Jerusalem Council, a council that addressed this very question in the early church. The council was convened because of an influential group of believers, comprised of former Pharisees, who were teaching new Gentile converts that they had to become circumcised and obey the entirety of the Mosaic law. So, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem to get the opinion of the apostles and elders there. What the council decided was that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised or bound by Mosaic law, for all believers entered the New Covenant in the same way: “We believe,” said the Apostle Peter, “it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (Acts 15:11).

After the Apostle Peter delivered the council’s verdict, James addressed the group and provided evidence of their decision from Scripture:

The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

“After this I will return  
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.  
Its ruins I will rebuild,  
and I will restore it,  
that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,  
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,  
says the Lord, who does these things’ —  
things known from long ago” (Acts 15:15–18, quoting Amos 9:11–12).

Here, again, an apostle turns to the Minor Prophets to provide evidence of God’s ancient plan to include all nations in his redemption.

Interestingly, the use of the oracle in Acts parallels its original use in Amos. In the book

of Amos itself, a certain shepherd from the south, Amos, is called by the Lord to travel to the northern kingdom, to deliver a message to the royal and religious leaders at its esteemed sanctuary city: Bethel. And the prophet's message is that, though the leaders are carrying out their religious celebrations with much pomp and circumstance, the Lord is not pleased. In fact, he is furious, for even though offering lavish feasts for the Lord, the leaders are allowing the vulnerable in the community to be oppressed, showing that they are not worshiping God truly. As such, God vows to destroy their false religion and, in the future, bring about the renewal of justice and righteousness, not only for the people of Israel but for all nations.

### DAILY READINGS

<i>MONDAY</i>	<i>AMOS 1-2</i>
<i>TUESDAY</i>	<i>AMOS 3-4</i>
<i>WEDNESDAY</i>	<i>AMOS 5</i>
<i>THURSDAY</i>	<i>AMOS 6-7</i>
<i>FRIDAY</i>	<i>AMOS 8-9</i>

The book of Acts, then, records the fulfilment of this promise, and it does so, like Amos, in order to correct the religious elite. In the case of Acts, the religious elite are believers who were formerly Pharisees, the most religiously scrupulous of Jews. These Jewish believers assumed Gentiles must enter the New Covenant as Israelites entered the Old: through obedience to the Mosaic law and the sign of circumcision. According to James, however, that misses the mark, much like the religious leaders in Amos's day missed the mark. In short, they mistook the letter of the law for the spirit of the law. The spirit of the law was grace, and its scope was always the whole of creation. And that is why James quotes from Amos 9:11–12.

**QUESTIONS  
FOR PERSONAL  
REFLECTION &  
DISCUSSION**

1. We typically think these texts are condemning hypocrites, those who profess one thing but practice another. Yet that is not quite true. The people in view here—the Israelite elite (Amos) and Jewish Pharisees (Acts)—were people who believed they were doing the right thing, but weren't. Because they were misguided on what it meant to be a true believer, they were keeping other people from God as well. What examples can you think of today where different Christian communities do this as well?
2. Now think of our own community. What things do we hold dear, that is, what are our core values? Is it possible that our expression of these might keep others from worshipping God? If so, how?
3. Consider a concrete dilemma: A boy is gifted in judo and has been invited to participate on the national team, but this would mean the family missing many Sundays of church. The mother and father are devout Christians, remaining committed to the church in other ways and committed to discipling their children despite missing Sundays. Yet the church has told them, in essence, they must choose between the boy's judo and the church, for missing Sundays is equivalent to no longer being a committed Christian. What do you think? Please discuss.



# WEEK FIVE: JONAH

The figure of Jonah makes for a fascinating study in the New Testament. On the one hand, no text from the book of Jonah is ever quoted in the New Testament. Yet, on the other, Jonah himself is key to some of the teachings of Christ in the Gospels. In this way, Jonah stands apart from all of the other Minor Prophets referenced in the New Testament, for, as we shall see, it is *his life* rather than *his words* that are seen as prophecy.

A perfect case in point is Matthew 12. This comes on the heels of chapter 11, in which Jesus provides evidence to John the Baptist's followers that he is Israel's messiah. His evidence, in essence, is a report of his miraculous signs: "The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Matthew 11:5). In other words, Jesus recounts to John's followers that his ministry is accompanied by the signs of God's kingdom breaking into the mortal realm.

DAILY READINGS	
MONDAY	OBADIAH 1
TUESDAY	JONAH 1-2
WEDNESDAY	JONAH 3-4
THURSDAY	MICAH 1-2
FRIDAY	MICAH 3-4

It is somewhat surprising, then, when in Matthew 12 the Pharisees and teachers of the law come to Jesus asking for precisely these signs: "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you" (Matthew 12:38). Yet this is Jesus's response:

He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:39-42).

Why, in this instance, does Jesus rebuke the religious leaders by citing the example of the prophet Jonah?

In Jewish thinking, the “third day” represented the day of God’s salvation. We see this in various places, such as Hosea 6:2:

After two days he will revive us,  
on the third day he will restore us,  
that we may live in his presence.

So, Jesus, in showing his coming resurrection as the ultimate fulfilment of God’s “third day,” refers to the prophet Jonah. But why Jonah? Jesus merely could have referenced the “third day” idea in general or quoted another passage such as Hosea 6:2. Why did he explicitly refer to it as the “sign of Jonah”?

Jesus referred to Jonah because, in so doing, he drew a parallel between multiple parts of the prophet’s life and his own. Not only did the prophet’s life—by spending three days in the belly of the fish—prefigure Christ’s death and resurrection. It also prefigured the message of salvation being joyfully received by the Gentiles. Just as Jonah’s preaching to the Ninevites produced repentance beyond that of the Israelites, so Jesus’s good news would prove more revolutionary among Gentiles than Jews. And this, Jesus says, is an indictment of the Jewish leaders who demanded a sign: the Gentile “Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it” (Matthew 12:42).

So, while with other Minor Prophets the New Testament cites key texts as prophecy, here it cites the very life of Jonah as prophecy. As one scholar described it, in the other Minor Prophets the focus falls upon “a few select passages,” but in the case of Jonah the focus falls upon “the biography of the prophet, who is considered a ‘type’ of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the story of Jonah prefigures the gospel of Jesus the Son of Man: his death, descent, proclamation, and resurrection.<sup>2</sup>

This is not unlike what we have already seen with the life of Israel, God’s “firstborn son” (Exodus 4:22), prefiguring the life of Christ. Here the difference is that one Israelite rather than the whole people prefigures the final Son of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise, eds., *The Minor Prophets in the New Testament* (London; T&T Clark, 2009), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Clay Alan Ham, “The Minor Prophets in Matthew’s Gospel,” pp. 39–56, in *The Minor Prophets in the New Testament*, eds. Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise (London; T&T Clark, 2009), 52.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Living the Resurrection: The Risen Christ in Everyday Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 52.

**QUESTIONS  
FOR PERSONAL  
REFLECTION &  
DISCUSSION**

1. In his little book, *Living the Resurrection*, Eugene Peterson makes this observation: "It's a curious thing but not uncommon for Christians to begin well and gradually get worse."<sup>3</sup> He goes on to point out that, typically speaking, the most joyful Christians are the most recent converts. Please take some time to discuss why you think this is the case.
2. In our passage, I think we find a similar dynamic at work. The experts of the law have so professionalized their work that they are missing the bigger picture, namely the appearance of the Messiah and the in-breaking of God's kingdom. All the while, the masses are embracing Christ. Consider some examples from your own life of times you've been so focused on the "business" of faith (teaching Bible studies, volunteering, discipling children, etc.) that you've overlooked the simple and profound joy of knowing Christ.
3. Now reflect on times you've seen "Gentiles" come to faith: atheists, Buddhists, Muslims, etc. What did you notice about their experience? And what can we learn from them?
4. As scholar Jon Levenson once commented, Christian hope is rooted in the life of Christ, meaning Christian hope is not that we will be saved *from* death but *through* death. This, in essence, is what we find in both the "sign of Jonah" and Christ's death and resurrection. How might this fundamental idea help set us free from the anxieties of life to rejoice in the promise we have in Christ?



## WEEK SIX: MICAH

The Gospel of Matthew intends at the outset to show Jesus of Nazareth as Israel's long-awaited Messiah. It therefore begins with a genealogy stretching from Abraham, the first patriarch, to Joseph, the husband of Mary, to demonstrate Jesus's royal lineage. Next, the Gospel moves to show further how this Nazarene fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, quoting, in chapter 2, three different prophetic texts as evidence: Micah 5:2; Hosea 11:1; and Jeremiah 31:15. The first of these, Micah 5:2, is our focus here.

Matthew 2 begins with magi from the east following a star to Jerusalem looking for the "king of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). Upon hearing this, King Herod is disturbed by news of a potential rival born in his realm and he gathers the priests and teachers of the law to inquire about where, exactly, this king of the Jews was meant to be born. And this is what they said:

"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:  
'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will be the shepherd of My people Israel'" (Matthew 2:3–6,  
quoting Micah 5:2–4).

As the religious leaders indicate, this text from Micah must have occupied an important place in messianic expectation.

The book of Micah itself is a collection of the prophet's oracles, delivered especially during the reign of King Hezekiah (see Jeremiah 26:18). Like his contemporaries, Amos and Isaiah, Micah cried out against the privileged in society abusing the vulnerable. If they did not repent of this abuse of the power, Micah said, Yahweh would punish them by tearing down both northern and southern kingdoms. Yet Micah also foresaw a time coming, "in the last days" (Micah 4:1), when Yahweh would restore the fortunes of his people, a time when he would send a just and righteous ruler.



“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.”  
Therefore Israel will be abandoned  
until the time when she who is in labor bears a  
son,  
and the rest of his brothers return  
to join the Israelites.  
He will stand and shepherd his flock  
in the strength of the LORD,  
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.  
And they will live securely, for then his greatness  
will reach to the ends of the earth (Micah 5:2–4).

<i>DAILY READINGS</i>	
<i>MONDAY</i>	<i>MICAH 5–6</i>
<i>TUESDAY</i>	<i>MICAH 7</i>
<i>WEDNESDAY</i>	<i>NAHUM 1–2</i>
<i>THURSDAY</i>	<i>NAHUM 3</i>
<i>FRIDAY</i>	<i>HABAKKUK 1–2</i>

The consummation of the “last days” is what Micah 5:2–4 speaks about, a time when Yahweh would return to his people and restore their fortunes. In particular, he would give them a just and righteous ruler to govern them.

And that is why the Gospel of Matthew quotes this passage from Micah (albeit only in part): it sees in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth the fulfilment of the ancient promise. But beyond his birth in Bethlehem, there are other points of connection as well. For one, it is interesting to note that Matthew moves from an ancient genealogy to quoting this passage from Micah, and this passage also speaks of the promised son having “ancient” origins (Micah 5:2). Furthermore, like other uses of the Minor Prophets, this passage suggests that the Messiah’s ministry would have global implications, reaching “to the ends of the earth” (v 4). This, of course, is also a focus of the Gospel of Matthew, which concludes with the Great Commission sending the disciples out to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

**QUESTIONS  
FOR PERSONAL  
REFLECTION &  
DISCUSSION**

1. One of the unique aspects of the Bible, running through both Old and New Testaments, is the principle of God's "upside-down kingdom." By this we mean the way in which God has chosen to work through the "least of these," rather than kings or powerful people, in order to reveal his goodness and majesty. Please read Micah 5:2–4 along with Matthew 2:1–15 and discuss how these verses signal the principle of the "upside-down kingdom."

2. The Gospel of Luke especially highlights the upside-down nature of God's kingdom. Please read Luke 1:46–55 and 2:4–16 and reflect on the following: How do these passages, which contain elements unique to Luke, highlight the upside-down nature of God's kingdom?

3. Finally, how well do you think the Christian church in general and our own church in particular reflect God's upside-down kingdom?



# WEEK SEVEN: HAGGAI

**H**ebrews 12 has a singular aim: to encourage Christians to press on in becoming like Christ. We see this from the very beginning of the chapter, which opens with a kind of theme statement:

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The chapter then goes on to develop this calling in terms of becoming a fitting heir and child of God. Christ is the true firstborn son, the one whom Christians should imitate; and so, in imitating him, Christians become “the church of the firstborn” (v. 23). Hebrews 12 therefore expounds some key issues in this pursuit.

The first issue surrounds the meaning of suffering. It seems the recipients of the letter were suffering and, as such, they were wondering, Is this God’s punishment? The author assures them it is not divine punishment, but precisely the opposite: It is evidence of God’s love for them:

My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,  
because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son  
(Hebrews 12:5–6, quoting Psalm 94:12).

Such suffering, therefore, is not a sign of rejection but of adoption. God only disciplines those whom he considers his “true sons and daughters” (vv. 7–11).

Hebrews then goes on to contrast this positive model of sonship with a negative one: Jacob’s brother, Esau (vv. 16–17). You will remember the story in Genesis 25, where Esau, who was the firstborn son, sold his inheritance rights to his younger brother, Jacob, for a bit of bread and a bowl of stew. In this way, we are told, “Esau despised his birthright” (Genesis 25:34). And it is this disregard for the firstborn status that Hebrews wants to spotlight. If “the church of the firstborn” is going to live worthily, then it needs to cherish its adoption as God’s heir. And a key way of doing this is by embracing suffering as God’s parental discipline.

<i>DAILY READINGS</i>	
<i>MONDAY</i>	<i>HABAKKUK 3, ZEPHANIAH 1</i>
<i>TUESDAY</i>	<i>ZEPHANIAH 2</i>
<i>WEDNESDAY</i>	<i>ZEPHANIAH 3</i>
<i>THURSDAY</i>	<i>HAGGAI 1</i>
<i>FRIDAY</i>	<i>ZECHARIAH 1</i>

Even still, the author of Hebrews recognizes the tumultuous nature of suffering, and he seeks to provide a rock upon which people can anchor. That rock is Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God (Hebrews 12:18–29). Yet it is not the earthly Mt. Sinai, but the heavenly one, called “Mt. Zion,” that serves as the anchor. The reason for this is because the earthly mountain was only a mirror of the true mountain, which, for now, exists in the heavenly realm.

And this is where the author of Hebrews quotes from the prophet Haggai. He contrasts the earthly mountain with the heavenly one, saying,

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain (Hebrews 12:26–27, quoting Haggai 2:7).

What the author is saying, therefore, is that the first mountain of God (Mt. Sinai) represents the elements of God’s kingdom that are passing away, but the second mountain (Mt. Zion) represents the things that will remain. The most important difference is that Mt. Zion is the bedrock of a strong and lasting kingdom, “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28).

The use of Haggai here is interesting, for, from a modern perspective, it is difficult to discern why Hebrews quotes this text. In short, Hebrews’ use of the text seems unrelated to its original meaning in Haggai. The book of Haggai itself is a collection of oracles delivered by the prophet in the post-exilic era, around 520 BC, when Israel had return from exile. His oracles especially concerned the temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. While the people had begun returning to the land and living in furnished houses, the “house” of the Lord (the temple) lay in ruin. Haggai found this deplorable, and he prophesied that the Lord wanted the people to rebuild the temple.

But how does this relate to the message of Hebrews? The key lies in the *mental maps* of the ancient Israelites and early Church, that is, in the way they imagined reality. In the ancient mind, a temple was the center of a kingdom, the place in which the divine dwelled, providing blessing and protection for the whole of the land. But the temple itself was not God’s true “house;” it was only a model of his true house, which existed in the heavenly realm. That is why God’s “house” was erected on a mountain, in Jerusalem: symbolically, it touched the realm of heaven. And that is why, when the biblical writers wanted to reference the enduring reality that lay behind the earthly

kingdom, they called Jerusalem “Mt. Zion.” For even when the temple was destroyed or the kingdom fell, God’s true dwelling and kingdom remained unaffected.

And that is what Hebrews is drawing on here. It encourages believers to stay true to their calling in spite of suffering, reminding them that their hope is not the temple or earthly kingdoms, but God’s true dwelling and kingdom in heaven. Unlike earthly temples and kingdoms, God’s is “unshakeable” (Hebrews 12:26–29; Haggai 2:7, 21–22). At the end of all things, his kingdom will again descent upon earth; but, for now, Christians are called to anchor their hope in the heavenly kingdom:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28–29; quoting Deuteronomy 4:24).

When the author of Hebrews quotes the prophet Haggai, therefore, he is drawing upon Israel’s ancient mental maps.

**QUESTIONS  
FOR PERSONAL  
REFLECTION &  
DISCUSSION**

1. Please discuss the following: Have you considered that difficult circumstances are evidence of God's presence rather than absence? That is, have you ever considered that suffering might be a sign of God disciplining us as his children?
2. How, then, do you think we can tell the difference between normal suffering and divine discipline?
3. Drawing on ancient Israel's "mental maps," the author of Hebrews grounds Christian hope in the very real, though unseen, spiritual realm. Please reflect on the following: Practically speaking, how can we also ground our hope in God's real but unseen realm? That is, what kinds of practices—in our personal lives, family lives, etc.—can we implement to remind ourselves of this reality?



# WEEK EIGHT: ZECHARIAH

For the Gospel of Matthew, the central aim is show that Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the long-awaited son of David, Israel's Messiah. Matthew does so especially by pointing to events in Jesus's life as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The Gospel cites a number of prophetic books in this pursuit, but one more than any other: the Book of the Twelve. Ten times Matthew quotes from the Minor Prophets, which is more than Isaiah (8x) and second only to Deuteronomy (13x). And of these ten quotations, three come from the prophet Zechariah: Matthew 21:5 (Zechariah 9:9–13), 26:31 (Zechariah 13:7–9), and 27:9–10 (Zechariah 11:12–13). The first of these are the most important, so they will occupy our attention here.

But, first, it is important to look briefly at the book of Zechariah. Along with Haggai and Malachi, Zechariah is one of three post-exilic prophets to close the Book of the Twelve. While Zechariah shares things in common with the other two, what sets it apart is its focus on the coming Messiah and his appearance in the Day of the Lord. This is especially true of Zechariah 9–14, which seems to have been foundational to the New Testament's thinking about the Messiah. The question of the Messiah was important in Zechariah's day because, though living in the land, Israel was still under the control of Persia. This meant that Israel was no longer autonomous and, most importantly, no longer had a king. Since God's ancient promises to Israel depended upon a Davidic king (2 Samuel 7), a burning question of the day was, How then can God's promises be fulfilled? This question is key to Zechariah 9–14.

In Zechariah 9, the prophet delivers an oracle that foresees a day when the Messianic king would come to deliver Israel. It begins with these words:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

These are the words the Gospel of Matthew cites when

## DAILY READINGS

MONDAY	ZECHARIAH 2-3
TUESDAY	ZECHARIAH 4-5
WEDNESDAY	ZECHARIAH 6-7
THURSDAY	ZECHARIAH 8
FRIDAY	ZECHARIAH 9-10

it wants to show the significance of Jesus of Nazareth's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:5). "This took place," Matthew tells us, "to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet" (Matthew 21:4). So, Jesus is the long-awaited messianic king of Israel. Interestingly, though, the Gospel leaves out one of the lines from the prophecy: "righteous and victorious." We will see shortly why it has done this.

In Zechariah 13, the prophet delivers another oracle about the future day of the Messianic king. This prophecy speaks in particular about how God will cleanse the "house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" from "sin and impurity" (13:1). Apparently, the way in which God will accomplish this is by striking down his own shepherd:

"Awake, sword, against my shepherd,  
against the man who is close to me!"  
declares the LORD Almighty.  
"Strike the shepherd,  
and the sheep will be scattered,  
and I will turn my hand against the little ones" (Zechariah 13:7).

In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ himself quotes the second half of this passage in explaining his imminent suffering: "Then Jesus told them, 'This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written...'" (Matthew 26:31).

Not only does this passage again show Christ as the coming king of Zechariah's oracles, but it also helps explain why, in Matthew, the Zechariah 9:9 quote leaves out language of the "victorious" king. The Gospel wanted to highlight that Jesus's victory would not come as the people had expected. It would not come through force, by one earthly kingdom overcoming another with swords, soldiers, and chariots. It would come, instead, through the kingdom of heaven overcoming the kingdoms of earth, by Christ's death reconciling humanity to God and his resurrection providing the first fruits of this coming kingdom. In this way, the Gospel of Matthew offers a deeply theological reading of Zechariah's prophecies.



**QUESTIONS  
FOR PERSONAL  
REFLECTION &  
DISCUSSION**

1. While most of us wouldn't see Zechariah as a key text in our own faith formation, the New Testament writers certainly did. At the very least, this should cause us to stop and reflect on a question: Why is this the case? Why is there a gap between what we value and what they valued in Scripture?
2. Assuming that the apostles serve as models for our own values, how might we begin to remedy the gap? That is, how do we begin to train ourselves to value what they valued in Scripture?
3. Matthew's quoting of Zechariah reveals what we might call the "split vision" of prophecy. As the Old Testament prophets looked down the corridors of time at the Day of the Lord, they saw it as we see mountain peaks from afar: from a distance, the peaks seem to be part of the same mountain, but as you come closer, they begin to separate into distinct peaks. We notice this reality when the New Testament comments on the fulfillment of passages such as Zechariah 9:9, which references the humility of the messianic king but not his victory. This is because only part of the prophecy is being fulfilled in the present; the other part (Christ's victory) will not be fulfilled until later. This means that we, as Christians, live between the "now and not yet," between the first Day of the Lord and the ultimate Day of the Lord, when Christ returns. Please reflect on this idea and what it means to our daily walk of faith that some, but not all, of the promises of God's kingdom have been realized.

**MALACHI 3:1, 4:5-6**  
**MATTHEW 11:7-15**  
**MATTHEW 17:10-13**

## **WEEK NINE: MALACHI**

**B**y the time of Jesus, Jews had come to expect that a great prophet would appear first to prepare the way for the Messiah. And many identified this prophet with Elijah, or at least an Elijah-like prophet. This belief grew out of a combination of key texts running across the Old Testament. Two texts were at the base of the belief:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me [Moses] from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him (Deuteronomy 18:15).

When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you” ... And he [Elijah] replied, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you” (2 Kings 2:1-2, 6).

The first text contains the words of Moses, promising that in his absence God would send a great prophet to speak to the people. The second contains the words of Elijah, spoken to his apprentice, Elisha, shortly before Elijah was taken into heaven in chariots of fire. Because the first passage does not identify who the prophet would be, and because the second reiterates that Elijah would “not leave” the people, even though he was taken up to heaven in fire, there was an increasing expectation that the future prophet would be like Elijah, either the prophet himself returning from heaven or a figure like him.

And the prophet Malachi developed this idea further. The prophet’s ideas occupied an important place in first-century thinking, serving as a bridge between the Old Testament literature and the belief of Jesus’s day. Its position with the Bible itself suggests such a role: standing both at the conclusion of the Minor Prophets and the close of the Christian Old Testament. Since Malachi’s words were some of the last divine oracles spoken in Israel and recorded in Scripture, they echoed and amplified across the four centuries before Christ. By the time of Christ, therefore, the prophet’s words rung loudly in the ears of the people.

What Malachi emphasized more than any other prophet was the idea of God’s ‘messenger’ (Malachi’s very name mean’s ‘my messenger’). This messenger would

come just before the great day of the Lord, as a herald proclaiming the Lord's return to his people.

I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me (Malachi 3:1).

Behold, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes (Malachi 4:5).

<i>DAILY READINGS</i>	
<i>MONDAY</i>	<i>ZECHARIAH 11</i>
<i>TUESDAY</i>	<i>ZECHARIAH 12-13</i>
<i>WEDNESDAY</i>	<i>ZECHARIAH 14</i>
<i>THURSDAY</i>	<i>MALACHI 1-2</i>
<i>FRIDAY</i>	<i>MALACHI 3-4</i>

As we see here, Malachi develops the earlier texts from Deuteronomy and 2 Kings by showing that the coming prophet, the one like Elijah, would play another key role: he would be the herald, or 'messenger,' of God's Messiah.

It is no surprise, then, that Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6 play a key role in the New Testament, being referenced in all four Gospels.<sup>5</sup> Matthew is most helpful for our purposes. When John the Baptist's disciples approach Jesus, asking whether he is the Messiah, Jesus not only tells them about his identity but also about John's:

What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he... All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. Whoever has ears, let them hear (Matthew 11:9-15, quoting Malachi 3:1 and alluding to Malachi 4:5).

The disciples asked him [Jesus], "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist (Matthew 17:10-13, alluding to Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6).

Here Jesus explicitly identified John the Baptist not only as the herald of the Messiah but also as the prophet like Elijah.

Yet this carries more weight than we might imagine. By saying this, Jesus is not only identifying John as Malachi's "messenger;" he is also identifying himself as the one whom the messenger proclaims.

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 3:1).

As Malachi 3:1 shows, the one who comes after the messenger is none other than Yahweh himself.<sup>6</sup> This is what the people would have expected, so when Jesus identifies John as his messenger, he is making an extraordinary claim. The "more startling implication" of Jesus's claim is that "the coming of Jesus is the coming of Yahweh, for Jesus stands in place of Yahweh."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Malachi 3:1 (Matthew 11:7–19; Mark 1:1–3; Luke 7:24–35) and Malachi 4:5–6 (Matthew 17:10–13; Mark 9:9–13; Luke 1:17). While Jesus identified John the Baptist as the prophet like Elijah, apparently John saw himself simply as the herald of the Messiah (see John 1:19–28).

<sup>6</sup> The same is true of Isaiah 40:3— "A voice of one calling out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord'"—which is probably why the Gospel of Mark (1:1–3) combines this passage with Malachi 3:1. In both, the messenger is a herald for Yahweh's return to his people

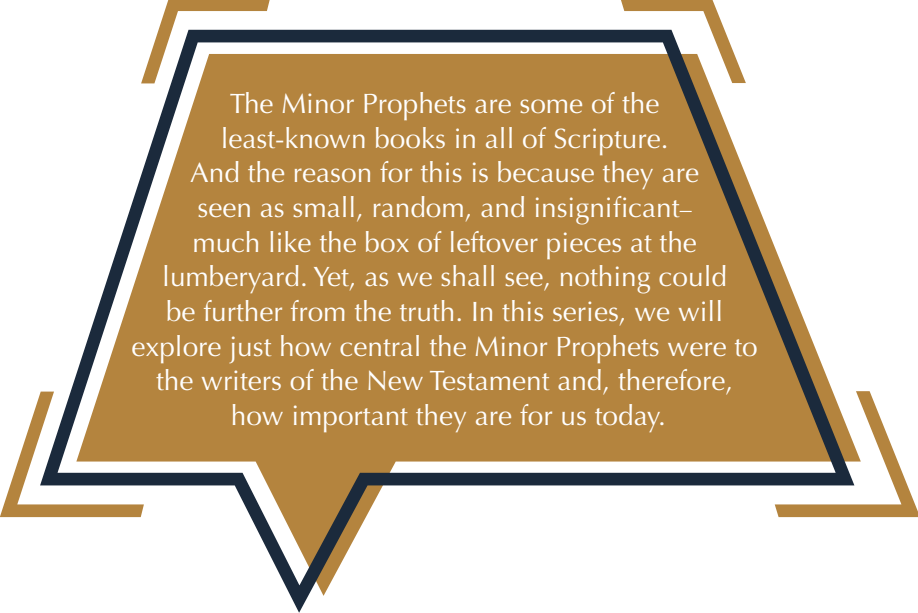
<sup>7</sup> Clay Alan Ham, "The Minor Prophets in Matthew's Gospel," pp. 39–56, in *The Minor Prophets in the New Testament*, eds. Maarten J. J. Menken and Steve Moyise (London; T&T Clark, 2009), 50.

**QUESTIONS  
FOR PERSONAL  
REFLECTION &  
DISCUSSION**

1. After Malachi delivered his prophecy, the people would wait approximately 400 years to see its fulfillment. For 400 years, the faithful waited, wondering when God would finally come to their rescue. For 400 years, babies were born, grew up and grew old, and died while waiting for the prophecy's fulfillment. This, as we noted previously, is called living in the "now but not yet," and it is the way of faith. How, then, do we learn to live well in the "now but not yet"? Please take some time to reflect on this question: How might we learn about "holy waiting" by thinking of the faithful who lived in the 400 years between Malachi's prophecy and the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ?
2. Furthermore, it is clear from the Gospels that, when the Messiah did appear, many missed him because their views of his appearance had become fixed on a misleading idea. How might we learn from this, keeping our eyes and ears open to God's ways, which are often surprising even while faithful?
3. Please take some time now to reflect on times when, in your own life, God has proven faithful but in surprising ways. What did you learn from these times?

# – NOTES –





The Minor Prophets are some of the least-known books in all of Scripture. And the reason for this is because they are seen as small, random, and insignificant—much like the box of leftover pieces at the lumberyard. Yet, as we shall see, nothing could be further from the truth. In this series, we will explore just how central the Minor Prophets were to the writers of the New Testament and, therefore, how important they are for us today.



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