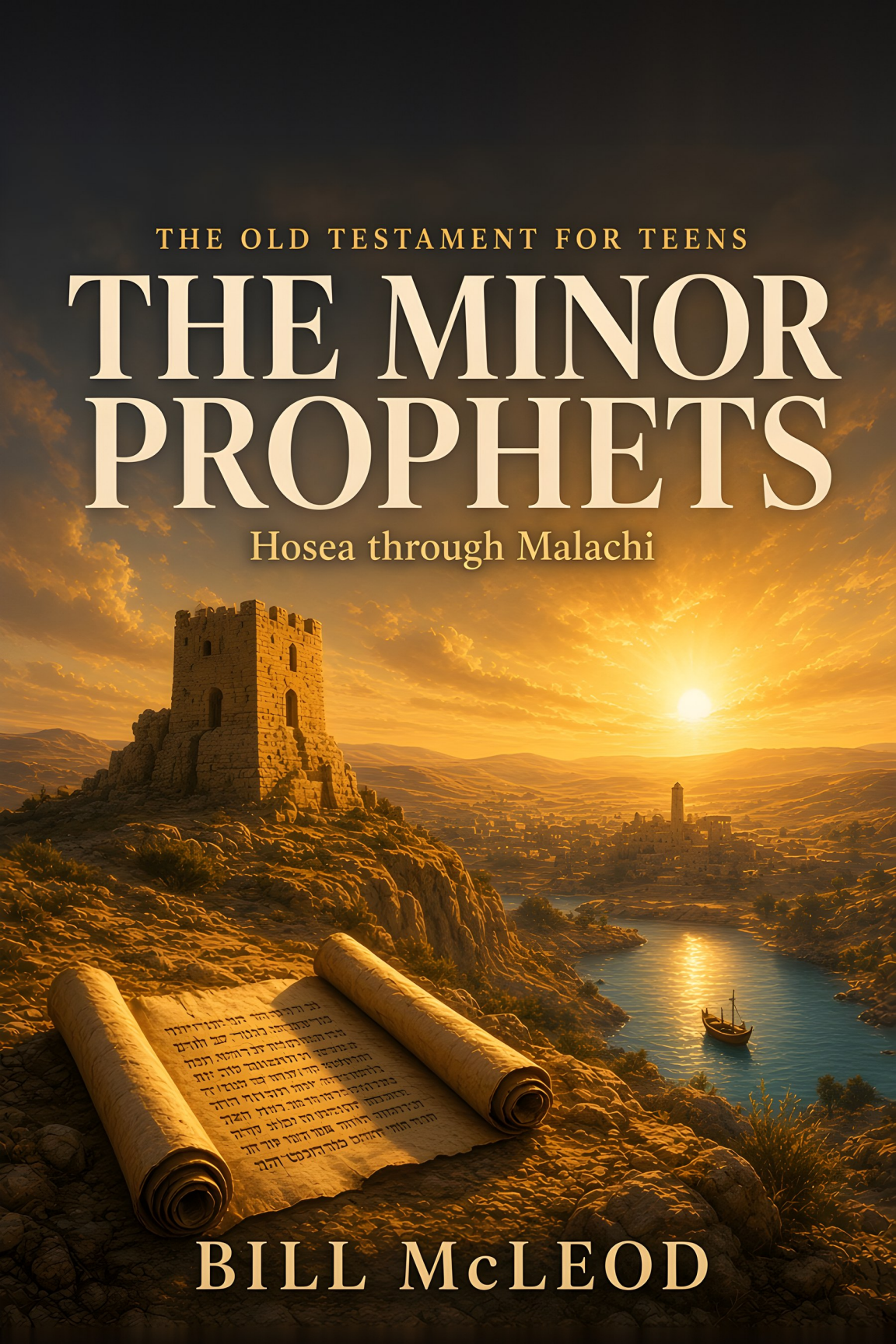
THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

THE MINOR PROPHETS

Hosea through Malachi



BILL McLEOD

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

The King Who Buys Us Back

Hosea, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Buys Us Back: The Book of Hosea, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

What does it feel like to be betrayed by someone you love? Maybe you know. A best friend who turned on you. A boyfriend or girlfriend who cheated. A parent who walked away. Betrayal is one of the deepest hurts there is, because it comes from someone who was supposed to be on your side.

The book of Hosea is about betrayal. It's the story of a prophet whose wife was unfaithful to him, again and again. But it's really a story about God. Hosea's broken marriage became a living picture of how God's people had been unfaithful to Him, chasing after other gods, other loves, and other sources of security.

And here's the shocking part. God didn't give up. Hosea went and bought his wife back. And God promised to do the same for His people. Hosea shows us a God whose heart breaks, whose love burns, and who would rather pay any price than lose the people He loves.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Hosea in five chapters: the hardest marriage in the Bible (Hosea 1-3), mercy, not sacrifice (4-7), sowing the wind (8-10), a parent's broken heart (11), and return and healing (12-14).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what the Minor Prophets are, where Hosea lived, and what was happening in his world. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as what exactly Gomer's story involved, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Hosea in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twenty-eighth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Hosea is built around a painful marriage, and its imagery of unfaithfulness is strong. This book handles Hosea's relationship with Gomer tastefully and without graphic detail, focusing on its meaning: God's faithful love for an unfaithful people.

Because Hosea's story could be misread as a model for staying in a harmful relationship, chapter 1 includes a clear safety box explaining that Hosea's prophetic calling was unique and is not a command for anyone to stay in an abusive or unsafe relationship. It lists a trusted adult, Love Is Respect (1-866-331-9474), the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-422-4453), and 911. Other Real Talk boxes address betrayal, empty religion, consequences, family pain, and the possibility of coming home to God.

Where Christians hold different views, such as whether Gomer was unfaithful before or after the marriage, this book presents them fairly.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how Jesus quoted Hosea's words about mercy, how Matthew connects Hosea 11:1 to Jesus, how Paul and Peter apply Not My People becoming God's people to believers, and how Hosea paying the price for Gomer points to the cross. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will discover that God's love is stronger than their wandering, and that the way home is always open.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

The Minor Prophets

The last twelve books of the Old Testament, from Hosea to Malachi, are called the Minor Prophets. That doesn't mean they're less important. It means they're shorter. Some are only a few pages long, and Obadiah is just one chapter. In the Hebrew Bible, these twelve books were written together on a single scroll and called The Book of the Twelve, or simply The Twelve. Together, they cover about three hundred years of history, from the eighth century BC to the fifth century BC. They're short, but they pack a punch.

Two Kingdoms

After King Solomon died around 930 BC, Israel split into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom kept the name Israel. It was larger, and its capital was Samaria. The southern kingdom was called Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem. Hosea preached to the northern kingdom, which he often calls Ephraim, after its largest tribe. He was the only writing prophet who came from the north and preached there.

Before the Fall

Hosea began preaching around 750 BC, during the reign of Jeroboam II. It was a time of wealth and success. The economy was booming. But underneath, the nation was rotting. People worshiped Baal, a Canaanite god they believed controlled the rain and the harvest. The rich exploited the poor. Kings were assassinated one

after another. In about twenty-five years, six kings ruled Israel, and four of them were murdered. Meanwhile, the Assyrian Empire was rising in the east. In 722 BC, Assyria conquered Samaria and carried the people of the northern kingdom into exile. Hosea was warning of that disaster, and pleading with the people to return to God before it was too late.

Who Was Hosea?

We know very little about Hosea apart from his marriage. His name means salvation, and it's closely related to the names Joshua and Jesus. He was the son of Beeri. He prophesied during the days of several kings, so his ministry may have lasted thirty years or more. He was a contemporary of Amos, who also preached to the north, and of Isaiah and Micah, who preached in the south.

Hosea's Big Word

One of Hosea's favorite words is the Hebrew word hesed, translated in the WEB as kindness, loving kindness, or mercy. It means loyal, steadfast, covenant love, the kind of love that keeps its promises. Hosea uses the picture of marriage to show what that looks like. God is the faithful husband. Israel is the unfaithful wife. And God's hesed refuses to let her go.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Hosea 1-3): The hardest marriage in the Bible.

Chapter 2 (Hosea 4-7): Mercy, not sacrifice.

Chapter 3 (Hosea 8-10): Sowing the wind.

Chapter 4 (Hosea 11): A parent's broken heart.

Chapter 5 (Hosea 12-14): Return and healing.

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CHAPTER 1

The Hardest Marriage in the Bible

Hosea 1–3

Most prophets get their messages in words. Hosea got his message in his marriage.

The book begins with one of the most shocking commands God ever gave anyone. "When the LORD spoke at first by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and children of unfaithfulness; for the land commits great adultery, forsaking the LORD."

Read that again. God told His prophet to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him. Why? Because that's exactly what Israel had done to God. Hosea's home would become a living picture of God's heartbreak.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Fair Questions: What Kind of Woman Was Gomer?**
>
> Christians and Jewish interpreters have understood Hosea 1:2 in several ways. Some think Gomer was already known for sexual unfaithfulness when Hosea married her. Others think she was faithful at first and only later became unfaithful, so the phrase describes what she would become, looking back from the end of the story. Some think wife of prostitution refers to involvement in the worship of Baal, which sometimes included sexual rituals,

so her unfaithfulness was spiritual as well as physical. A few interpreters have suggested the marriage was a vision or a parable rather than a real event, though most think it really happened. Whatever view you take, the point is the same: Hosea's experience of betrayal mirrored God's experience with His people.

"So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim." Hosea obeyed. And Gomer had three children. God gave each one a name that was also a message.

The first was a son. God said, "Call his name Jezreel." Jezreel was a place, a valley where, many years earlier, a king named Jehu had violently wiped out the family of King Ahab. The current king of Israel was descended from Jehu. The name meant that judgment was coming on Jehu's dynasty, and on the northern kingdom.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jezreel**

Jezreel means God sows or God scatters. It was a fertile valley in northern Israel and also a royal city. Second Kings 10 tells how Jehu killed Ahab's descendants there. God had used Jehu to judge Ahab's wicked family, but Jehu went far beyond what was right, with bloodthirsty violence and political ambition. Jeroboam II, who was king when Hosea began preaching, was Jehu's great-great-grandson. Not long after Jeroboam II died, his son was assassinated, and Jehu's dynasty came to an end, just as Hosea said.

The second child was a daughter. God said, "Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel." Lo-Ruhamah means No Mercy or Not Loved.

The third was another son. God said, "Call his name Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I will not be yours." Lo-Ammi means Not My People.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Were They Hosea's Children?**

The text says Gomer "bore him a son" for the first child, but for the second and third it just says she conceived and gave birth. Some interpreters think this hints that Hosea may not have been the father of the last two children. Others think it's just a shorter way of telling the story. Either way, the names carried the painful message that the relationship between God and His people was broken.

Imagine growing up with those names. Imagine your teacher calling roll: Not Loved? Not My People? It's heartbreaking. But that's the point. Israel's unfaithfulness had consequences, and those consequences were written into the very names of the next generation.

REAL TALK **The Names People Call You**

Hosea's children were given names that carried painful messages. Maybe you've been called names that stuck: stupid, ugly, worthless, a mistake, too much, not enough. Sometimes those names come from classmates, sometimes from social media, and sometimes, painfully, from family. Hosea's story shows that God has the power to rename people. As you'll see in a moment, Not My People would become Children of the Living God. Whatever names you've been given, God's name for you is the one that lasts. And if someone at home is calling you hurtful names or treating you badly, please talk to a trusted adult. You deserve to be safe and respected.

But then, right after the darkest names, comes a surprise. God says, "in the place where it was said to them, You are not my people, they will be called sons of the living God." And in the next verse: "Say to your brothers, My people! and to your sisters, My loved one!"

Not My People would become My People. Not Loved would become Loved. The names wouldn't be the end of the story.

Chapter 2 shifts from Hosea's family to God's. God speaks like a husband whose wife has left him. Israel had run after other lovers, the false god Baal and the nations she trusted instead of God. She thought they gave her food, clothes, wine, and oil. "For she didn't know that I gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied to her silver and gold, which they used for Baal."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Baal**
>
> Baal was the main god of the Canaanites. People believed he controlled the storms, the rain, and the fertility of the land. In an agricultural society, rain meant life. If the rains didn't come, crops failed and people starved. So many Israelites worshiped Baal alongside the LORD, or instead of Him, hoping to guarantee good harvests. Hosea insists that the LORD is the one who gives the rain, the grain, and every good gift. The word baal also meant master, lord, or husband, which Hosea plays with in chapter 2.

So God says He will block her path with thorns, so she can't find her other lovers. She'll chase them but never catch them. And finally, she'll say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now."

Then comes one of the most tender passages in the Bible. God says, "Therefore behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her." He'll give back her vineyards, and turn "the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Valley of Achor**
>
> Achor means trouble. The valley of Achor was where Achan was punished after he stole forbidden treasure during the conquest of Jericho, in Joshua 7. It was a place remembered for sin and disaster. But God promises to turn the valley of trouble into a door of hope. That's what God does. He takes the places where we failed, the memories we're most ashamed of, and turns them into doorways to a new beginning.

God says that in that day, "you will call me my husband, and no longer call me my master." That's a play on words. The Hebrew word for my master is baali, which sounds like Baal. God doesn't want a relationship based on fear or duty. He wants a relationship of love.

And then He makes a promise like a wedding vow. "I will betroth you to me forever. Yes, I will betroth you to me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion. I will even betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD."

Then the children's names are reversed. God says, "I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; and I will tell those who were not my people, You are my people; and they will say, You are My God!"

Then chapter 3 brings us back to Hosea's home. Gomer had left. And she had ended up in such trouble that she apparently needed to be bought out of it, perhaps from slavery, debt, or another man. And God said to Hosea, "Go again, love a woman loved by another, and an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods."

Go again. After everything she had done, Hosea was told to go after her.

"So I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Price**
>
> Fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley may have added up to about thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave according to the law of Moses. A homer of barley was a large measure, possibly about as much as a donkey could carry. Paying partly in barley may suggest that Hosea didn't have

enough money and had to scrape together everything he had. Whatever the exact value, Hosea paid a real price to bring Gomer home.

Then Hosea told her that she would stay with him and be faithful, and he would be faithful to her too. It was a new beginning, but with boundaries. And it was a picture of what God would do for Israel. After a long time of discipline, without king or temple, "Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king."

Notice something about what Hosea did. He didn't pretend nothing had happened. He set clear expectations for the future. He told Gomer that their relationship would be built on faithfulness from both of them. Love in Hosea is not the same as having no boundaries. It is faithful and costly, but it is also honest and safe.

REAL TALK **Who Are Your Other Lovers?**

In Hosea, Israel's lovers were the false gods and foreign powers they turned to for security, pleasure, and success. Today, people don't usually bow to statues of Baal. But we still chase things that promise to make us happy and safe: popularity, money, achievement, romance, our phones, our image. None of those are wrong in themselves. They become lovers when they take God's place, when we trust them more than Him, or when we'd give anything to keep them. Ask yourself honestly: What do I run to when I'm stressed, lonely, or afraid? What would I be devastated to lose? Those answers might show you where your heart is.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety First: Hosea Is Not a Model for Staying in an Abusive Relationship**

Hosea's marriage was a unique prophetic calling. God gave him a one-time, specific assignment to act out a picture of God's love for Israel. It is not a command for anyone today to stay in a relationship where they are being hurt, controlled, threatened, or abused. Nothing in Hosea means you have to put up with someone who hits you, scares you, pressures you sexually, tracks

your phone, isolates you from friends, or tells you you're worthless. That's not love. God's love in Hosea is faithful, patient, and protective. If you're in a relationship that feels unsafe, or if someone at home is hurting you, please tell a trusted adult right away. You can also contact Love Is Respect at 1-866-331-9474, or text LOVEIS to 22522, for help with dating relationships. If you're a young person being abused, call or text the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453. If you're in immediate danger, call 911. Getting safe is not a lack of faith. It's wisdom.

REAL TALK **When You've Been Betrayed**

If someone you love has betrayed you, the pain is real. You might feel angry, foolish, or unwanted. It might be hard to trust anyone again. Hosea's story shows that God knows exactly what that feels like. He has been betrayed by the people He loves most. You can tell Him how much it hurts, and He understands. Forgiveness is important, and God can help you forgive over time. But forgiving someone doesn't always mean going back to the way things were, or trusting someone who hasn't changed. Talk with a trusted adult, a pastor, or a counselor as you work through it.

Hosea's story is hard. But it shows us the heart of God. He has every right to walk away. Instead, He pays the price to bring His people home.

REAL TALK **What Real Love Looks Like**

Hosea's story shows a love that is faithful, patient, and costly. But it's worth being clear about what healthy love looks like in your own relationships. Healthy love respects your boundaries. It's honest. It doesn't pressure you, control you, or make you afraid. It lets you have friends and interests of your own. It says sorry and changes when it's wrong. Unhealthy love is jealous, possessive, controlling, or cruel, and it often blames you for its own behavior. God's love never manipulates or abuses. If you're unsure whether a relationship is healthy, talk it over with a trusted adult or reach out to Love Is Respect.

KEY VERSE

I will betroth you to me forever. Yes, I will betroth you to me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion. I will even betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.

Hosea 2:19–20 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God used Hosea's marriage to communicate His message?
2. What do the children's names, and their reversal, say about God?
3. What does it mean that God turns the valley of trouble into a door of hope?
4. Why is it important to understand that Hosea's story is not a model for staying in an unsafe relationship?

TRY THIS *Write down one name or label that has hurt you. Then write next to it what God calls you, using Hosea 1:10 and 2:23. Keep it somewhere you'll see it.*

CHAPTER 2

Mercy, Not Sacrifice

Hosea 4–7

After the story of Hosea's marriage, the book shifts into a series of messages, like a court case. "Hear the LORD's word, you children of Israel, for the LORD has a charge against the inhabitants of the land: Indeed there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land."

The word for goodness here is hesed, God's loyal, covenant love. Israel had none. And there was no knowledge of God. Not just a lack of facts. A lack of relationship.

Instead, God says, "There is cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery." That list sounds a lot like the Ten Commandments being broken one by one. When people stop knowing God, they stop treating each other well.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Knowing God**
>
> In Hebrew, the word for know, yada, means much more than knowing information. It's the word used for close, personal relationship, even the intimacy of marriage. When Hosea says there's no knowledge of God, he doesn't mean people had forgotten the facts about God. They had stopped loving Him, trusting Him, and walking with Him. That's why Hosea connects knowing God with marriage. You can know a lot about someone without really knowing them.

Then God says one of the most famous lines in Hosea. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you, that you may be no priest to me."

God was especially angry with the priests. Their job was to teach the people God's law. Instead, they had rejected it. They actually profited from the people's sins, because more sin meant more sin offerings, and the priests got to eat part of those. So they had no reason to teach people to stop sinning.

> **REAL TALK** **Destroyed for Lack of Knowledge**
>
> Hosea 4:6 is a warning. People were being destroyed, not because God had hidden the truth, but because they had rejected it. Today, you have more access to the Bible than any generation in history. It's on your phone, in multiple translations, with study notes and podcasts. But having access isn't the same as knowing. It's easy to know a lot about celebrities, sports, video games, or trends and very little about God. What would it look like to actually get to know Him? Start small: read one short passage a day, ask questions, and talk to God about what you read.

The people were turning to idols for guidance. "My people consult with their wooden idol, and answer to a stick of wood." Imagine asking a stick for advice. That's how ridiculous idolatry is. But people do it all the time, looking for direction in things that can't speak, can't love, and can't save.

In chapter 5, God says Israel was sick, but instead of turning to Him for healing, they went to Assyria for help. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria." But Assyria couldn't heal them. Only God could.

So God says He will step back, "until they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face." And then, in chapter 6, the people seem to respond.

"Come! Let's return to the LORD; for he has torn us to pieces, and he will heal us; he has injured us, and he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us. On the third day he will raise us up, and we will live before him. Let's acknowledge the LORD. Let's press on to know the LORD."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **On the Third Day**
>
> Hosea 6:2 says that on the third day God will raise His people up. In context, it's a picture of Israel being restored quickly, after a short time. Many Christians, from early church times, have seen in it a hint of Jesus' resurrection on the third day. Paul wrote that Christ was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and some think Hosea 6:2 is one of the Scriptures he had in mind. Others think Paul was thinking more broadly. Either way, the hope of being raised up by God runs throughout the Old Testament.

That sounds great. But God's response is surprising. He doesn't seem convinced. "Ephraim, what shall I do to you? Judah, what shall I do to you? For your love is like a morning cloud, and like the dew that disappears early."

Their repentance was shallow. It looked good in the morning, but by noon it was gone, like fog burning off in the sun. They said the right words, but their hearts hadn't really changed.

And then God says what He really wants. "For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Fair Questions: Was Israel's Repentance Real?**
>
> Readers disagree about Hosea 6:1-3. Some think it's the people's shallow repentance, quoted so that God can expose it in verse 4. Others think it's Hosea's own invitation, showing what true repentance should sound like, followed by God's sad observation that the people's love never lasted. Some see both: beautiful words that the people said but didn't mean. Either way,

the lesson is the same. God isn't looking for the right words alone. He's looking for a heart that stays.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Mercy and Sacrifice**

In Hosea 6:6, the word for mercy is hesed, loyal love. God had commanded sacrifices in the law of Moses, so He wasn't saying sacrifices were bad. He was saying that sacrifices without love were worthless. The people were going through religious rituals while treating God and each other badly. Other prophets said similar things: Samuel told King Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice, and Micah said God requires justice, mercy, and humility. Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 twice when religious leaders cared more about rules than people.

REAL TALK **Religion Without Love**

It's possible to go to church every week, sing every song, post Bible verses, and still not love God or people. That's what Hosea was confronting. God doesn't want a performance. He wants your heart. That means showing up for a friend who's struggling, being kind to the kid nobody talks to, telling the truth when it costs you, and spending real time with God, not just going through the motions. Ask yourself honestly: Is my faith mostly about looking good, or about loving God and loving people?

In chapter 7, Hosea piles up vivid word pictures. He compares the people to a heated oven, burning with passion and intrigue. The court officials were plotting against their kings, and one king after another was assassinated. And none of them called on God.

Then comes one of the funniest and sharpest images in Hosea. "Ephraim mixes himself among the nations. Ephraim is a pancake not turned over."

Picture a pancake cooking on a griddle. If you never flip it, one side burns black, and the other side stays raw. It's ruined. Half-baked. That's what Israel was like: burned on one side, raw on the other.

They were half devoted to God and half devoted to other things, and the result was useless.

Hosea's pictures in chapter 7 can seem strange, but they're also a little funny. An oven, a pancake, gray hairs, a silly dove. Hosea used everyday images from the kitchen, the mirror, and the backyard to help people see themselves clearly. Sometimes the truth hits harder when it comes through a picture you can't forget.

> **REAL TALK** **Half-Baked**
>
> Hosea's half-cooked pancake is a picture of a half-hearted life. Maybe you're on fire for God at youth group or camp, but completely different at school or online. Maybe you trust God with some parts of your life, but keep others to yourself. Being half-baked isn't just a little less than ideal. It ruins the whole thing. Jesus said no one can serve two masters. The good news is that God is patient. He doesn't throw out the pancake. He invites you to let Him work on the whole thing, every part of your life.

Hosea adds more pictures. "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he doesn't realize it. Indeed, gray hairs are here and there on him, and he doesn't realize it." Israel was weakening and aging without noticing. Sin works that way. It slowly drains your strength, and you don't even see it happening.

"Ephraim is like an easily deceived dove, without understanding. They call to Egypt. They go to Assyria." Israel was flitting back and forth between superpowers, trying to find security anywhere but in God.

And finally, God says, "They haven't cried to me with their heart, but they howl on their beds." They were miserable. They cried out in pain. But they didn't cry out to God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Kings Falling Like Dominoes**

In the final years of the northern kingdom, Israel's government was chaos. After Jeroboam II died around 753 BC, his son Zechariah ruled for six months before being assassinated by Shallum. Shallum ruled one month before Menahem killed him. Menahem paid huge sums to the Assyrian king to stay in power. His son Pekahiah was murdered by Pekah. Pekah was murdered by Hoshea. And Hoshea, the last king, was captured by the Assyrians. Hosea 7 describes this violent time, when court officials plotted like a burning oven and no one called on God.

Notice how often Hosea talks about knowing God in these chapters. There is no knowledge of God in the land. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Let's press on to know the LORD. I desire the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. For Hosea, the heart of the problem wasn't just bad behavior. It was a broken relationship. When people stop knowing God, everything else starts to fall apart: honesty, families, justice, and peace.

REAL TALK **Getting to Know God**

How do you get to know anyone? You spend time with them. You talk and listen. You notice what they care about. You stick with them through good times and bad. Getting to know God works the same way. Read the Gospels to see what Jesus is like. Talk to God honestly in prayer, including your questions and doubts. Notice the good things in your life and thank Him for them. Spend time with other people who know Him. Like any relationship, it grows over time. Hosea says to press on to know the LORD. Keep going, even when it feels slow.

KEY VERSE

For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:6 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What's the difference between knowing about God and knowing God?
2. Why do you think God wasn't convinced by the people's repentance in 6:1-3?
3. What does God mean when He says He desires mercy, not sacrifice?
4. Are there parts of your life that are half-baked, given to God on one side but not the other?

TRY THIS *This week, do one act of mercy that no one will see or reward: help someone, include someone, or forgive someone. Then thank God for His mercy to you.*

CHAPTER 3

Sowing the Wind

Hosea 8–10

Chapter 8 begins with an alarm. "Put the trumpet to your lips!" An enemy was coming like an eagle against the house of the LORD, because the people had broken God's covenant and rebelled against His law.

The people claimed to know God. But their actions said otherwise. They made kings without asking God. They made idols out of their own silver and gold. "They have set up kings, but not by me. They have made princes, and I didn't approve."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Golden Calves**
>
> When the northern kingdom first split from Judah, its king, Jeroboam I, didn't want his people going to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. So he set up two golden calves, one at Bethel and one at Dan, and told the people these were the gods who brought them out of Egypt. It was almost exactly what Israel had done at Mount Sinai with Aaron's golden calf. For about two hundred years, the northern kingdom worshiped at these shrines. Hosea mocks the calf of Samaria, saying a craftsman made it, so it can't be God. He even calls Bethel, which means house of God, Beth Aven, which means house of wickedness.

Then comes the most famous line in this section. "For they sow the wind, and they will reap the whirlwind."

Farmers know that what you plant determines what you harvest. Plant wheat, and you get wheat. Plant corn, and you get corn. Israel had planted wind, empty, worthless things, like idols, alliances, and unfaithfulness. And they would harvest a whirlwind, a destructive storm. The consequences would be far bigger than what they had sown.

It's worth noticing that God doesn't usually have to invent special punishments in Hosea. Often, the consequences grow naturally from the choices themselves. Israel trusted Assyria, and Assyria turned on them. They chased idols, and idols couldn't save them. They planted wind, and the wind grew into a storm. Sometimes the hardest part of sin is simply getting what you chose.

> **REAL TALK** **You Reap What You Sow**
>
> Paul wrote, "Don't be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Every choice is a seed. Small choices, like a little lie, a quick look at something you shouldn't, or a habit of gossip, can seem harmless. But seeds grow. Over time, they can produce a harvest you never wanted: broken trust, addiction, damaged relationships, or a reputation that's hard to repair. The good news is that it works the other way too. Small seeds of honesty, kindness, prayer, and self-control grow into a good harvest. What are you planting right now?

God says that Israel had become like a wild donkey wandering alone. They had hired lovers, paying other nations for protection. And "Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces." They were proud of their buildings and fortresses, but they had forgotten the One who made them.

In chapter 9, Hosea warns that their celebrations would end. "Don't rejoice, Israel, to jubilation like the nations; for you were unfaithful to your God." The harvest festivals, where they thanked Baal for

their crops, would turn to mourning. They would go into exile, back to a kind of Egypt, and to Assyria.

The people mocked Hosea. "Israel will consider the prophet to be a fool, and the man who is inspired to be insane." They thought he was crazy. That's often how people respond when they don't want to hear the truth.

> **REAL TALK** **When People Think You're Crazy**
>
> The people in Hosea's time called the prophet a fool. If you take your faith seriously, people might think you're weird, too religious, or out of touch. That can hurt, especially when it comes from friends. But remember that you're in good company. Hosea, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Jesus Himself were all mocked. You don't have to be preachy or judgmental. But you also don't have to hide who you are. Respectful, honest faith often earns more respect over time than you'd expect.

In chapter 10, Hosea describes Israel as "a luxuriant vine that produces his fruit." Israel was prosperous. But the more it prospered, the more altars it built to false gods. "As their land has prospered, they have adorned their sacred stones." Their success made them forget God.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Prosperity and Forgetting**
>
> Hosea notices a dangerous pattern: when life is good, people tend to forget God. Moses had warned about this before Israel even entered the promised land. He said that when they had eaten and were full, and had built fine houses, they should be careful not to forget the LORD. Hosea 13:6 says it directly: they were filled, their hearts became proud, and they forgot God. Many people turn to God when things are hard. The real test is whether you remember Him when things are good.

The judgment would be so terrible that people would beg the mountains to cover them and the hills to fall on them. Jesus quoted

those words as He walked to the cross, warning of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Revelation uses them too.

But even in the middle of these warnings, Hosea gives an invitation. "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and rains righteousness on you."

Then Hosea uses a farming picture of his own. He says Ephraim was like a trained young cow that loved to thresh grain, because threshing was easy work and the animal could eat as it walked. But now God would put a yoke on Ephraim, and he would have to pull the plow. Israel had enjoyed God's blessings without wanting the hard work of obedience.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Fallow Ground**
>
> Fallow ground is soil that hasn't been plowed for a while. Over time, it becomes hard, packed down, and covered with weeds. Before you can plant anything, you have to break it up with a plow. That's hard work. But until the ground is broken, seed can't get in, and rain just runs off. Hosea says Israel's hearts had become fallow ground: hard, crusty, and unresponsive to God. They needed to be broken up so God's rain could soak in. Jeremiah used the same picture.

Then Hosea explains what went wrong. "You have plowed wickedness. You have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, for you trusted in your way, in the multitude of your mighty men." They trusted themselves and their armies instead of God, and it led to disaster.

> **REAL TALK** **Breaking Up Hard Ground**
>
> Has your heart ever felt hard toward God? Maybe you've been hurt, disappointed, or just distracted, and now prayer feels dry and the Bible feels boring. That's fallow ground. Breaking it up might mean being honest with

God about what you're really feeling, confessing something you've been hiding, getting back into a habit of reading Scripture, or talking with someone you trust. It's not always comfortable. But Hosea says it's time to seek the LORD. And when you do, He promises to rain righteousness on you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Fall of Samaria**

In 725 BC, Hoshea, the last king of Israel, stopped paying tribute to Assyria and asked Egypt for help. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser V responded by besieging Samaria. After three years, the city fell in 722 BC. Assyrian records say that Sargon II, who finished the campaign, deported more than twenty-seven thousand people from Samaria and resettled other conquered peoples in their place. The northern kingdom of Israel was never restored as a nation. Everything Hosea had warned about came true. But his promises of hope, that God would one day gather His scattered people, still pointed forward.

Hosea's warnings in these chapters can feel heavy. But they come from love. A doctor who tells you that you have a serious illness isn't being cruel. A friend who tells you that your choices are hurting you isn't being mean. Hosea warned Israel because God didn't want them to be destroyed. Every warning in the Bible is also an invitation to turn around before it's too late.

REAL TALK **Trusting in the Wrong Things**

Israel trusted in its mighty men, its fortresses, its wealth, and its alliances. They all failed. What do you trust to keep you safe, happy, or important? It might be your grades, your looks, your friend group, your followers, your talent, or your plans for the future. Those things aren't bad. But they make terrible gods. They can't carry the weight of your whole life. When they fail, and eventually they will, you need something deeper. Hosea's invitation is to put your ultimate trust in the God who never fails.

REAL TALK **Small Seeds of Good**

Hosea says to sow righteousness and reap kindness. What does that look like for a teenager? It might be saying something encouraging to someone who's

having a rough day. Keeping a promise when it's inconvenient. Turning off your phone to really listen to a friend. Telling the truth when a lie would be easier. Including someone who's left out. Standing up when someone is being mocked. None of these feel huge in the moment. But they're seeds. Over months and years, they grow into a life, and a reputation, that reflects God's love.

KEY VERSE

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and rains righteousness on you.

Hosea 10:12 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does it mean to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind?
2. Why do you think prosperity made Israel forget God?
3. What seeds are you planting right now, good or bad?
4. Is there any part of your heart that feels like fallow ground?

TRY THIS *Make two lists: seeds you want to stop planting and seeds you want to start planting. Pick one from each list to focus on this week.*

CHAPTER 4

A Parent's Broken Heart

Hosea 11

For ten chapters, Hosea has pictured God as a heartbroken husband. In chapter 11, the picture changes. Now God speaks as a parent.

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."

Think back to the story of the Exodus. Israel was a nation of slaves in Egypt, helpless and oppressed. God heard their cries, sent Moses, and brought them out. Before that, God had told Pharaoh, "Israel is my son, my firstborn." The Exodus was like a father rescuing his child.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **God as Parent**
>
> The Old Testament occasionally pictures God as a father to Israel, and Hosea 11 is one of the most tender examples. Some of the images in this chapter, like teaching a child to walk, lifting a baby to the cheek, and bending down to feed, could describe a mother as easily as a father. Isaiah also compares God's love to a nursing mother's: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet I will not forget you!" God is not male or female in the way humans are, but the Bible uses the tenderest human relationships to show how much He loves His people.

But the child didn't stay close. "They called to them, so they went from them. They sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to engraved images." The more God called, the farther they ran.

And then God remembers what it was like when Israel was small. "Yet I taught Ephraim to walk. I took them by their arms, but they didn't know that I healed them."

Picture a parent kneeling on the floor, holding a toddler's hands, helping them take their first wobbly steps. When the child falls and scrapes a knee, the parent picks them up and kisses it better. But the child doesn't remember. They grow up and forget who taught them to walk.

"I drew them with cords of a man, with ties of love; and I was to them like those who lift up the yoke on their necks; and I bent down to him and I fed him."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Cords of Love**

In Hosea 11:4, God says He led Israel with cords of a man and ties of love. That might mean the kind of gentle leading strings a parent would use to guide a little child, rather than the ropes used for animals. The image of lifting the yoke pictures a farmer easing the heavy wooden yoke off an ox's neck so it could eat. Either way, God's leadership was gentle and caring. He didn't drag His people. He drew them with love.

REAL TALK **When Your Family Hurts**

Hosea 11 is about a parent's love for a child who runs away. Maybe you've seen that kind of pain in your own family, with a sibling who left, a parent who is heartbroken, or a relationship that's strained. Or maybe your experience of parents has been painful, and picturing God as a parent is hard. If your parents have hurt you, it's okay to tell God that. He is not like a parent who abandons, abuses, or neglects. He's the perfect parent no one else can be. And if you're being hurt at home right now, please tell a trusted adult, or call

or text the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453. If you're in danger, call 911.

But the child had refused to come home. So the consequences would come. "They won't return into the land of Egypt; but the Assyrian will be their king, because they refused to repent." The sword would fall on their cities. "My people are determined to turn from me."

You'd expect God to say, That's it. I'm done. Instead, His heart breaks open.

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned within me, my compassion is aroused."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Admah and Zeboiim**

Admah and Zeboiim were two cities destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Deuteronomy 29 mentions them as examples of complete destruction, "which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath." By naming them, God is saying, Israel deserves the same fate. But I can't bring Myself to do it. His justice and His love were wrestling, and love would not let go.

This is one of the most emotional moments in the whole Bible. God doesn't sound like a distant judge reading out a sentence. He sounds like a parent pacing the floor at night, torn apart, saying, How can I give up on my child?

And then He makes a decision. "I will not execute the fierceness of my anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath."

BACKGROUND CHECK **For I Am God, and Not Man**

You might think God would say, I'm holy, so I must destroy them. But He says the opposite. Because He is God and not a human, He will not destroy them completely. Human beings get fed up. We hold grudges. We give up on people. We write people off when they hurt us. But God's holiness includes a love and mercy far beyond ours. That doesn't mean there would be no consequences. Assyria still came in 722 BC. But God would not abandon His people forever. Holiness and mercy aren't enemies in God. They go together.

REAL TALK **Have You Given Up on Yourself?**

Maybe you've messed up so many times that you think God must be done with you. Maybe you've run so far that you can't imagine coming back. Hosea 11:8 says God's heart doesn't work like that. He doesn't give up on people. His compassion is stirred, not exhausted. That doesn't mean sin doesn't matter. It matters so much that it breaks His heart. But His love is bigger than your worst choices. If you've been running, you can stop. You can turn around. He's still calling you son, daughter, beloved.

Then the chapter ends with a picture of return. "They will walk after the LORD, who will roar like a lion; for he will roar, and the children will come trembling from the west."

When a lion roars, every animal pays attention. But this lion's roar isn't a threat. It's a call. And the children come home, "trembling like a bird out of Egypt, and like a dove out of the land of Assyria." Remember chapter 7, where Israel was a silly dove flying back and forth between Egypt and Assyria? Now the dove is coming home. "I will settle them in their houses, says the LORD."

REAL TALK **Remembering Who Taught You to Walk**

Think about the people who have helped you grow: parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, mentors, or friends. Many of them helped you in ways you don't even remember, like a toddler who doesn't remember learning to walk. Hosea 11 reminds us that God has been involved in your life far more than you

realize, healing you, guiding you, and caring for you, often through other people. This week, try thanking someone who helped you grow. And thank God for the ways He's been teaching you to walk all along.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Out of Egypt**

Matthew's Gospel tells how Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus fled to Egypt to escape King Herod, and then came back after Herod died. Matthew writes that this fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." In Hosea, the son is Israel. Matthew isn't saying Hosea was predicting a specific event in Jesus' childhood. He's saying that Jesus relived Israel's story. Israel was God's son who went down to Egypt, came out, and then failed in the wilderness. Jesus is God's Son who went to Egypt, came out, and then succeeded in the wilderness, resisting temptation for forty days. He is the faithful Son Israel never was.

REAL TALK **The Father Who Runs**

Jesus told a story that sounds a lot like Hosea 11. A son demanded his inheritance, left home, and wasted everything. When he finally came to his senses and headed home, ready to beg to be a servant, his father saw him far away. "But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran, fell on his neck, and kissed him." The father didn't wait with crossed arms. He ran. That's what God is like. If you take even one step toward Him, He's already running toward you.

Hosea 11 is the heart of the whole book. It shows that God's judgment is real, but His love is deeper. He says, How can I give you up? And the answer is: He can't. He won't.

Think about what it means that God describes Himself this way. The Creator of the universe, who is all-powerful and holy, says His heart is turned within Him. That doesn't mean God is unstable or out of control. It means His love is real and personal, not cold and distant. He isn't a machine that dispenses rewards and punishments. He is a

person who loves, grieves, and longs for His children to come home.

> **REAL TALK** **Come Home**
>
> Maybe you grew up in church and drifted away. Maybe you made choices you're ashamed of. Maybe you got angry at God, or just got busy and stopped thinking about Him. Hosea 11 is God's message to you: How can I give you up? You don't have to clean yourself up before you come back. You don't have to earn your way home. You just have to turn around. Talk to God today. Tell Him where you've been. Then find someone, like a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend, who can walk with you as you come home.

KEY VERSE

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned within me, my compassion is aroused.

Hosea 11:8 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What images in Hosea 11:1-4 show God's love as a parent?
2. Why do you think Israel forgot who taught them to walk?
3. What does Hosea 11:8 reveal about God's heart?
4. How does it feel to know that God refuses to give up on His people?

TRY THIS *Read Luke 15:11-24, the story of the father and the lost son. Write down three ways the father in the story is like God in Hosea 11.*

CHAPTER 5

Return and Healing

Hosea 12–14

In chapter 12, Hosea looks back to Israel's ancestor Jacob. Jacob was a schemer. Even before he was born, he grabbed his twin brother's heel. "In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he contended with God." He tricked his brother and his father, and spent years running from the consequences.

But then Jacob met God. He wrestled with God all night and wouldn't let go until God blessed him. "He wept, and made supplication to him." Jacob was changed, and God gave him a new name: Israel.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Jacob's Story**
>
> Jacob's story is told in Genesis 25-35. He was born grabbing his brother Esau's heel, and his name sounds like the Hebrew word for heel, suggesting someone who trips others up. He tricked Esau out of his birthright and his blessing, then fled for his life. Years later, before facing Esau again, he wrestled with a mysterious figure all night at the Jabbok River and was renamed Israel, meaning he struggles with God. At Bethel, God had met him earlier in a dream of a stairway to heaven. Hosea reminds the nation named after Jacob that they had the same scheming heart, but they could also have the same transforming encounter with God.

Hosea's point is that Israel was just like Jacob, scheming, cheating, and grasping. "A merchant has dishonest scales in his hand. He

loves to defraud." And like Jacob, they were proud of their wealth. "Ephraim said, Surely I have become rich. I have found myself wealth."

But they could also be like Jacob in another way. They could turn to God. "Therefore turn to your God. Keep kindness and justice, and wait continually for your God."

Hosea also reminds Israel that God had always spoken through prophets. "By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved." That prophet was Moses. God had never stopped sending messengers to lead His people. Now He was sending Hosea. The question was whether they would listen.

> **REAL TALK** **You Can Change**
>
> Jacob was a cheater and a liar for much of his life. But God didn't give up on him. Through a long and painful process, including a night of wrestling with God, Jacob became Israel. If you've got patterns in your life you're not proud of, like lying, manipulating people, or always looking out for yourself, Jacob's story says change is possible. It might take time. It might involve some wrestling. But God can give you a new name and a new way of living. Turn to God, practice kindness and justice, and keep waiting on Him.

Chapter 13 is one of the darkest in Hosea. God reminds Israel of everything He had done. "Yet I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; and you shall acknowledge no god but me, and besides me there is no savior. I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought."

But then: "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted. Therefore they have forgotten me." When life got comfortable, they forgot the One who had cared for them in the desert.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Hard Passage: Fierce Images of Judgment**

Hosea 13 uses fierce images for God's judgment. He says He will be like a lion, a leopard, and a mother bear robbed of her cubs. The chapter ends by describing the brutal violence the Assyrian army would bring on Samaria, including against the most vulnerable. These verses are painful to read. It helps to remember that Hosea was describing what Assyrian armies actually did in war, as their own records and carvings boast. The prophet isn't celebrating it. He is warning of the real consequences of turning away from the only true protector, with the same broken heart we saw in chapter 11. Even a mother bear's fury comes from love for her cubs.

But even in this dark chapter, there's a flash of hope. "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol. I will redeem them from death! Death, where are your plagues? Sheol, where is your destruction?"

Notice the contrast in this chapter. Israel chose kings to save them, but God says, "I have given you a king in my anger, and have taken him away in my wrath." The kings they demanded couldn't save them. The very next promise is that God Himself would redeem them from death. Human saviors fail. Only God can rescue from the deepest enemy of all.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Death, Where Is Your Sting?**

Hosea 13:14 may have originally been a call for death to come and do its worst to sinful Israel, or a promise that God would rescue His people from death. Scholars debate how to read it in context. But Paul used these words in his great chapter on the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, as a victory song over death: "Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?" Because Jesus rose from the dead, death has lost its power for everyone who belongs to Him. Hosea's words became a taunt against the defeated enemy.

And then comes chapter 14, the final invitation. "Israel, return to the LORD your God; for you have fallen because of your sin. Take words with you, and return to the LORD."

Hosea even gives them the words to say. “Forgive all our sins, and accept that which is good.” And then they make three promises: “Assyria can’t save us. We won’t ride on horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Our gods! for in you the fatherless finds mercy.”

> **REAL TALK** **Take Words With You**
>
> Sometimes you know you need to come back to God, but you don’t know what to say. Hosea 14 gives a simple pattern. Admit you’ve fallen. Ask for forgiveness. Name the things you’ve been trusting instead of God, whether that’s popularity, money, a relationship, or your own strength, and let them go. Then remember that God shows mercy to the fatherless, to people who feel alone and helpless. You don’t need fancy words. You just need honest ones. If it helps, write your prayer down, or say it out loud. God is listening.

And then God answers. This is the most beautiful answer in the whole book. “I will heal their waywardness. I will love them freely; for my anger is turned away from them.”

Love them freely. Not because they earned it. Not because they finally got their act together. Freely. As a gift.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Love Them Freely**
>
> The word freely in Hosea 14:4 means generously, willingly, spontaneously, as a free gift. It’s the same idea as a freewill offering, a gift given not because it was required but because someone wanted to give it. God’s love for His people isn’t a reward for good behavior. It flows from who He is. Christians call this grace: undeserved favor, given freely. Paul wrote, “God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Then God describes what His love will do. “I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like the lily, and send down his roots like Lebanon.” Israel would grow beautiful, strong, and fragrant. People would rest in its shade. It would flourish like grain and vines.

Earlier, Israel had thanked Baal for the rain and harvest. Now God says, I'm the one who gives life. "I am like a green cypress tree; from me your fruit is found." The fruitfulness Israel had looked for in idols could only come from God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Lebanon's Cedars**

Hosea 14 mentions Lebanon three times. Lebanon, north of Israel, was famous for its mountains and its towering cedar trees, which could grow over a hundred feet tall and live for centuries. Their wood was so valuable that Solomon used it to build the temple. Cedar trees also gave off a pleasant fragrance. When Hosea says Israel's roots, branches, and fragrance would be like Lebanon, he's painting a picture of strength, beauty, and lasting life. The people who had been like a morning mist would become like ancient cedars.

REAL TALK **Real Growth**

Hosea 14 promises that when God's people return to Him, they'll grow like a lily, put down deep roots, and spread out like branches. Jesus said something similar: "I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit." Real growth, the kind that makes you more loving, joyful, patient, and kind, doesn't come from trying harder to impress people. It comes from staying connected to God. If you feel spiritually dry, the answer isn't to try harder by yourself. It's to come back to the source.

The book ends with a wisdom saying, like a final word to every reader. "Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Who is prudent, that he may know them? For the ways of the LORD are right, and the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them."

Hosea's last line is an invitation and a choice. The same road can be a path to life or a place to stumble. It depends on whether you walk it with God or against Him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Sabbath of Return**

Jewish communities read Hosea 14 on a special Sabbath called Shabbat Shuvah, the Sabbath of Return. It falls between Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The name comes from the first word of Hosea 14:1 in Hebrew, shuvah, which means return. During those days, Jewish people focus on repentance, asking forgiveness from God and from people they've wronged. It's a beautiful reminder that returning to God is something we're invited to do again and again, not just once.

Notice how Hosea's book has moved. It began with a broken marriage and children named No Mercy and Not My People. It ends with healing, free love, and a people blooming like a lily. The story of Hosea is the story of the whole Bible in miniature: people wander, God pursues, and love wins.

REAL TALK **Repentance Isn't Just Feeling Bad**

In Hosea 6, the people's repentance was like morning fog, here and then gone. In Hosea 14, it's real. What's the difference? Real repentance isn't just feeling bad or saying sorry. It's turning around. It means naming what you've done wrong, asking forgiveness, letting go of the things you've been trusting instead of God, and changing direction. It often means making things right with people you've hurt. And it's not a one-time event. It's a way of life. Every time you notice you've wandered, you can turn back again.

Hosea had lived his message. He loved a wife who betrayed him. He named children with painful names. He bought back the one who left. And through it all, he showed Israel what God was like. Many people have read Hosea and finally understood, maybe for the first time, that God's love is not cold, distant, or easily used up. It is fierce, tender, patient, and stubborn. It goes to the marketplace and pays the price. It says, How can I give you up? And it ends with a promise: I will love them freely.

KEY VERSE

I will heal their waywardness. I will love them freely; for my anger is turned away from them.

Hosea 14:4 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. How was Israel like Jacob, both in bad ways and in good ways?
2. Why do you think comfort and success made Israel forget God?
3. What does it mean that God loves His people freely?
4. What words would you take with you if you were returning to God today?

TRY THIS *Write your own return prayer using Hosea 14:2-3 as a model. Name what you've trusted instead of God, ask for forgiveness, and thank Him for His free love.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Hosea ends with an invitation: return to the LORD, and He will heal and love you freely. Jewish readers treasure Hosea's picture of God's faithful love, reading part of chapter 14 on the Sabbath of Return between the New Year and the Day of Atonement. Christians believe Hosea's story comes to its fullest meaning in Jesus.

Jesus quoted Hosea twice. When religious leaders criticized Him for eating with tax collectors and sinners, He said, "But you go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." And when they condemned His disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath, He said it again. Matthew saw Hosea 11:1 in the life of Jesus, who as a child was taken to Egypt and then brought back: "Out of Egypt I called my son." Jesus is the true Son who relived Israel's story, but stayed faithful where Israel had failed. Paul and Peter applied Hosea's promise to everyone who trusts Jesus, Jew and Gentile alike: "In the past, you were not a people, but now are God's people, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." And just as Hosea paid silver and barley to buy back Gomer, Jesus paid with His own life. Paul writes, "you were bought with a price." The cross is God going to the marketplace for His unfaithful people and saying, I will take her home.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. His love for you never gives up.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Hosea says we've all wandered like an unfaithful spouse. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus paid the price.

Hosea bought Gomer back with silver and barley. Jesus bought us back with His own life. He died for our sins and rose again, so Not My People can become God's people.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

God loves us freely, not because we earned it. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Come home.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Hosea says, "Take words with you, and return to the LORD." You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've wandered from You. I've chased other things to make me happy and safe, and I can't fix that myself. Thank You that You never stopped loving me. Thank You that Jesus paid the price to buy me back, died for my sins, and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Heal my heart, and help me love You faithfully. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Hosea 11 and 14, then Luke 15, the story of a father running to his lost son.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized. God's people are a family.

Keep coming home. When you wander, don't hide. Turn back right away. The door is open.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Hosea's story is hard, and its love is hard to believe. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Hosea is right, God's love doesn't give up. Whenever you're ready to come home, He's waiting.

Let's acknowledge the LORD. Let's press on to know the LORD. As surely as the sun rises, the LORD will appear.

Hosea 6:3 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF JOEL

The King Who Restores the Years

Joel, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Restores the Years: The Book of Joel, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Imagine waking up to a sound like a storm. You look outside, and the sky is dark, not with clouds, but with insects. Billions of locusts are pouring over the hills, devouring every leaf, every blade of grass, every crop in the fields. By the time they move on, the land looks like it's been burned. There's nothing left to eat.

That's how the book of Joel begins. A real disaster had hit the land of Judah, and it was so devastating that people would tell their grandchildren about it. But Joel saw something more in it. He saw a warning, an invitation, and, surprisingly, a promise.

Joel is one of the shortest books in the Bible, only three chapters. But it contains some of the most important promises in Scripture: that God will restore what was lost, that He will pour out His Spirit on everyone, young and old, sons and daughters, and that whoever calls on His name will be saved. Seven centuries later, a fisherman named Peter stood up in Jerusalem and said, This is what Joel was talking about.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Joel in four chapters: when the locusts hit (Joel 1), tear your heart, not your clothes (2:1-27), pouring out the Spirit on all flesh (2:28-32), and the valley of decision and the fountain of hope (3).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what we know and don't know about Joel, what locust plagues are like, and what the Day of the LORD means. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as when Joel lived or whether the locusts were also a picture of an army, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Joel in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twenty-ninth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Joel is short but rich. This book explains the real locust plague behind it, the prophetic theme of the Day of the LORD, and the uncertain date of the book, presenting the early and post-exilic views fairly.

It highlights Joel's call to genuine rather than performative repentance, God's promise to restore the years the locusts have eaten, and the outpouring of the Spirit on sons and daughters, young and old, which Peter quotes at Pentecost. Where Christians hold different views on how that promise applies to roles in the church today, the book notes that sincere believers differ while affirming what Joel clearly says: the Spirit is for everyone.

Chapter 3 addresses God's judgment on nations that sold children into slavery. A Real Talk box connects this to modern human trafficking and exploitation, encouraging readers to recognize warning signs and to talk with a trusted adult. It lists the National Human Trafficking Hotline (1-888-373-7888, or text 233733), the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-422-4453), and 911.

Other boxes address crisis, loss, regret, and 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how Joel's promises come to life in Acts 2 and Romans 10:13, and how Jesus restores what sin and loss have stolen. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will tear their heart, not just their clothes, and discover that God is gracious and merciful.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

Who Was Joel?

We know almost nothing about Joel except his name and his father's name. Joel means the LORD is God. His father was Pethuel. He seems to have lived in or near Jerusalem, since he talks a lot about the temple, the priests, and Zion. Beyond that, the book focuses entirely on his message, not his life.

When Did Joel Live?

Unlike most prophets, Joel doesn't mention any king, so his date is uncertain. Some scholars place him early, around 835-800 BC, during the reign of young King Joash, when priests and elders led the nation. They point to the book's position near Hosea and Amos and to the enemies it names, like Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt, and Edom. Others place him after the exile, around 500-350 BC, when the temple had been rebuilt and the people had no king. They point to the mention of Greeks buying slaves, the focus on priests and elders, and the way Joel seems to echo other prophets. Some propose a date in between. Sincere Christians hold different views, and the message of the book doesn't depend on settling it.

Locust Plagues

Locusts are a kind of grasshopper. Most of the time, they live alone. But when conditions are right, they change their behavior, gather in enormous swarms, and travel long distances. A single swarm can cover hundreds of square miles and contain billions of insects. Each

locust eats roughly its own weight in plants every day. A large swarm can eat as much food in a day as millions of people. Swarms still hit parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia today. In 2020, East Africa saw its worst locust outbreak in decades. In the ancient world, a locust plague meant famine.

The Day of the LORD

Joel's big theme is the Day of the LORD. It's a phrase used by many prophets for a time when God steps into history in a dramatic way to judge evil and rescue His people. People in Israel often thought of it as a great day when God would defeat their enemies. But the prophets warned that it would also bring judgment on God's own people if they were unfaithful. Sometimes the Day of the LORD refers to a disaster in the prophet's own time. Sometimes it points to the final day when God will set everything right. Joel uses it both ways.

How Joel Is Built

Joel moves from disaster to hope. Chapter 1 describes the locust plague and calls for mourning. Chapter 2 describes an even more terrifying invasion, then calls the people to repent, and promises restoration. Then it promises that God will pour out His Spirit. Chapter 3 describes God judging the nations and blessing His people. In the Hebrew Bible, the verses are numbered differently, with 2:28-32 as chapter 3 and chapter 3 as chapter 4. This book follows the English numbering used by the WEB.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Joel 1): When the locusts hit.

Chapter 2 (Joel 2:1-27): Tear your heart, not your clothes.

Chapter 3 (Joel 2:28-32): Pouring out the Spirit on all flesh.

Chapter 4 (Joel 3): The valley of decision and the fountain of hope.

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4 The Valley of Decision and the Fountain of Hope *3* .....

Where This Points .....

CHAPTER 1

When the Locusts Hit

Joel 1

Joel's book opens with a question for the oldest people in town. "Hear this, you elders, and listen, all you inhabitants of the land! Has this ever happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?"

The answer was no. Nobody had ever seen anything like it. And Joel wanted the story passed down for generations. "Tell your children about it, and have your children tell their children, and their children, another generation."

What happened? Locusts. Wave after wave of them. "What the swarming locust has left, the great locust has eaten. What the great locust has left, the grasshopper has eaten. What the grasshopper has left, the caterpillar has eaten."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Four Kinds of Locusts**
>
> Joel uses four different Hebrew words for the insects. Some scholars think they describe four different kinds of locusts. Others think they describe four stages in a locust's life, from young hoppers without wings to fully grown flyers. Others think Joel is using four words for poetic effect, to show wave after wave of destruction. Whatever the exact meaning, the point is clear: what one wave missed, the next one devoured. Nothing was left.

Joel describes the swarm like an invading army. "For a nation has come up on my land, strong, and without number. His teeth are the

teeth of a lion." They stripped the grapevines and fig trees, even gnawing off the bark until the branches were white.

Then Joel goes through every group of people and tells them to mourn.

First, the partiers. "Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine." The grapes were gone, so there would be no more wine. The good times were over.

Then the priests. The grain and wine used for daily offerings at the temple had run out. "The meal offering and the drink offering are cut off from the LORD's house. The priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn." For the first time in living memory, worship itself was being interrupted.

Then the farmers. "Be confounded, you farmers! Wail, you vineyard keepers, for the wheat and for the barley; for the harvest of the field has perished." The wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, dates, and apples were all gone. And Joel sums it up with a heartbreaking line: "joy has withered away from the sons of men."

REAL TALK **When Everything Gets Stripped Away**

Sometimes life hits like a locust swarm. A parent loses a job. A family member gets seriously sick. Your house is damaged in a storm or fire. Your family breaks apart. Suddenly, the things you counted on are gone, and joy seems to have withered away. If that's happening to you, it's okay to grieve. Joel didn't tell people to pretend everything was fine. He told them to mourn. Talk to a trusted adult about what you're going through. You don't have to carry it alone. And if the weight ever feels like too much, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Food in the Ancient World**

In Joel's world, there were no grocery stores, food trucks, or imports from other countries. People ate what they grew. Grain made bread, the most basic

food. Grapes made wine, which was a normal part of meals. Olives made oil for cooking, lamps, and medicine. Figs and dates were important sources of sugar and energy. If a swarm destroyed all of these at once, a family could starve before the next harvest, and the seeds for next year's crop might be gone too.

Notice what the locusts did. They stripped away everything people relied on: food, drink, income, even the ability to worship in the usual way. Everything they had counted on for security was suddenly gone.

That's what a crisis often does. It exposes what we've been trusting. When things are going well, it's easy to think we're in control. We have money, food, friends, plans, and routines. But when the locusts hit, we discover how fragile all of that really is.

So what does Joel tell them to do? Not panic. Not blame each other. Not just try harder. He tells them to turn to God.

"Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD, your God, and cry to the LORD."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Fasting and Sackcloth**

In the ancient world, people showed grief and repentance by fasting, going without food, and by wearing sackcloth, a rough, scratchy cloth made from goat hair. Sometimes they also sat in ashes or put dust on their heads. These were outward signs of inner sorrow. A solemn assembly was a special gathering of the whole community to pray. Joel wanted everyone to come together and cry out to God, because this disaster affected everyone.

Then Joel uses a phrase that will echo through the rest of the book. "Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty."

The locust plague was a warning. It was a preview of an even bigger day, when God would step into history to deal with sin. If the locusts were this bad, how much more serious would the Day of the LORD be?

Joel ends the chapter with his own prayer. "LORD, I cry to you, for the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned all the trees of the field." Drought had followed the locusts. Even the animals were suffering. "Yes, the animals of the field pant to you, for the water brooks have dried up."

REAL TALK **Even the Animals Cry Out**

Joel says the animals were panting to God. It's a striking picture: creation itself crying out in its suffering. The Bible cares about the whole world God made, not just people. Paul wrote that all creation groans, waiting to be set free. Today, many young people care deeply about the environment, animals, and the planet. That's a good instinct. Christians believe God made the world, called it good, and asked people to take care of it. Caring for creation is part of loving the Creator.

REAL TALK **What's Your Security?**

Joel 1 asks a hard question: What happens when everything you depend on is gone? If your sense of security comes from your grades, your friend group, your looks, your phone, or your family's money, a crisis can shake you to the core. Those things are good gifts, but they can't hold your whole life. Joel's answer is to cry out to the LORD. God doesn't promise that bad things will never happen. But He promises that He is a refuge who never runs out, even when everything else does.

Joel 1 is a hard chapter. There are no quick answers. But it shows the right first step in a crisis: be honest about the loss, come together, and turn to God.

KEY VERSE

Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD, your God, and cry to the LORD.

Joel 1:14 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Joel wanted people to tell their children and grandchildren about the locust plague?
2. What things did the locusts strip away from people's lives?
3. What do you rely on for security? What would happen if it were taken away?
4. Why do you think Joel told people to gather together and cry to the LORD?

TRY THIS *Make a list of the things you depend on most. Next to each, write whether it could be taken away. Then write one sentence telling God that you want Him to be your deepest security.*

CHAPTER 2

Tear Your Heart, Not Your Clothes

Joel 2:1–27

Chapter 2 opens with an alarm. “Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD comes, for it is close at hand.”

Joel describes an army so vast and terrifying that the sky turns dark. “A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.” In front of them, the land looks like the garden of Eden. Behind them, it’s a desolate wilderness.

They look like horses and run like warhorses. They sound like chariots and crackling fire. They climb walls like soldiers. They march in perfect lines, never breaking ranks. “They rush on the city. They run on the wall. They climb up into the houses. They enter in at the windows like thieves.”

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Fair Questions: Locusts or an Army?**
>
> Is Joel 2 describing locusts again, or a human army? Christians and scholars hold different views. Some think chapter 2 continues describing the locust plague, comparing the insects to an army. Locust heads really do look a bit like tiny horse heads, and their swarms can darken the sky and sound like fire. Others think chapter 2 describes a future human army, perhaps the Assyrians or Babylonians, using the locusts of chapter 1 as a picture. Others think it

points to the final Day of the LORD. Some combine these views. Either way, the main point is the same: a terrifying judgment is coming, and the only hope is to turn to God.

And then comes the most surprising part. Who is leading this army? "The LORD thunders his voice before his army, for his forces are very great." The army was God's. The disaster was a wake-up call from Him. "For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome, and who can endure it?"

That's the question. Who can survive the Day of the LORD? And then, right when things seem hopeless, God speaks.

"Yet even now, says the LORD, turn to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning."

Yet even now. Those might be the three most hopeful words in Joel. Even when the alarm is sounding, even when disaster is at the door, it's not too late.

Then God says what kind of turning He's looking for. "Tear your heart and not your garments, and turn to the LORD, your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and relents from sending calamity."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tearing Your Clothes**

In the ancient world, people tore their clothes as a sign of deep grief, shock, or repentance. Jacob tore his clothes when he thought his son Joseph was dead. David tore his clothes when he heard that Saul and Jonathan had died. It was a dramatic, public way of showing sorrow. But it could also become a performance, something people did because it was expected, even if their hearts weren't changed. God says He isn't interested in the show. He wants their hearts.

Notice why Joel says they should turn back. Not because God is harsh, but because He is good. "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness." Those words go all the way back to Exodus 34, when God revealed His character to Moses on Mount Sinai. They're repeated throughout the Old Testament, by Moses, David, Nehemiah, Jonah, and others. It's like God's official description of Himself.

> **REAL TALK** **Real vs. Performative**
>
> It's possible to look sorry without being sorry. You can post the right thing, say the right words, put on a sad face, or apologize just to get out of trouble. That's tearing your clothes without tearing your heart. Real repentance is different. It means honestly admitting what you did, feeling the weight of it, and actually changing direction. It's not about how sad you look. It's about turning around. Jesus warned against people who fast with sad faces just so others will notice. God sees past the performance to the heart. And the good news is that He's gracious and merciful, so you don't need to put on a show to be welcomed back.

Then Joel says something humble. "Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him." Joel doesn't treat God like a vending machine, where you put in repentance and get out blessings. He leaves room for God's freedom. But he hopes in God's mercy.

So Joel calls everyone together again. "Blow the trumpet in Zion! Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly." Everyone was invited: the elders, the children, even nursing babies. Even a bride and groom were supposed to leave their wedding celebration. Nobody was too young, too old, or too busy. And the priests were to weep between the porch and the altar and pray, "Spare your people, LORD."

REAL TALK **Everyone Is Invited**

Notice that Joel called the children too. Even the youngest people in the community were part of turning back to God. Sometimes teens feel like church and faith are mainly for adults, and they're just along for the ride. Joel says no. You're part of God's people right now, not someday. Your prayers matter. Your repentance matters. Your faith matters. Paul told young Timothy, "Let no man despise your youth; but be an example to those who believe." You can lead in your family, your school, and your church by turning to God with your whole heart.

And then everything changes. "Then the LORD was jealous for his land, and had pity on his people."

God answered. He promised to send grain, wine, and oil again. He promised to drive away the invading army. He told the land, the animals, and the people not to be afraid. The rain would come again, the early rain in the fall and the latter rain in the spring. The threshing floors would be full of wheat, and the vats would overflow with wine and oil.

And then God made one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible. "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the great locust, the grasshopper, and the caterpillar, my great army, which I sent among you."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Restoring the Years**

Notice that God doesn't just promise to restore the crops. He promises to restore the years. You can't actually get time back. A year lost to locusts is gone. But God promised to make up for it, to bring such abundance that it would be as if those years hadn't been wasted. It's a promise that God can redeem loss in ways we can't imagine. That doesn't mean everything lost will be replaced in the same form. But it means loss doesn't get the final word.

REAL TALK **Lost Years**

Maybe you feel like you've lost time. Maybe you spent years in a bad situation, like a hard home life, an illness, a toxic friendship, an addiction, or just running from God. Maybe you look back with regret and think, I wasted so much. Joel 2:25 is for you. God specializes in restoring what was eaten. He can bring good out of the hardest seasons and make your story count. That might take time, and it might not look exactly the way you expect. But your past doesn't disqualify you from a good future with God. If you're struggling with regret or shame, talk to a trusted adult, pastor, or counselor about it.

God ends this section with two more promises. "You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied, and will praise the name of the LORD, your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; and my people will never again be disappointed. You will know that I am among Israel, and that I am the LORD, your God, and there is no one else."

The greatest blessing wasn't the food. It was God Himself. He would be among His people.

KEY VERSE

Tear your heart and not your garments, and turn to the LORD, your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and relents from sending calamity.

Joel 2:13 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the words yet even now are so important?
2. What's the difference between tearing your heart and tearing your clothes?
3. Why does Joel point to God's character as the reason to turn back to Him?
4. Is there an area of your life where you feel like the locusts have eaten years? How might God restore it?

TRY THIS *Write a short, honest prayer telling God about one area where you need to turn back to Him. Don't worry about saying it perfectly. Just tear your heart.*

CHAPTER 3

Pouring Out the Spirit on All Flesh

Joel 2:28–32

Joel has just promised that God will restore what the locusts ate. Then he looks further ahead, beyond the next harvest, to something even bigger.

"It will happen afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. And also on the servants and on the handmaids in those days, I will pour out my Spirit."

This is one of the most amazing promises in the Old Testament. To understand why, you need to know how the Spirit worked before.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Spirit in the Old Testament**
>
> In most of the Old Testament, God's Spirit came on specific people for specific tasks. The Spirit came on craftsmen to build the tabernacle, on judges like Gideon and Samson to rescue Israel, on kings like Saul and David, and on prophets to speak God's word. But most ordinary people never experienced the Spirit that way. Moses once said he wished all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit on them. Joel says that day is coming. The Spirit won't be just for a few special leaders. He will be for everyone.

Notice the word poured. Not sprinkled, not dripped. Poured out, like rain after a drought. After a chapter about dry land and withered crops, God promises a downpour, not of water, but of His own Spirit.

And look who receives Him. All flesh. Then Joel spells out what that means.

Sons and daughters. Both young men and young women. Not just men.

Old men and young men. Not just the experienced and respected. Young people too.

Servants and handmaids. Not just the powerful and wealthy. Even those at the bottom of society, who had no status at all.

> **REAL TALK** **The Spirit Is for Teens Too**
>
> Joel specifically mentions sons and daughters and young men. That's you. God doesn't wait until you're an adult to use you. In the Bible, God worked through young people again and again: Samuel heard God's voice as a boy, David faced Goliath as a teenager, Mary was probably a teenager when she said yes to God, and Timothy was a young pastor. When Joel says the Spirit will be poured out on sons and daughters, he means God wants to fill and use young people. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to be willing.
>
> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Fair Questions: Sons and Daughters Prophesying**
>
> Joel's promise that both sons and daughters will prophesy was radical in the ancient world, where women were often excluded from religious leadership. The New Testament shows women prophesying, like Philip's four daughters in Acts 21 and women in the church at Corinth. Christians today hold different views on how this applies to specific roles in church leadership, and sincere, Bible-loving believers come to different conclusions on that question. But

Joel and Acts are clear on the main point: the Holy Spirit is poured out on women and men alike, and God speaks through and uses both. Paul wrote, "there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

What does it mean to prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions? In the Bible, prophecy means speaking God's message, often encouraging, warning, or comforting people. Dreams and visions were ways God sometimes revealed Himself. Joel's point is that everyone would know God personally and be able to share His message. The New Testament says the Spirit gives different gifts to different people, but everyone who belongs to Jesus has the Spirit.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Prophecy Today**

Christians have different views on how gifts like prophecy, dreams, and visions work today. Some believe these gifts continue in the church in much the same way as in the New Testament. Others believe some gifts were especially for the time of the apostles, while God still guides His people today through Scripture and the Spirit. Many take positions in between. All agree that any message claiming to come from God must line up with the Bible, and that the Spirit's most important work is helping people know Jesus and love one another.

Then Joel describes signs that will accompany the Day of the LORD. "I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes."

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Blood Moon**

During a total lunar eclipse, the moon can turn a deep reddish color, which is why people sometimes call it a blood moon. Some people have tried to connect specific eclipses with Joel's prophecy and predict the end of the world. Those predictions have repeatedly turned out to be wrong. In the Bible, darkened sun and blood moon are common prophetic images for times

when God shakes the world in judgment. Peter quoted these lines at Pentecost, and many Christians connect them both with the darkness that covered the land when Jesus was crucified and with the final day still to come.

And then comes the climax. Of all the promises in Joel, this might be the greatest. "It will happen that whoever will call on the LORD's name shall be saved."

Whoever. Not just the people of Israel. Not just the religious leaders. Not just the good people. Whoever. Anyone who calls on the name of the LORD.

REAL TALK **Calling on His Name**

What does it mean to call on the name of the LORD? It means turning to God for help and trusting Him to save you. It's not a magic formula. It's a cry from the heart, like someone who's drowning shouting for a lifeguard. In the Bible, a name represents a person's character and authority. Calling on God's name means trusting who He is. You don't need fancy words, a perfect past, or a special location. You can call on Him anywhere, anytime: in your room, in a car, in a hospital, at school, or in the middle of the night.

Seven hundred years or more after Joel, his words came to life in a way no one expected.

Jesus had died and risen. Before He returned to heaven, He told His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the gift His Father had promised. Then, on the Jewish festival of Pentecost, they were gathered together in one place. "Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." Something like tongues of fire rested on each of them. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Pentecost**

Pentecost, called Shavuot in Hebrew, was a Jewish harvest festival held fifty days after Passover. Jewish tradition also connected it with the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem for it. That's why, in Acts 2, people from many nations heard the disciples speaking in their own languages. The timing is beautiful. Joel had promised a great harvest after the locusts and an outpouring of God's Spirit. At Pentecost, the harvest festival became the day the Spirit was poured out, and about three thousand people joined the church.

A crowd gathered, amazed and confused. Some mocked, saying the disciples were drunk. Then Peter stood up. "For these aren't drunken, as you suppose, seeing it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel."

Peter quoted Joel's whole prophecy, and then he told them about Jesus: His life, His death, His resurrection, and His exaltation. The Lord on whom they should call was Jesus. When the people asked what they should do, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are far off."

REAL TALK **The Promise Is to Your Children**

Peter said the promise was for the crowd, for their children, and for all who were far off. That includes you. You don't have to be a Bible scholar, a pastor, or an adult to receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God's gift to everyone who turns to Jesus. He helps you understand the Bible, pray when you don't know what to say, resist temptation, and love people you find hard to love. If you've trusted Jesus, the Spirit Joel promised lives in you. Ask Him to guide you every day.

KEY VERSE

It will happen that whoever will call on the LORD's name shall be saved

Joel 2:32 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why was Joel's promise of the Spirit on all flesh so surprising in his time?
2. What does it mean to you that the Spirit is poured out on sons and daughters, young and old?
3. What does it look like to call on the name of the LORD?
4. How did Joel's prophecy come true at Pentecost?

TRY THIS *Read Acts 2:1-41. Underline every place where Joel is quoted or echoed. Then ask God's Spirit to help you live for Him this week.*

CHAPTER 4

The Valley of Decision and the Fountain of Hope

Joel 3

In chapter 3, Joel's focus widens to the whole world. God says that when He restores His people, He will gather all the nations into "the valley of Jehoshaphat," and judge them there.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Valley of Jehoshaphat**
>
> Jehoshaphat means the LORD judges. No one is sure exactly where the valley of Jehoshaphat was, or whether Joel meant a literal place. Since the fourth century AD, some traditions have identified it with the Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem between the city and the Mount of Olives, where many Jewish, Christian, and Muslim graves now lie. Others think the name is symbolic, describing the place where God judges. It may also remind readers of King Jehoshaphat, who saw God defeat an invading army without a battle in 2 Chronicles 20.

Why would God judge the nations? Joel gives specific reasons. They had scattered God's people. They had divided up His land. And they had done something horrifying: "and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a prostitute, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink."

They treated children as cheap merchandise. They traded a boy or a girl for a night of drinking. Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia had also stolen

treasures from God's temple and sold the people of Judah "to the sons of the Greeks, that you may remove them far from their border."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ancient Slave Trading**

Tyre and Sidon were wealthy Phoenician trading cities on the Mediterranean coast, and the Philistines lived along the southwest coast. Ancient sources show that the Phoenicians were major traders across the Mediterranean, and that human beings, including prisoners of war, were among the goods bought and sold. Amos also condemned Tyre and Gaza for selling whole communities as slaves to Edom. Joel shows that God sees and cares about every person who has been bought, sold, or treated as property.

God promised that He would turn their actions back on their own heads. The people they had sold would be brought back, and the traders would face justice. The God of Israel does not ignore the exploitation of the vulnerable.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety First: Human Trafficking Is Real**

Human trafficking still happens today, including in the United States. Traffickers use force, fraud, or manipulation to exploit people for labor or sex. Teens are often targeted, sometimes online through social media, gaming platforms, or messaging apps. Warning signs include someone who offers you a job, modeling deal, or relationship that seems too good to be true; who showers you with gifts and attention, then asks for favors; who asks you to keep your relationship secret; who wants to meet in person after only knowing you online; or who pressures you to send pictures. If anything like that is happening to you or a friend, tell a trusted adult right away. You can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text 233733. If you're being abused, call or text the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453. If you're in immediate danger, call 911. It's never your fault.

Then God issues a challenge to the nations. It's like a battle cry, mocking their pride. "Prepare for war! Stir up the mighty men. Let all the warriors draw near." And then: "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, I am strong."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Plowshares and Swords**

Joel's command to beat plowshares into swords is the reverse of a famous promise in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." A plowshare is the metal blade of a plow, used for farming. Isaiah and Micah describe a future of peace, when weapons will be turned into farm tools. Joel describes the opposite, a final rebellion when the nations turn their farming tools into weapons to fight against God. It's as if Joel is saying, Go ahead and gather every weapon you can make. It won't be enough. After God's judgment, Isaiah's peace will finally come.

Then Joel describes the nations gathering. "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision."

The valley of decision isn't mainly a place where the nations decide something. It's where God's decision, His verdict, is announced. Joel uses the picture of a harvest. "Put in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe." The wickedness of the nations was ripe, ready for judgment. Revelation uses the same imagery for the final judgment.

REAL TALK **Justice Is Coming**

It can feel like people who hurt others get away with it. Bullies, abusers, traffickers, and corrupt leaders sometimes seem untouchable. Joel 3 says God sees it all, and He will hold every person and nation accountable. That's good news for anyone who has been hurt. It means injustice won't have the final word. It's also a reason not to take revenge into your own hands, but to trust God's justice and support people who work for justice now, like police,

courts, advocates, and organizations that help victims. If someone has hurt you, you don't have to stay silent. Telling a trusted adult is a step toward justice.

And then the sun and moon go dark, and the LORD roars from Zion. "The LORD will roar from Zion, and thunder from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth will shake; but the LORD will be a refuge to his people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel."

The same God whose voice shakes heaven and earth is a safe place for His people. His power is terrifying to His enemies and comforting to those who trust Him.

Then Joel ends with a picture of paradise. "It will happen in that day, that the mountains will drop down sweet wine, the hills will flow with milk, all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters; and a fountain will flow out from the LORD's house."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Fountain From God's House**

Joel's fountain flowing from the temple connects with Ezekiel 47, where a river flows from the temple and heals the Dead Sea, and with Zechariah 14, where living waters flow from Jerusalem. The valley of Shittim, which Joel mentions, may refer to a dry valley where acacia trees grew, possibly near the Dead Sea. Water flowing into a dry valley is a picture of life coming to barren places. At the end of the Bible, John sees "a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

Remember how Joel began? Dry fields, withered crops, dried-up streams, animals panting for water, and joy withering away. Now the book ends with mountains dripping with sweet wine, hills flowing with milk, streams full of water, and a fountain flowing from God's house. Everything the locusts took has been restored and more.

The last line of Joel is simple and powerful. "For the LORD dwells in Zion."

That's the final answer to every disaster, every injustice, and every loss. God is there. He lives among His people. And where God is, there is life.

> **REAL TALK** **From Dry Ground to a Fountain**
>
> Joel's book moves from total loss to overflowing abundance. Maybe your life feels more like chapter 1 right now, dry, empty, and stripped bare. Joel's message is that it doesn't have to stay that way. God can bring life to dry places. It may not happen overnight, and it may not look exactly like you expect. But the God who restores the years and pours out His Spirit is still at work. Keep turning to Him. Keep calling on His name. And if you're in a dry season that feels hopeless, please talk to someone you trust, and remember that 988 is available any time.

KEY VERSE

The LORD will roar from Zion, and thunder from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth will shake; but the LORD will be a refuge to his people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel.

Joel 3:16 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God takes the exploitation of children so seriously?
2. How does Joel's plowshares-into-swords image reverse Isaiah's?
3. What does it mean that the LORD is both a roaring lion and a refuge?
4. How does the ending of Joel compare to its beginning?

TRY THIS *Learn more about how to recognize and prevent human trafficking. Talk with a parent or trusted adult about online safety, and agree on a plan for what you'll do if anyone online ever makes you uncomfortable.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Joel ends with a fountain flowing from God's house and a promise that the LORD dwells in Zion. Jewish readers treasure Joel's call to repentance, and Joel 2 is read in some Jewish communities during the season of return before the Day of Atonement. Christians believe Joel's greatest promises came to life after Jesus rose from the dead.

Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, His followers were gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. "Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind." Something like tongues of fire rested on each of them, and they began speaking in languages they had never learned. A crowd gathered. Some said they were drunk. Then Peter stood up and said, "But this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel." He quoted Joel 2:28-32. The Spirit had been poured out, on men and women, young and old. And he ended with Joel's promise: "whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." Peter told the crowd that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was the Lord on whom they should call. "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are far off." About three thousand people believed that day. Years later, Paul quoted the same promise in Romans: "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved," adding that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. And the God who promised to restore the years the locusts had eaten does that in Jesus, who takes lives devoured by sin, loss, and regret and makes them new.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Joel calls everyone, from elders to children, to turn back to God. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus opened the way.

Jesus died for our sins and rose again. Then He poured out the Spirit Joel promised, so everyone who calls on His name can be saved.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

God's Spirit is poured out as a gift, not a wage. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Call on His name.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Joel says, Tear your heart and not your garments. You don't need perfect words. You can call on the name of the Lord right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've gone my own way, and I can't fix that myself. I'm tearing my heart, not just saying the right words. Thank You that You are gracious and merciful. Thank You that Jesus died for my sins, rose again, and poured out Your Spirit. I call on His name. Forgive me, fill me with Your Spirit, and restore the years that have been lost. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Joel 2, then Acts 2, from the promise to Pentecost.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized, like the three thousand at Pentecost.

Ask for the Spirit's help. Each day, ask God's Spirit to guide you, strengthen you, and use you.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Joel asks, Who knows? God may turn and leave a blessing behind. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Joel is right, the promise is for you too. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten

Joel 2:25 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF AMOS

The King with the Plumb Line

Amos, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King with the Plumb Line: The Book of Amos, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Imagine a farmer from a small town in the countryside showing up at the most exclusive church in the richest city in the country. He's got dirt under his fingernails and calluses on his hands. He's never been to seminary. And he stands up in the middle of a packed worship service and says, God hates your songs.

That's Amos. He was a shepherd and fig farmer who God sent to the wealthy northern kingdom of Israel, at a time when business was booming, the churches were full, and everyone felt blessed. But underneath the success, the poor were being crushed. The rich were cheating, bribing judges, and selling people into debt slavery for the price of a pair of sandals. And they were still showing up to worship every week as if nothing was wrong.

Amos says that God cares about how we treat people at least as much as how we sing on Sunday. His most famous line, about justice rolling on like rivers, has been quoted by civil rights leaders, carved into monuments, and shouted at protests. If you've ever cared about fairness, about people who get overlooked, or about religious people who say one thing and do another, Amos is for you.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Amos in five chapters: the trap closes (Amos 1-2), chosen means accountable (3-4), let justice roll on like

rivers (5-6), the plumb line and the priest (7-8), and rebuilding David's fallen tent (9).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Amos was, when he lived, and what life was like in Israel at the time. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how Amos's call for justice applies to politics today, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Amos in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirtieth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Amos is the Bible's great prophet of social justice. This book explains his background as a shepherd and sycamore-fig farmer from Tekoa, his mission to prosperous Israel under Jeroboam II around 760 BC, and archaeological evidence of the earthquake mentioned in Amos 1:1.

It highlights Amos's central message: that God rejects worship paired with injustice, and that being chosen by God means being accountable. It explains Amos 5:24 and notes how Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted it in the civil rights movement. Where Christians differ on how biblical justice translates into specific policies today, this book avoids partisan politics and focuses on the clear biblical call to care for the poor, act honestly, and refuse to exploit others.

Real Talk boxes address privilege and responsibility, fairness, comfort and complacency, honest business, speaking truth when it's unwelcome, and hope. One box gently addresses teens whose families are struggling financially, encouraging them to talk with a trusted adult.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how James quoted Amos 9:11-12 at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 to welcome Gentiles into Jesus' family, and how Jesus united true worship with care for the poor. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will seek God and live, and let justice roll on like rivers in their own corner of the world.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

A Blue-Collar Prophet

Amos wasn't a professional prophet or a priest. He was a working man from Tekoa, a small town in the hills of Judah, about ten miles south of Jerusalem, on the edge of the wilderness. The book calls him one of the herdsmen of Tekoa. Later, he says he also took care of sycamore-fig trees. These trees produced small, cheap figs that ordinary people ate. To help the fruit ripen, workers had to pinch or slit each fig by hand. It was humble, seasonal labor. Amos may have traveled to the lowlands to do it. He knew hard work, open fields, wild animals, and rural poverty. And God sent him from the south to preach in the north.

Two Years Before the Earthquake

Amos 1:1 dates his preaching to the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. That was around 760 BC. The earthquake must have been unforgettable. Two hundred years later, the prophet Zechariah still referred to it, saying people fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Archaeologists have found evidence of a major earthquake around that time at several sites in Israel, including Hazor and Gezer, where walls collapsed, tilted, or cracked. Some geologists estimate it was one of the strongest earthquakes in the region's history.

Boom Times in Israel

Under Jeroboam II, the northern kingdom was at the height of its power and wealth. Assyria was temporarily weak, so Israel expanded its borders. Trade flourished. The rich built winter homes and summer homes, decorated with carved ivory. Archaeologists have found hundreds of beautiful ivory carvings in the ruins of Samaria, Israel's capital, from around this period. But the wealth wasn't shared. Small farmers fell into debt. The powerful took their land. Judges took bribes. And the poor were sold into slavery for tiny debts.

Religion Everywhere

Israel was very religious. People flocked to shrines at Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. They offered sacrifices, gave tithes, sang songs, and celebrated festivals. They were sure God was on their side and looked forward to the Day of the LORD, when they believed He would defeat their enemies. Amos had to tell them that their religion was empty, because it didn't change how they treated people.

What Happened Next

About thirty-five years after Amos preached, Assyria rose again, conquered the northern kingdom, and destroyed Samaria in 722 BC. The people were scattered, just as Amos had warned. His words were remembered and written down, and they became part of The Twelve, the scroll of the Minor Prophets.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Amos 1-2): The trap closes.

Chapter 2 (Amos 3-4): Chosen means accountable.

Chapter 3 (Amos 5-6): Let justice roll on like rivers.

Chapter 4 (Amos 7-8): The plumb line and the priest.

Chapter 5 (Amos 9): Rebuilding David's fallen tent.

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Where This Points .....

CHAPTER 1

The Trap Closes

Amos 1–2

Amos begins with a roar. "The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the pastures of the shepherds will mourn, and the top of Carmel will wither."

A shepherd like Amos knew what a lion's roar meant. It meant danger was close. And God was roaring.

Then Amos does something brilliant. Picture him standing in a public place in Israel, maybe at the shrine in Bethel, with a crowd gathered around. He starts preaching against Israel's enemies.

"For three transgressions of Damascus, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **For Three, Yes, for Four**
>
> The phrase for three transgressions, yes, for four is a Hebrew way of saying, Their sins have piled up and overflowed. It's like saying, They've done it again and again and again, and this is the last straw. It doesn't mean they committed exactly four sins. In each case, Amos names one especially terrible crime, the one that tipped the scales. Proverbs uses a similar pattern: There are three things, yes, four.

Damascus was the capital of Aram, or Syria, Israel's enemy to the northeast. Its army had brutally attacked the region of Gilead, part

of Israel. Threshing with iron sledges meant crushing people like grain. The crowd would have cheered. Yes! God's going to punish Damascus!

Then Amos turned to Gaza, a Philistine city to the southwest. Gaza had "carried away captive the whole community, to deliver them up to Edom." They had captured entire villages and sold them as slaves. More cheering.

Then Tyre, the rich Phoenician city to the northwest, which had also sold whole communities to Edom and broken a "brotherly covenant." More cheers.

Then Edom, to the southeast, which "pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity." Edom was descended from Esau, Jacob's brother, so the Edomites were relatives of Israel. And they had been merciless.

Then Ammon, to the east, which had committed horrific war crimes against pregnant women in Gilead just to expand its borders. Then Moab, which had desecrated the bones of the king of Edom. Notice that Moab's crime wasn't against Israel at all. God cares about cruelty no matter who the victim is.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Map of Judgment**
>
> If you trace Amos's speech on a map, something interesting happens. He starts with Damascus in the northeast, jumps to Gaza in the southwest, then Tyre in the northwest, then Edom, Ammon, and Moab in the southeast and east. He's circling around Israel, getting closer and closer. Then he moves to Judah, Israel's brother nation to the south. And finally, he lands right in the middle of the circle: Israel itself. The crowd didn't realize they were standing in the center of a target.

None of these nations had the law of Moses. But God still held them accountable for basic human decency: not selling people as slaves, not breaking treaties, not slaughtering civilians, not showing hatred to relatives. They knew those things were wrong. Every human being has a conscience.

> **REAL TALK** **Everyone Knows Some Things Are Wrong**
>
> The nations in Amos 1 didn't have the Bible, but God still judged them for cruelty, slavery, and violence. That's because some things are written on every human heart. Paul says in Romans that people who don't have God's law still have a conscience that tells them right from wrong. You've probably noticed this. Even people who say there's no such thing as right and wrong get angry when someone cheats them or hurts someone they love. Deep down, we all know that cruelty, exploitation, and betrayal are wrong. Amos shows that God takes those things seriously, everywhere, for everyone.

Then Amos turned south. "For three transgressions of Judah, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have rejected the LORD's law."

The northern crowd probably cheered even louder. Judah was their rival. And Judah's sin was different. They had God's law, and they rejected it. More knowledge meant more responsibility.

Seven nations. Seven judgments. In the Bible, seven often stands for completeness. The crowd might have thought Amos was done. They had heard their enemies condemned and their rivals rebuked. Surely that was the end.

Then came number eight.

"For three transgressions of Israel, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals."

The trap closed. The crowd had been cheering for God's justice. Now that justice was pointed straight at them.

> **REAL TALK** **Cheering for Judgment**
>
> It's easy to cheer when someone else gets called out. We love seeing a bully get caught, a cheater get exposed, or a celebrity get canceled. Amos's audience felt that way about their enemies. But then the spotlight swung around to them. Jesus warned about this when He talked about noticing the speck in someone else's eye while ignoring the log in your own. Before you celebrate someone else's downfall, it's worth asking: Is there anything in my own life God might want to talk to me about?

What were Israel's sins? They weren't mainly about idols this time, although that was part of it. They were about how people treated each other.

They sold innocent people into slavery over small debts. "The needy for a pair of sandals" may mean that a poor person could be sold to pay off a debt as small as the price of shoes. Or it may refer to bribes as cheap as sandals. Either way, human beings were being treated as worth less than footwear.

"They trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the earth and deny justice to the oppressed." The powerful pushed the poor around and blocked their path in court.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Debt Slavery**
>
> In ancient Israel, a person who couldn't pay a debt might be forced to work for the lender, or even sell family members into service. The law of Moses allowed this only under strict limits. Debt servants were to be treated fairly and set free after six years, and every fifty years, in the Year of Jubilee, land was supposed to return to its original families. These laws were meant to keep poor families from being trapped in poverty forever. Amos shows that

the rich were ignoring those protections and using debt to grab people and land.

Amos also condemned sexual exploitation and religious hypocrisy. People lay down beside altars on clothing they had taken from the poor as security for loans. The law said a poor person's cloak had to be returned by nightfall, because it might be their only blanket. Instead, the rich were using those cloaks at their religious feasts. And they drank wine bought with fines unfairly collected from the poor, right in the house of their God.

REAL TALK **How We Treat People Is Spiritual**

Some people think faith is mainly about what happens at church: singing, praying, and listening to sermons. Amos says God also cares about what happens at school, at work, online, and in your neighborhood. How you treat the kid nobody likes, how you talk about people behind their backs, how you handle money, whether you're honest, whether you take advantage of people who are weaker than you, all of that is spiritual. Your faith isn't just what you believe. It's how you live.

Then God reminded Israel of everything He had done for them. He had destroyed the powerful Amorites who once lived in the land. He had brought them out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness. He had raised up prophets and Nazirites, people specially dedicated to Him, from among their young men. "Isn't this true, you children of Israel?"

But they had pressured the Nazirites to break their vows and drink wine, and told the prophets, "Don't prophesy!"

BACKGROUND CHECK **Nazirites**

A Nazirite was a person who took a special vow of dedication to God, described in Numbers 6. Nazirites didn't drink wine or eat anything from grapes, didn't cut their hair, and avoided contact with dead bodies. Samson

and Samuel were Nazirites from birth. John the Baptist may have been too. Nazirites were living reminders that some people were completely devoted to God. When the people pressured them to drink, they were trying to silence that reminder.

REAL TALK **Don't Pressure People to Compromise**

Israel pushed the Nazirites to break their vows. Peer pressure isn't new. Maybe you've seen people push someone to drink, vape, cheat, or do something they had decided not to do, just because their choice made others uncomfortable. If someone has decided to live differently, respect that. And if you're the one being pressured, remember that you don't owe anyone an explanation for keeping your convictions. A true friend will respect your no.

The chapter ends with a warning. Judgment was coming, and no one would escape it. Not the fastest runner, not the strongest warrior, not the best archer, not the rider on the swiftest horse. Even the bravest soldier would flee naked on that day.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Was Amos Talking To?**

Amos was from Judah, the southern kingdom, but God sent him north to Israel. That made him an outsider. Imagine a farmer from a small country town traveling to a rich city in a rival state and telling its most powerful people that God was angry with them. Some would have laughed at his accent. Others would have said, Who does he think he is? Amos had no money, no political connections, and no fan club. All he had was a message. That's part of why his trap in chapters 1 and 2 was so clever. He got the crowd on his side before he told them the hard truth.

REAL TALK **Value Is Not a Price Tag**

Israel treated poor people like products that could be bought and sold. Our world does something similar in quieter ways. People get ranked by followers, likes, brands, grades, and bank accounts. Someone with nice shoes gets more respect than someone with worn-out ones. But God's view of people never depends on what they own. Every person you meet is made in

> His image and worth more than anything money can buy. When you treat people with dignity no matter what they have, you're seeing them the way God does.

Think about how carefully Amos built his message. He didn't start by yelling at Israel. He started with things everyone already agreed were wrong. He let the crowd's own sense of justice grow stronger and stronger. By the time he reached Israel, they had already agreed with every principle he would use against them. It's a lot like the way the prophet Nathan confronted King David with a story about a rich man stealing a poor man's lamb. David was furious at the rich man, until Nathan said, You are the man.

Good confrontation often works like that. It helps people see the truth for themselves. But it's not a trick to win arguments. Amos wasn't trying to embarrass Israel. He was trying to wake them up before it was too late. God's warnings are always a form of mercy, because a warning gives you time to change.

KEY VERSE

The LORD says: "For three transgressions of Israel, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals;

Amos 2:6 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Amos started with Israel's enemies before talking about Israel?
2. Why did God judge nations that didn't have His law?
3. What did it mean to sell the needy for a pair of sandals?
4. Where are you tempted to cheer for someone else's judgment while ignoring your own faults?

TRY THIS *This week, notice one person who is overlooked or treated unfairly at your school or in your community. Do one specific thing to treat them with dignity.*

CHAPTER 2

Chosen Means Accountable

Amos 3–4

Chapter 3 begins with one of the most surprising verses in the Bible. "I have chosen only you of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all of your sins."

Wait. You'd expect it to say, I have chosen you, therefore I will protect you no matter what. Instead, it says, I have chosen you, therefore I will hold you accountable.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Chosen**
>
> The word translated chosen in Amos 3:2 is the Hebrew word yada, which means to know. Literally, God says, You only have I known. It's the language of close relationship, like a marriage. God had a special, personal relationship with Israel that no other nation had. But that relationship came with expectations. Israel was chosen not to be better than everyone else, but to show the world what God is like. When they misrepresented Him, their privilege made their guilt greater, not smaller.

The people of Israel thought being God's chosen people was like having a VIP pass. They could do whatever they wanted, and God would still be on their side. Amos says it's the opposite. Privilege means responsibility.

REAL TALK **Privilege Means Responsibility**

Jesus said, "To whomever much is given, of him will much be required." If you've grown up in a church, had a Bible, been taught about God, or had parents who love you, those are huge gifts. But they aren't a free pass. They're a responsibility. The same goes for other advantages, like a good education, money, talents, or popularity. The question isn't just, What do I have? It's, What am I doing with it? People who've been given much are called to give much, serve much, and love much.

Then Amos asks a string of questions, the kind a shepherd from the country would ask. "Do two walk together, unless they have agreed? Will a lion roar in the thicket, when he has no prey?" Does a bird fall into a trap if there's no bait? Does a trap spring shut if nothing has been caught? Does a city hear a warning trumpet without being afraid?

Each question has an obvious answer. Every effect has a cause. And Amos's point is that his preaching has a cause too. "The lion has roared. Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken. Who can but prophesy?" Amos wasn't preaching because he wanted to. He was preaching because God had spoken, and he couldn't keep quiet.

Then Amos does something shocking. He invites Israel's enemies to come and watch. "Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see what unrest is in her, and what oppression is among them." It's as if he's saying, Even the Philistines and Egyptians would be appalled at what's happening in God's own nation.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Houses of Ivory**

Amos 3:15 says God would strike "the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory will perish." Wealthy Israelites had separate homes

for different seasons, a sign of incredible luxury. Archaeologists excavating Samaria found more than five hundred pieces of carved ivory, used to decorate furniture and walls, dating to around this period. The carvings show lotus flowers, sphinxes, lions, and other designs, many in Phoenician and Egyptian styles. These are likely the very kind of luxuries Amos condemned, built on the backs of the poor.

Amos says that when judgment came, only scraps would be left of Israel, like when a shepherd rescues two leg bones or a piece of an ear from a lion's mouth. In the law of Moses, a shepherd who lost a sheep to a wild animal had to bring back the remains as proof. That's all that would remain of the wealthy people lounging on their couches in Samaria.

Then, in chapter 4, Amos gets even more blunt. "Listen to this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who tell their husbands, Bring us drinks!"

BACKGROUND CHECK **Cows of Bashan**

Bashan was a region east of the Sea of Galilee, famous for its rich pastures and well-fed cattle. Calling the wealthy women of Samaria cows of Bashan was a sharp insult, but it also meant they were pampered and overfed while others went hungry. Amos, as a herdsman, would have known exactly what a fat Bashan cow looked like. His point wasn't to mock their appearance, but to expose a lifestyle of luxury paid for by oppressing the poor. Their comfort came at someone else's expense.

REAL TALK **Where Does It Come From?**

Amos challenged people to think about the cost of their comfort. Today, it's worth asking similar questions. Who made the clothes you're wearing? Were they paid fairly? Who grew the food you eat? It's not possible to know everything, and you don't have to feel guilty about every purchase. But Amos invites us to care about the people behind the products. You can learn about

fair trade, support companies that treat workers well, avoid wasting food, and give generously to people in need. Caring about the poor isn't just about what you give. It's also about how you live.

Then Amos mocks their religion with sarcasm. "Go to Bethel, and sin; to Gilgal, and sin more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days." In other words, Go ahead, keep up your religious routines. It doesn't impress God. They even bragged about their offerings, making sure everyone knew how generous they were. "For this pleases you."

REAL TALK **Religion for Show**

The people in Amos 4 loved religion because it made them look good. They offered sacrifices and announced their generous gifts so everyone would notice. It's possible to do that today, too. You can post about your faith, volunteer for the photo, or pray loudly to impress others. Jesus warned against practicing your righteousness in front of people to be seen by them. Real faith isn't about looking spiritual. It's about loving God and loving people, often in ways no one else will ever see.

Then God lists all the ways He had tried to get their attention. He had sent famine, so their teeth were clean because there was no food. Yet you haven't returned to me. He had held back the rain. Yet you haven't returned to me. He had sent crop diseases and locusts. Yet you haven't returned to me. He had sent plagues and war. Yet you haven't returned to me. Some of them had been nearly destroyed, like a burning stick pulled out of a fire. Yet you haven't returned to me.

Five times, the same sad refrain. God had been calling them back, over and over. And they never came.

So God says, "Therefore I will do this to you, Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, Israel."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Prepare to Meet Your God**

Today, the phrase Prepare to meet your God is sometimes painted on signs by the side of the road. In Amos, it's a warning. Israel had refused to come back to God through all His warnings. Now God was coming to them. Many Christians also hear in it an invitation. Everyone will one day stand before God. The question is whether you'll meet Him as a friend or as someone who refused His call. Amos follows it with a description of God's power: He forms the mountains, creates the wind, and knows our thoughts. The God of Armies is His name.

REAL TALK **Has God Been Getting Your Attention?**

Sometimes hard things happen in life, and we wonder why. Amos 4 describes God using hardships to call Israel back. That doesn't mean every hard thing in your life is a punishment. Many hard things happen in a broken world for reasons we don't understand, and Jesus warned against assuming people suffer because they're worse sinners. But difficult seasons can be a time to pause and ask, God, is there anything You want to say to me? Is there an area where I've drifted? If you're going through something really hard right now, please talk to a trusted adult about it. God cares about you, and so do the people around you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Life Under Jeroboam II**

Jeroboam II ruled Israel for about forty years, from roughly 793 to 753 BC. Second Kings says he restored Israel's borders from Lebo Hamath in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. Assyria was temporarily weak, and Syria had been defeated, so Israel enjoyed peace and trade. Wealth flowed into Samaria. But the money didn't spread evenly. A small group at the top got richer, while many farmers lost their land through debt. Archaeologists have noticed that, over time, homes in some Israelite towns changed from similar sizes to a mix of large mansions and small huts. That's the kind of gap Amos saw.

Amos's message in chapters 3 and 4 can sound harsh. But notice why God was so upset. It wasn't that He disliked Israel. It was that

He loved them and had given them so much. He had rescued them from slavery, given them a land, sent them prophets, and called them to show the world His character. When people who know God treat others cruelly, they don't just hurt their victims. They also give the world a false picture of what God is like.

That's still true. When Christians are dishonest, unkind, or proud, people sometimes walk away from God because of it. When Christians are humble, generous, and fair, people get a glimpse of Jesus. You may be the only picture of Jesus some of your friends ever see. That's not pressure to be perfect. It's an invitation to let His love show through you.

> **REAL TALK** **When You Feel Like You've Blown It**
>
> Reading Amos 4 might make you think about times you ignored God, maybe for a long time. If that's you, here's the good news. The refrain yet you haven't returned to me means God was still waiting for them to come back. The door was open. It's still open today. You don't have to clean yourself up first. You can simply say, God, I'm sorry. I want to come back. He's not waiting with crossed arms. Like the father in Jesus' story of the prodigal son, He runs to meet those who return.

KEY VERSE

I have chosen only you of all the families of the earth.
Therefore I will punish you for all of your sins.

Amos 3:2 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why does being chosen by God mean more responsibility, not less?
2. What gifts or advantages have you been given? What might God want you to do with them?
3. Why do you think Amos used such strong language, like cows of Bashan?
4. What does the repeated line yet you haven't returned to me reveal about God's heart?

TRY THIS *Make a list of five privileges or advantages you have. Next to each one, write one way you could use it to serve someone else this month.*

CHAPTER 3

Let Justice Roll On Like Rivers

Amos 5–6

Chapter 5 begins with a funeral song. "The virgin of Israel has fallen; She shall rise no more." Amos was singing a lament for Israel as if it were already dead. It was a shocking thing to do in the middle of a boom economy. Everyone else thought Israel was thriving.

But then, right in the middle of the funeral, comes an invitation. "For the LORD says to the house of Israel: Seek me, and you will live." And again: "Seek the LORD, and you will live."

Notice what God doesn't say. He doesn't say, Seek Bethel. Seek Gilgal. Seek Beersheba. Those were the popular religious shrines where people went to worship. God says, Don't seek the places. Seek Me.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba**

Bethel was where Jacob had dreamed of a stairway to heaven, and where King Jeroboam I had set up a golden calf. Gilgal was where Israel camped after crossing the Jordan into the promised land. Beersheba, in the far south, was connected with Abraham and Isaac. These were places with deep spiritual history. But the people had turned them into religious tourist sites, places to perform rituals without real devotion. Amos says God isn't found in famous places. He's found when people seek Him.

REAL TALK **Seeking God, Not an Experience**

Some people chase spiritual experiences: the perfect worship night, the big conference, the summer camp high. Those things can be great. But it's possible to seek the experience instead of God Himself. When the excitement fades, so does their faith. Amos says, Seek the LORD, not the place, not the feeling, not the event. You can seek God on an ordinary Tuesday in your bedroom, on the bus, or in a hospital waiting room. Seeking Him means wanting Him more than any experience He gives.

Amos describes the God they should seek, the one "who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns the shadow of death into the morning." The Creator of the stars was the one calling them back.

But the people had done something terrible. They had turned justice into wormwood, a bitter, poisonous plant. Justice should be sweet, like fresh water. They had made it bitter.

They hated anyone who told the truth in court. "They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks blamelessly." They took bribes and pushed the poor aside. They built beautiful stone mansions and planted lovely vineyards, all with money squeezed from the poor. So Amos says they would never get to live in those houses or drink that wine.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Justice at the Gate**

In ancient Israel, the city gate was more than an entrance. It was like the town square, the courthouse, and the business center all in one. Elders sat there to settle disputes, judge cases, and witness business deals. If you had been cheated, the gate was where you went for justice. That's why Amos keeps talking about the gate. When the gate was corrupt, the poor had nowhere else to go.

Then Amos gives a simple command. "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live." And: "Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in

the courts. It may be that the LORD, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph."

> **REAL TALK** **Hate Evil, Love Good**
>
> Amos says to hate evil. That doesn't mean hating people. It means being genuinely bothered by things like cruelty, cheating, bullying, racism, abuse, and lies, instead of shrugging them off. It means not laughing along when someone is being mocked. And it means loving good: honesty, kindness, fairness, courage. It's easy to become numb to evil when you see it all the time online. But God calls you to keep your heart soft, to care, and to do what you can to make things right.

Then Amos confronts the people who were looking forward to the Day of the LORD. They thought it would be a great day when God would defeat their enemies. Amos says, "Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light."

He gives a vivid picture. It would be like a man running from a lion, only to run into a bear. He escapes into his house, leans against the wall in relief, and a snake bites him. There's no escape from God's judgment by being religious.

And then comes the heart of the book. God says, "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I can't stand your solemn assemblies." He refuses their sacrifices and offerings. "Take away from me the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps."

Imagine God saying that about your church's worship service. That's how shocking this would have sounded. The people were singing, praying, and giving. But God called their worship noise.

Why? Because their worship was disconnected from how they lived. They sang praises on the Sabbath and cheated the poor on Monday.

Then God says what He wants instead. “But let justice roll on like rivers, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Rivers and Streams**
>
> In Israel, most streams only flowed during the rainy season. In the dry summer months, they dried up into empty riverbeds called wadis. Amos says God wants justice like a river that keeps rolling and righteousness like a stream that never runs dry. Not justice that shows up once in a while, on special occasions, and then disappears. Justice that keeps flowing, all year round, through every part of life.

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted Amos 5:24 in his famous I Have a Dream speech at the March on Washington, in the familiar wording of older translations about justice rolling down like waters. He used it again and again in his sermons and speeches during the civil rights movement. The words are carved into the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, where water flows over a stone table listing names of people who died in the struggle for civil rights.

> **REAL TALK** **Justice Today**
>
> Christians agree that God cares deeply about justice, but they sometimes disagree about how to pursue it, including which policies, programs, or political approaches are best. That’s okay. Amos isn’t a political party platform. But he does make some things very clear. God cares about the poor. He hates bribery, cheating, and exploitation. He wants fair courts. He wants His people to treat everyone with dignity. You can start right where you are: standing up for someone who’s being treated unfairly, being honest in school and work, volunteering, giving, and learning about the needs in your community.

In chapter 6, Amos turns to the wealthy leaders who felt completely secure. “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who are secure on the mountain of Samaria.”

He describes their lifestyle. They lay on beds of ivory, lounged on couches, ate the best lambs and calves, played music, drank wine by the bowlful, and used the finest oils. Nothing wrong with good food and music in themselves. But Amos says, "they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." The nation was falling apart, and they didn't care. They were too comfortable to notice.

REAL TALK **At Ease**

It's easy to get so comfortable that you stop noticing other people's pain. Maybe you scroll past news of disasters without a second thought, or don't notice the kid at school who always eats alone. Being at ease isn't the same as enjoying good things. It's about not caring. Amos challenges us to stay aware and to let other people's suffering move us to pray and act. That doesn't mean you have to feel guilty all the time. It means letting compassion be part of your comfort.

REAL TALK **If Your Family Is Struggling**

Amos talks a lot about poverty, debt, and unfair treatment. If your family is struggling financially, you might feel embarrassed, worried, or stressed. Please know that God sees you and cares about your situation. Poverty is not a sign that God loves you less. In fact, Amos shows that God is especially concerned for people who are struggling. If you're worried about food, housing, or safety at home, talk with a trusted adult, a school counselor, or a pastor. Many churches and communities have resources to help, and asking for help is nothing to be ashamed of.

Amos ends chapter 6 with a strange question. "Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plow there with oxen?" Of course not. That would be absurd. But Israel had done something just as absurd: "you have turned justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Did God Hate Worship?**

Some readers wonder whether Amos 5 means God was against sacrifices, feasts, and music. After all, God Himself had commanded Israel to hold festivals and offer sacrifices. Most scholars agree that God wasn't rejecting worship itself. He was rejecting worship that was disconnected from obedience. The prophets say this again and again. Isaiah 1, Hosea 6, and Micah 6 all make the same point. Jesus said something similar: if you're bringing a gift to the altar and remember someone has something against you, go make it right first, then come back and offer your gift.

REAL TALK **Worship That Rings True**

Singing worship songs is a good thing. So is going to church, giving, and praying. But Amos shows that God listens to our lives as well as our songs. Real worship includes how you treat your siblings, how you speak to your parents, how you treat the substitute teacher, and how you respond to someone who is struggling. When what you sing on Sunday matches how you live on Monday, your worship rings true. If there's a gap, don't stop worshiping. Instead, ask God to help you close it.

Justice in the Bible is more than punishing wrongdoers. The Hebrew word mishpat includes making sure people are treated fairly, protecting the vulnerable, and making wrong things right. The word righteousness, tsedaqah, is about living in right relationship with God and others. Together, they describe a community where everyone, especially the weak, is cared for and treated with dignity.

That's why the Bible keeps mentioning widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor. They were the people most likely to be ignored or taken advantage of. God's people were supposed to notice them. The prophet Micah later summed it up beautifully: God requires His people "to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

KEY VERSE

But let justice roll on like rivers, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Amos 5:24 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God called Israel's worship noise?
2. What's the difference between seeking a place or an experience and seeking God?
3. What would it look like for justice to roll on like a river in your school or community?
4. Where might you be at ease while others are hurting?

TRY THIS *Find one way to serve people in need in your community this month, like volunteering at a food bank, helping a neighbor, or donating to a local charity. Then do it.*

CHAPTER 4

The Plumb Line and the Priest

Amos 7–8

Chapters 7 through 9 contain five visions God showed Amos. Each one is a picture, almost like a short film, with a message about Israel's future.

In the first vision, God was forming swarms of locusts just as the late crops were sprouting, after the king's share had been harvested. The locusts would eat everything the ordinary people needed to survive. Amos cried out, "Lord GOD, forgive, I beg you! How could Jacob stand? For he is small." And God relented. "It shall not be," says the LORD.

In the second vision, God was calling for judgment by fire, a fire so hot it dried up the great deep and was eating up the land. Again Amos pleaded, and again God relented.

BACKGROUND CHECK **When God Relents**

Some people wonder how God can change His mind if He knows everything. Christians have explained it in different ways. Many say that God's character never changes, but His actions respond to people, including their prayers and repentance, just as He planned. God isn't wishy-washy. But He has chosen to make prayer matter. When Amos prayed, things happened. That's an amazing truth: God invites ordinary people like a shepherd from Tekoa to take part in what He does in the world.

REAL TALK **Praying for People**

Amos was sent to warn Israel, but he didn't want them destroyed. He prayed for them. He called them small, like a little brother who couldn't survive on his own. That's a great example for us. It's easy to criticize people who are doing wrong. It's harder to pray for them. Who could you pray for this week, even someone who has hurt you or someone you disagree with? Praying for someone changes your heart toward them, and God hears those prayers.

In the third vision, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. God asked, "Amos, what do you see?" Amos answered, "A plumb line." God said, "Behold, I will set a plumb line in the middle of my people Israel. I will not again pass by them any more."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Plumb Line**

A plumb line is a string with a weight tied to the bottom. When you hold it up, gravity pulls it perfectly straight down. Builders used it to check whether a wall was straight. If a wall was leaning, it would eventually collapse, and it needed to be torn down and rebuilt. God was holding His plumb line up against Israel, and the nation was dangerously crooked. This time, Amos didn't pray for them to be spared. Sometimes, a crooked wall has to come down.

REAL TALK **God's Plumb Line**

Everyone measures themselves by something. Some people compare themselves to friends: At least I'm not as bad as them. Others measure themselves by popularity, grades, or followers. But God's plumb line is His own perfect goodness, revealed in His Word and in Jesus. Next to that standard, all of us are crooked in some ways. That could sound discouraging. But it's actually good news, because God doesn't just measure us. Through Jesus, He forgives us and starts rebuilding us from the inside out.

Then the story is interrupted. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, sent a message to King Jeroboam II. He accused Amos of conspiracy. "The

land is not able to bear all his words." In other words, Amos is a threat to national security.

Then Amaziah told Amos to his face, "You seer, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there, but don't prophesy again any more at Bethel; for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house!"

BACKGROUND CHECK **The King's Sanctuary**

Notice what Amaziah called Bethel. Not God's sanctuary, but the king's sanctuary. That says a lot. The religion at Bethel had become a tool of the government. Its job was to support the king, bless the nation, and keep everyone comfortable. A prophet who criticized the king was unwelcome. Amaziah also assumed Amos was a professional prophet who preached for money. Go home and earn your bread there, he said. He couldn't imagine anyone speaking because God had actually called him.

Amos's answer is one of the most famous lines in the book. "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman, and a farmer of sycamore figs; and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

In other words: I'm not here because this is my career. I didn't go to prophet school. I had a real job, working with animals and fig trees. God interrupted my life and sent me here. I'm not leaving just because you don't like what I'm saying.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Prophet's Son**

The phrase prophet's son probably refers to the groups of prophets, sometimes called the sons of the prophets, who lived and trained together in the days of Elijah and Elisha. These were like prophet schools or guilds. Some prophets were paid by kings and told the king whatever he wanted to hear.

Amos was saying he wasn't part of any professional group. He had no title, no training, and no salary. He had only God's call.

REAL TALK **God Uses Ordinary People**

Amos wasn't a priest, a scholar, or a professional speaker. He was a working man who took care of animals and trees. God used him anyway. You don't need a title, a platform, or a perfect background for God to use you. You don't need to be the most talented or most popular person in your youth group. God loves to use ordinary people who are willing to listen and obey. Wherever you are, whatever you're good at, God can use you to make a difference.

Amos then gave Amaziah a hard message of judgment about his family's future and Israel's exile. Speaking God's truth to power was costly. Amos didn't back down.

In the fourth vision, God showed Amos "a basket of summer fruit." God asked, "Amos, what do you see?" Amos said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then God said, "The end has come on my people Israel."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Summer Fruit Pun**

This vision is built on a Hebrew wordplay. The word for summer fruit is qayits. The word for end is qets. They sound almost the same. It's as if God held up a basket of ripe fruit and said, This is ripe, and Israel is ripe for judgment. Summer fruit was the last harvest of the year. After it, the growing season was over. In the same way, Israel's time was running out.

Then Amos exposed the dishonest business practices in Israel. The merchants couldn't wait for the Sabbath and the religious festivals to end so they could get back to cheating people. They were "making the ephah small, and the shekel large, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit." That meant they gave people less grain than they paid for, charged more money than they should, and rigged their scales.

They even planned to "buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals," and to sell the leftover chaff mixed with the grain. Amos echoes the same sin he condemned in chapter 2.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ephahs and Shekels**

An ephah was a unit for measuring grain, about half a bushel. A shekel was a weight used to measure silver for payment. Coins weren't widely used yet, so buyers weighed out silver on a scale. A dishonest merchant could use a smaller ephah basket to give less grain and a heavier shekel weight to demand more silver. Archaeologists have found stone weights from ancient Israel that don't all match, which suggests that this kind of cheating really happened. The law of Moses strictly commanded honest weights and measures.

REAL TALK **Honest in Small Things**

Cheating can seem small. Copying a homework answer, lying about your age to get a discount, not giving back extra change, pirating a movie, or fudging your hours at work. But Amos shows that God cares about honesty in business and everyday life. Jesus said that whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much. Being honest when no one is watching builds the kind of character that will matter for the rest of your life.

Then God makes one of the most chilling promises in the Bible. "I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the LORD's words." People would wander from sea to sea, searching for God's word, and would not find it.

Israel had told the prophets to stop prophesying. Now God would give them what they asked for: silence. The worst thing that could happen wasn't a lack of food. It was a lack of God's voice.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Silent Years**

Many Christians notice that after the last of the Old Testament prophets, around 430 BC, there was a long period, about four hundred years, without a

recognized prophet in Israel. Jewish writings from that era sometimes say that prophecy had ceased. Some see a fulfillment of Amos 8:11 in that silence, though Amos's warning was first aimed at the northern kingdom before its fall. The silence was finally broken when John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preparing the way for Jesus.

REAL TALK **Hungry for God's Word**

Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of God's mouth." Most of us have more access to the Bible than any generation in history. It's on our phones, in our homes, and online for free. But it's possible to have a famine of hearing God's words even when Bibles are everywhere, simply because we never open them. If you want to hear from God, start small. Read one chapter of a Gospel each day. Ask God to speak to you through it. The more you read, the hungrier you'll become.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Did Amos Go Home?**

The Bible doesn't tell us what happened to Amos after his clash with Amaziah. Some later traditions claim he was attacked or killed, but there's no reliable evidence for that. Most likely, he eventually returned to Tekoa and his work with sheep and fig trees. What we do know is that his words were written down and preserved. About forty years later, his warnings came true when Assyria destroyed Samaria in 722 BC. The people of Judah kept his words because they had proven true, and they hoped to learn from Israel's mistakes.

Amos's confrontation with Amaziah shows a pattern that appears throughout the Bible. People in power often try to silence those who speak uncomfortable truths. Elijah was hunted by King Ahab. Jeremiah was thrown into a muddy cistern. John the Baptist was imprisoned for confronting Herod. Jesus Himself was crucified after challenging the religious leaders of His day.

But God's word can't be silenced. Amaziah could tell Amos to leave Bethel, but he couldn't stop what God had said. That's encouraging if you ever feel pressure to stay quiet about your faith or about

something wrong. Speaking up should be done with humility, love, and wisdom. But when God calls you to speak, you don't have to be afraid.

REAL TALK **Speaking Up Wisely**

Not every situation calls for a big speech. Sometimes speaking up means quietly telling a friend you're worried about them. Sometimes it means reporting bullying to a teacher. Sometimes it means refusing to repeat a rumor. Before you speak, pray, check your motives, and make sure you have the facts. And if something serious is happening, like abuse, self-harm, or someone in danger, always tell a trusted adult. You don't have to fix it alone.

KEY VERSE

Behold, the days come, says the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the LORD's words.

Amos 8:11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God answered Amos's prayers in the first two visions but not in the third?
2. What does a plumb line show? What standard do you usually measure yourself against?
3. Why did Amaziah want Amos to go home? What does Amos's answer show about his calling?
4. What would a famine of hearing God's words look like in your life?

TRY THIS *Choose one Gospel, like Mark, and read one chapter a day this week. Each day, write down one thing you think God is saying to you through it.*

CHAPTER 5

Rebuilding David's Fallen Tent

Amos 9

The fifth and final vision is the most terrifying. "I saw the Lord standing beside the altar." The altar was where people went to find forgiveness and safety. Now God was standing there to bring judgment. He commanded the tops of the pillars to be struck so the temple would collapse on the worshipers.

There would be no place to hide. Even if they dug down to the grave, or climbed up to heaven, or hid on top of Mount Carmel, or at the bottom of the sea, God would find them. It's the dark side of Psalm 139, which says there's nowhere we can go to escape God's presence. For those who love God, that's comforting. For those who refuse Him, it's terrifying.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Where Was This Altar?**
>
> Amos doesn't say exactly which altar he saw in this vision. Many scholars think it was the altar at Bethel, the center of the northern kingdom's religion and the place where Amaziah had told Amos to leave. Others think it could be the temple in Jerusalem or a picture of all of Israel's worship. Either way, the message is the same. The very place where the people thought they were safe would become the place of judgment, because their worship was empty.

Then Amos describes God's power. He touches the earth, and it melts. He builds His upper rooms in the heavens. He calls for the

waters of the sea and pours them out on the earth. The LORD is His name.

Then God asks a startling question. "Are you not like the children of the Ethiopians to me, children of Israel?" says the LORD. "Haven't I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?"

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ethiopians, Philistines, and Syrians**

The Ethiopians, called Cush in Hebrew, lived far to the south of Egypt, in what is now Sudan. To Israel, they represented the far ends of the earth. The Philistines and Syrians were Israel's enemies. God's point was startling. Israel thought they were special because God had brought them out of Egypt. But God had guided the movements of other nations too. Israel wasn't God's favorite because they were better than anyone else. God cares about every nation on earth, and His choosing of Israel was meant to bless the whole world.

REAL TALK **No Favorites**

Every culture has a way of ranking people: by race, nationality, wealth, looks, or popularity. Amos 9:7 cuts through all of that. God isn't impressed by any of our rankings. He loves people from every nation, ethnic group, and background. That doesn't mean Israel wasn't chosen. It means being chosen was never about being better. If you ever catch yourself thinking certain kinds of people matter less, remember that God sees every person as made in His image. Nobody is a second-class citizen in His eyes.

God says He will shake Israel among the nations like grain in a sieve, but not a single kernel will fall to the ground. Judgment would sift the nation, but it would not destroy everyone. God would preserve a remnant.

And then, after nine chapters of warning, something completely unexpected happens. Hope breaks through.

"In that day I will raise up the tent of David who is fallen and close up its breaches, and I will raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Tent of David**

The phrase the tent of David, sometimes translated the booth or hut of David, pictures David's royal family line as a broken-down shelter. By Amos's time, the kingdom of David had split in two, and things would only get worse. Eventually, Judah would be conquered by Babylon, and no descendant of David would sit on the throne. The tent would seem completely collapsed. But God promised to rebuild it. Many Christians understand the tent as David's dynasty, and others as the people and community connected to David's kingdom. In either view, the promise points forward to the Messiah, the Son of David.

But that's not all. God's plan was bigger than just Israel. The rebuilt kingdom would include "all the nations who are called by my name." People from every nation would one day belong to God.

Then Amos paints a picture of incredible abundance. The harvest would be so huge that the plowman would overtake the reaper. In other words, the harvest would still be going on when it was time to plow for the next season. The mountains would drip with sweet wine. God would restore the fortunes of His people. They would rebuild the ruined cities, plant vineyards, and enjoy the fruit of their own gardens.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Such a Sudden Turn?**

Some scholars think the hopeful ending of Amos was added later by another writer, because it's so different from the rest of the book. Others point out that almost every prophet mixes judgment and hope, and that Amos himself mentioned a remnant and mercy earlier in the book. Many Christian scholars see the whole book as coming from Amos and his message. Either way, the

ending fits a pattern found throughout Scripture. God's judgment is never His last word for those who belong to Him. Hope always has the final say.

The book ends with a promise of permanent security. "I will plant them on their land, and they will no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them," says the LORD your God.

For a book about judgment, that's a beautiful ending. The same God who held up the plumb line would rebuild what was broken.

REAL TALK **When Things Feel Broken**

Maybe something in your life feels like a fallen tent: your family, your friendships, your faith, or your sense of who you are. Amos 9 reminds us that God specializes in rebuilding ruins. That doesn't always happen overnight, and it may not look exactly like you expect. But God is a builder. He can take broken things and make them new. If you're going through a really hard time, don't keep it to yourself. Talk to a trusted adult. If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself, call or text 988 right away. If you are in danger, call 911. If someone is hurting you, call Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453.

Hundreds of years later, the early church faced a big question. As non-Jewish people, called Gentiles, began to follow Jesus, some believers insisted that they had to become Jewish first and keep the law of Moses. The apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to decide. James, the brother of Jesus, stood up and quoted Amos 9:11-12. He said the rebuilding of David's tent was happening through Jesus, so that people from every nation could seek the Lord.

That decision changed history. It meant that anyone, from any nation, could become part of God's family through faith in Jesus, without first becoming Jewish. If you're not Jewish and you follow Jesus, you're part of the fulfillment of Amos 9.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Acts 15 and the Greek Translation**

When James quoted Amos in Acts 15, his wording matched the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, more closely than the Hebrew text. The Hebrew of Amos 9:12 speaks of Israel possessing the remnant of Edom and all the nations called by God's name. The Greek version speaks of the rest of mankind seeking the Lord. Scholars discuss why the two differ. Either way, both point toward the nations being brought under God's name. James saw that happening as Gentiles came to faith in Jesus.

Think about what this meant for the first Gentile believers. They had grown up worshiping other gods. They didn't keep kosher, didn't observe the Sabbath, and didn't know the Hebrew Scriptures. Some Jewish believers wondered whether they really belonged. Amos 9 gave the church an answer. God had always planned to welcome the nations. The rebuilt tent of David had room for everyone.

Today, the church includes people from almost every nation and language on earth. That's not an accident. It's the fulfillment of promises God made through prophets like Amos thousands of years ago. When you worship with believers from different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnic groups, you're seeing Amos 9 come true. Revelation describes the final picture: people from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before God's throne together.

REAL TALK **Everyone Is Welcome**

Some people feel like they're too different, too messed up, or too far from God to belong to His family. Amos 9 says otherwise. God's family isn't a private club for people who grew up in church or have their lives together. It's a rebuilt home with open doors. If you've ever felt like an outsider, know that Jesus came to bring outsiders in. And if you're already part of God's family, look for ways to make others feel welcome too, like the new kid, the visitor, or the person who doesn't fit in.

KEY VERSE

In that day I will raise up the tent of David who is fallen and close up its breaches, and I will raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old,

Amos 9:11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the book of Amos ends with hope after so much judgment?
2. What does Amos 9:7 teach about how God sees people from different nations?
3. How did James use Amos 9:11-12 to welcome Gentiles into God's family?
4. What area of your life needs God to rebuild something broken?

TRY THIS *Write a short prayer asking God to rebuild one broken area of your life or your world. Then read Acts 15:1-21 to see how Amos 9 helped open the church to everyone.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Amos ends with a surprise: after all the judgment, God promises to rebuild the fallen tent of David and bring in the nations who are called by His name. Jewish readers treasure Amos as a powerful voice for justice and look to his promise of restoration. Christians believe that promise came to life in Jesus.

About twenty years after Jesus rose from the dead, the early church faced a huge question. Thousands of non-Jewish people, called Gentiles, were trusting Jesus. Did they have to become Jewish first, keeping all of Moses' law, to be part of God's family? The leaders met in Jerusalem to decide. James, the brother of Jesus, stood up and quoted Amos: "After these things I will return. I will again build the tabernacle of David, which has fallen. I will again build its ruins. I will set it up that the rest of men may seek after the Lord: all the Gentiles who are called by my name." James concluded that God had always planned to welcome the nations. Through Jesus, the Son of David, the fallen tent was being rebuilt, and it had room for everyone. And Jesus Himself lived out what Amos preached. He announced that He had come "to preach good news to the poor." He challenged religious leaders who were careful about tiny rules but neglected "justice, mercy, and faith." He said that whatever we do for the least of His brothers and sisters, we do for Him. In Jesus, worship and justice are never separated.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He sees every person the world overlooks.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Amos shows that even religious people can trample others. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus rebuilt the fallen tent.

Jesus, the Son of David, died for our sins and rose again. He rebuilt David's fallen tent into a family where people from every nation are welcome.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

No one can earn God's favor by religious performance. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Seek Him and live.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Amos says, Seek the LORD, and you will live. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, I've gone my own way. Sometimes I've treated people unfairly, ignored people in need, or acted religious without really loving You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus, the Son of David, died for my sins, rose again, and welcomes people from every nation into Your family. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me worship You with my whole life, and let justice flow from me like a river. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Amos 5, then Luke 4:16-21 and Acts 15:1-21.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught, Jesus is honored, and the poor are cared for. Ask about being baptized.

Do justice. Look for one way this month to serve someone in need, and keep doing it.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Amos was blunt, and his questions are hard. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Amos is right, God sees every person the world overlooks, and He invites you to seek Him and live.

Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of Armies, will be with you, as you say.

Amos 5:14 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

The King Who Brings Down the Proud

Obadiah, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Brings Down the Proud: The Book of Obadiah, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Think about the worst fight you've ever had with a brother, sister, or cousin. Now imagine that fight never ending. Imagine it getting passed down to your kids, and their kids, for more than a thousand years, until your families became two nations who couldn't stand each other.

That's the story behind Obadiah. It starts with twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, wrestling before they were even born. It ends with Esau's descendants, the nation of Edom, standing on the sidelines and cheering while Jacob's descendants were attacked, looted, and carried away. Some of them even blocked the roads so refugees couldn't escape.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, only twenty-one verses long. You can read the whole thing in about three minutes. But it packs a punch. It's about pride that makes you feel untouchable, about what happens when you stand by and watch someone get hurt, and about a God who sees it all and promises that, in the end, the kingdom will be His.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Obadiah in three chapters: the eagle's nest of pride (verses 1-9), you stood on the other side (verses 10-14), and the kingdom will be the LORD's (verses 15-21).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains the long history between Israel and Edom, where the Edomites lived, and the main views about when Obadiah was written. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as when Obadiah was written, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Obadiah in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-first book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. This book traces the long rivalry between Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) from Genesis onward, describes the rugged red-rock country where the Edomites lived, and notes the later connection to King Herod the Great, whose family was Idumean, the later name for Edomite. It presents the two main views of Obadiah's date, around 845 BC or shortly after 586 BC, fairly and without insisting on one.

Obadiah condemns Edom's pride and its betrayal of Judah in a time of disaster. Because these themes connect with bullying, piling on, and standing by while someone is hurt, Real Talk boxes address those topics directly. A safety box encourages teens who are being bullied or betrayed, or who are thinking about hurting themselves, to talk with a trusted adult, call or text 988, or call 911 in an emergency. The book is careful to apply Obadiah's message about ancient Edom to attitudes and actions, never to any modern ethnic group.

The closing section, Where This Points, contrasts Jesus with Herod the Idumean, shows that Jesus did not stand aloof when we were crushed but came close and took our place, and notes that people from Idumea came to Jesus (Mark 3:8). Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will choose humility over pride, stand with people who are hurting, and trust the King whose kingdom will never end.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

The Shortest Book

Obadiah has only twenty-one verses, making it the shortest book in the Old Testament. We know almost nothing about the prophet himself. His name means servant of the LORD or worshiper of the LORD, and it was a common name. At least a dozen different men named Obadiah appear in the Old Testament. The book doesn't tell us his hometown, his family, or his job. All we have is his message, a vision about the nation of Edom.

Twins at War

The story behind Obadiah goes all the way back to Genesis. Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. While they were still in the womb, the babies struggled so much that Rebekah asked God what was going on. God told her, "Two nations are in your womb." Esau was born first, red and hairy, with Jacob grabbing his heel. Later, Esau traded his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of red stew, which is why he was also called Edom, a name that sounds like the Hebrew word for red. Then Jacob tricked their father into giving him Esau's blessing. Esau was so furious he planned to kill his brother. Years later, the brothers made peace. Esau ran to meet Jacob, hugged him, and they cried together. But the peace didn't last between their descendants.

A Rivalry Through the Centuries

Jacob was later renamed Israel, and his descendants became the nation of Israel. Esau's descendants became the nation of Edom, living southeast of the Dead Sea. When Israel came out of Egypt, Edom refused to let them pass through its land. God still told Israel not to hate Edomites, because they were their brothers. But over the centuries, the two nations fought again and again. King Saul fought Edom. King David conquered it. Later, Edom rebelled and won its independence. By the time of Obadiah, the bitterness ran deep.

Red-Rock Fortress

The Edomites lived in rugged mountains of red sandstone, full of cliffs, gorges, and caves. Their cities were perched high on rocky heights that seemed impossible to attack. One of their strongholds was called Sela, which means rock. Many people connect Edom's rock country with the famous city of Petra in modern Jordan, with its buildings carved into towering red cliffs. Petra's famous carved buildings were made later by a people called the Nabataeans, and scholars debate whether biblical Sela was at Petra or at another nearby rock fortress. Either way, the landscape helps us picture why the Edomites felt untouchable.

When Was It Written?

Obadiah describes a time when foreigners attacked Jerusalem and Edom joined in. But the book doesn't name the attackers. Christians hold two main views. Some date Obadiah early, around 845 BC, when Edom rebelled against King Jehoram of Judah and Philistines and Arabians raided Jerusalem. These scholars point out that Obadiah is placed early in The Twelve, near Joel and Amos. Many others date it shortly after 586 BC, when Babylon destroyed

Jerusalem and Edom cheered the destruction. These scholars note that Psalm 137 and Ezekiel 35 describe Edom's gloating then, and that Obadiah's words are very similar to Jeremiah 49. Both views take the book seriously, and its message is the same either way.

What Happened to Edom?

After Babylon's conquest, the Edomites were pushed out of their mountain homeland by Arab tribes, including the Nabataeans. Many moved west into southern Judah, an area that came to be called Idumea, the Greek form of Edom. Around 125 BC, a Jewish ruler conquered Idumea and forced its people to convert to Judaism. About a century later, an Idumean named Herod became king of Judea under the Romans. He was the King Herod who tried to kill baby Jesus. After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, the Edomites disappear from history.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Obadiah 1-9): The eagle's nest of pride.

Chapter 2 (Obadiah 10-14): You stood on the other side.

Chapter 3 (Obadiah 15-21): The kingdom will be the LORD's.

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Setting the Scene.....

1 The Eagle's Nest of Pride *1–9*.....

2 You Stood on the Other Side *10–14*.....

3 The Kingdom Will Be the LORD's *15–21*.....

Where This Points.....

CHAPTER 1

The Eagle's Nest of Pride

Obadiah 1–9

Obadiah opens like a news bulletin. "The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Lord GOD says about Edom." Then comes breaking news: a messenger has been sent among the nations, calling them to rise up and attack Edom.

Edom was a small nation, but it didn't feel small. Its people lived high in the mountains southeast of the Dead Sea, in a land of red cliffs and narrow canyons. Their cities sat on rocky heights that were almost impossible to reach. For centuries, armies had looked up at those cliffs and decided not to bother.

So when God says, "Behold, I have made you small among the nations," it's a shock. Edom thought it was a giant. God says it's tiny.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Obadiah and Jeremiah**
>
> If you read Obadiah 1-9 and then Jeremiah 49:7-22, you'll notice something surprising. Many of the lines are almost identical. Both talk about the pride of Edom's heart, its home in the clefts of the rock, its nest as high as the eagle, and thieves and grape pickers who would leave something behind. Scholars debate who borrowed from whom. Some think Jeremiah used Obadiah. Others think Obadiah used Jeremiah, or that both drew on an older prophecy about Edom. Either way, it shows that God's warning to Edom was serious enough to be repeated.

Then comes the heart of the chapter. “The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high, who says in his heart, Who will bring me down to the ground?”

Notice the word deceived. Pride is a liar. It tells you that you’re safe when you’re not. It tells you that you’re better than others when you’re not. It tells you that you don’t need anyone, including God. And the scary thing is that pride usually feels like confidence, so you don’t notice you’re being fooled.

Edom’s pride was built on its geography. They looked at their cliffs and thought, Nobody can touch us. Their question, Who will bring me down? wasn’t really a question. It was a boast.

God answers it anyway. “Though you mount on high as the eagle, and though your nest is set among the stars, I will bring you down from there,” says the LORD.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Sela and Petra**

Second Kings mentions that King Amaziah of Judah captured Sela, an Edomite stronghold whose name means rock. Many people have connected Sela with Petra, the breathtaking city in southern Jordan carved into rose-red sandstone cliffs, reached through a narrow gorge called the Siq. Petra’s famous carved tombs and temples were built later, mostly by the Nabataeans, who moved into Edom’s territory after the Edomites were pushed out. Some scholars place biblical Sela at Petra, while others point to a rocky fortress called es-Sela, about thirty miles north. Either way, visitors to the region today can see exactly why Edom felt untouchable.

The eagle was the perfect picture. Eagles build their nests on the highest cliffs, far out of reach of predators. Edom thought it had done the same thing. But God says, Even if your nest were among the stars, I could reach it. No height is too high for God.

REAL TALK **Feeling Untouchable**

Pride doesn't always look like bragging. Sometimes it looks like feeling untouchable. Maybe you're the smartest kid in class, the best athlete, the most popular, or the one with the most followers. Maybe you think, Rules don't really apply to me, or, I'll never get caught, or, I don't need anyone's help. That's Edom's nest. The Bible says, "Pride goes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall." The higher you think you are, the harder the fall. Real security doesn't come from being on top. It comes from being held by God.

Next, God describes how complete Edom's downfall would be. If thieves broke into your house at night, they would take only what they wanted. If grape pickers came to your vineyard, they would leave a few grapes behind. But Edom's destruction would be total. "How Esau will be ransacked! How his hidden treasures are sought out!"

Edom was rich. It sat along the King's Highway, a major trade route, and controlled copper mines in the region. Archaeologists working in the Arabah valley, south of the Dead Sea, have found huge ancient copper-mining and smelting sites, some of them linked to Edom. Edom's wealth was hidden away in mountain caves. But none of it would be safe.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Copper and the King's Highway**

The King's Highway was an ancient road running north and south east of the Jordan River, connecting Egypt and Arabia with Damascus and beyond. Caravans carried spices, incense, gold, and other goods along it. Edom sat right on this route and could charge travelers for passing through. That's the same road Israel asked to use in the days of Moses, when Edom refused to let them pass. Edom also controlled copper mines at places like Khirbat en-Nahas in the Arabah. Archaeologists have found mountains of ancient slag

there, the leftover waste from smelting copper, showing that the region was an industrial center.

Then comes betrayal. “All the men of your alliance have brought you on your way, even to the border. The men who were at peace with you have deceived you, and prevailed against you. Friends who eat your bread lay a snare under you.”

Edom had allies, nations it trusted and shared meals with. In the ancient world, eating someone’s bread meant you were committed to their safety. But Edom’s friends would turn on it. And this is a painful irony, because, as we’ll see in the next chapter, Edom had done the very same thing to its own brother.

REAL TALK **Friends Who Turn on You**

Few things hurt as much as betrayal by a friend. Maybe someone you trusted shared your secrets, joined a group chat that mocked you, or suddenly acted like they didn’t know you. If that’s happened to you, you’re not alone. Even Jesus was betrayed by a friend who ate bread with Him. God sees that pain, and He’s not going to betray you. It’s also worth asking a harder question: Have I ever been the friend who turned on someone? If so, it’s not too late to apologize and make it right.

Edom was also famous for its wise men. The town of Teman, in Edom, was known for wisdom. One of Job’s friends, Eliphaz, came from Teman. But God says He would “destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mountain of Esau.” All of Edom’s cleverness would fail. Its mighty warriors would be terrified.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Wisdom of Teman**

Edom had a reputation for wisdom, the way some cities today are known for universities or tech companies. Jeremiah asks, Is wisdom no more in Teman? The book of Job, which many scholars think is set in or near Edom’s territory,

features Eliphaz the Temanite. Being wise, smart, or educated isn't bad. The Bible praises wisdom. But Edom's wisdom had become a source of pride. When intelligence makes you feel superior and independent from God, it stops being real wisdom. The Bible says the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

Here's the big idea of these first nine verses. Edom trusted in three things: its location, its allies, and its intelligence. Its cliffs made it feel safe. Its friends made it feel secure. Its wise men made it feel smart. And God says all three would fail.

We do the same thing. We trust in our looks, our grades, our friends, our talents, our money, or our plans. None of those things are bad. But if they become the place where we find our security, they will eventually let us down. Only God is a rock that never fails.

REAL TALK **Where Is Your Nest?**

Take a minute and be honest. What makes you feel safe, important, or in control? Is it your friend group, your reputation, your phone, your performance in sports or school, or your family's money? Those can all be gifts. But they can also become an eagle's nest, the high place where you think nothing can touch you. James says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Humility isn't thinking you're worthless. It's knowing that everything you have comes from God, and that you need Him every day.

KEY VERSE

The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high, who says in his heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'

Obadiah 3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Bible says pride deceives us?
2. What were the three things Edom trusted in, and how did each one fail?
3. Where are you most tempted to feel untouchable?
4. What's the difference between healthy confidence and pride?

TRY THIS *This week, look for one chance each day to put someone else first, like letting someone go ahead of you, asking for help, or giving credit to someone else. Notice how it feels.*

CHAPTER 2

You Stood on the Other Side

Obadiah 10–14

Now we find out what Edom actually did. “For the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever.”

Notice the word brother. God doesn’t say, For the violence done to your enemy, or, to your neighbor. He says brother. Edom and Israel were family. They both came from Isaac and Rebekah. Their ancestors were twins. That’s what made Edom’s betrayal so terrible.

Then Obadiah describes the scene. Foreign armies broke into Jerusalem. They carried away its wealth. They threw dice, or cast lots, to divide up the city and its people. And where was Edom? “In the day that you stood on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away his substance and foreigners entered into his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, even you were like one of them.”

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Edom in the Day of Jerusalem**
>
> If Obadiah describes the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, other parts of the Bible fill in the picture. Psalm 137, written by exiles in Babylon, prays, “Remember, LORD, against the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem, who said, Raze it! Raze it even to its foundation!” Ezekiel 35 and Lamentations 4 also mention Edom rejoicing over Judah’s destruction. If Obadiah describes the earlier attack around 845 BC, it fits a time when Edom had rebelled against Judah

and raiders plundered Jerusalem. Either way, Edom's behavior was remembered with deep pain.

Edom didn't start the attack. But Edom stood on the other side. They watched and did nothing. And God says that made them just as guilty as the attackers. Even you were like one of them.

REAL TALK **The Other Side**

Jesus told a story about a man who was beaten by robbers and left on the side of the road. A priest came by, saw him, and "passed by on the other side." So did a Levite. Then a Samaritan, someone from a group the man's people despised, stopped and helped. Standing on the other side is one of the most common sins there is. It's watching someone get mocked and saying nothing. It's seeing someone sitting alone and walking past. It's scrolling past a cruel post without speaking up. Obadiah and Jesus agree: when you could help and don't, you're not neutral.

Then Obadiah lists eight things Edom should never have done. Each line begins with Don't, like a series of warnings. It's as if the prophet is replaying the scene in slow motion, wishing he could stop each step.

First, Edom gloated. "But don't look down on your brother in the day of his disaster, and don't rejoice over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction. Don't speak proudly in the day of distress."

Edom looked down on Judah, enjoyed watching them suffer, and bragged while they were in pain. They mocked their brother when he was at his lowest.

REAL TALK **When Someone Else Falls**

It can feel good when someone you don't like gets in trouble. Maybe a rival loses, an ex gets dumped, or the kid who was mean to you gets caught. Proverbs warns, "Don't rejoice when your enemy falls. Don't let your heart be

> glad when he is overthrown." That doesn't mean pretending everything is fine or that what they did was okay. It means not celebrating someone else's pain. Paul says to "weep with those who weep." That's hard, especially with enemies. But it's the way of Jesus.

Second, Edom looted. "Don't enter into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity. Don't look down on their affliction in the day of their calamity, neither seize their wealth on the day of their calamity."

Notice how the phrase in the day of their calamity repeats three times in one verse. Obadiah is hammering home the point. Edom took advantage of Judah at the worst possible moment. When their brother was down, Edom walked in and took his stuff.

> **REAL TALK** **Piling On**
>
> There's a word for what Edom did: piling on. It's when someone is already hurting and others join in to make it worse. Online, it can look like a flood of mean comments on someone who made a mistake. At school, it can look like everyone joining in once one person starts teasing someone. Piling on happens because it feels safe to attack someone who's already down. But God takes it seriously. If you see someone getting piled on, you don't have to join the crowd. Sometimes the bravest thing you can do is refuse to add one more blow, or to quietly reach out to the person being attacked.

Third, and worst of all, Edom trapped refugees. "Don't stand in the crossroads to cut off those of his who escape. Don't deliver up those of his who remain in the day of distress."

Picture families running from a burning city, carrying children and whatever they could grab. They head for the roads leading out of the country. And at the crossroads, Edomite soldiers are waiting. They block the way. They capture the survivors and hand them over to the enemy.

That's not just standing by. That's active betrayal. Edom went from watching to helping the attackers.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Brothers Who Should Have Helped**

The law of Moses specifically told Israel, "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother." Even after Edom refused to let Israel pass through its land in the wilderness, God told Israel not to attack Edom. God expected these brother nations to treat each other with basic kindness. In the ancient world, refugees often fled to neighboring nations, and hospitality to people in danger was considered a sacred duty. By blocking the roads and handing refugees over, Edom broke one of the most important moral codes of the ancient world.

Notice the progression in these verses. Edom started by watching. Then it gloated. Then it bragged. Then it walked in and looted. Then it trapped refugees and handed them over. Sin often works that way. It starts with a small step, like a look or a laugh, and grows into something much worse.

That's why it matters what you do in the small moments. Laughing at a cruel joke can lead to telling one. Watching someone get bullied can lead to joining in. Small choices shape who you become.

REAL TALK **If You're the One Being Hurt**

Maybe you've been on the other end of what Edom did. Maybe friends turned on you, people piled on, or someone who should have protected you betrayed you instead. That hurts deeply. God sees it, and He doesn't take it lightly. Obadiah exists in part because God noticed what was done to Judah. You don't have to face it alone. Talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, teacher, school counselor, coach, or pastor. If you're being bullied, keep a record, like screenshots of messages, and report it. If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself, call or text 988 any time, day or night. If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911.

REAL TALK **Standing on the Right Side**

You don't have to be a superhero to stand on the right side. You can sit with someone who's alone. You can refuse to forward a hurtful post. You can say, That's not cool, when someone is being mocked. You can tell a trusted adult when someone is being bullied or is in danger. You can send a message to someone who's having a hard day. Those small choices are the opposite of what Edom did. They're the way of Jesus, who always moved toward hurting people.

KEY VERSE

In the day that you stood on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away his substance and foreigners entered into his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, even you were like one of them.

Obadiah 11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God said Edom was like one of them, even though Edom didn't start the attack?
2. Which of Edom's actions, gloating, looting, or trapping refugees, seems worst to you? Why?
3. When have you seen someone stand on the other side? When have you done it yourself?
4. What's one way you could stand with someone who's being hurt?

TRY THIS *This week, find one person who is being left out, teased, or ignored, and do something to stand with them, like sitting with them, inviting them in, or telling a trusted adult if they're in danger.*

CHAPTER 3

The Kingdom Will Be the LORD's

Obadiah 15–21

In verse 15, the camera pulls back. Obadiah has been talking about Edom. Now he talks about the whole world. "For the day of the LORD is near all the nations! As you have done, it will be done to you. Your deeds will return upon your own head."

That's the justice boomerang. Whatever Edom threw at others would come flying back. Edom gloated, so it would be shamed. Edom looted, so it would be ransacked. Edom betrayed its brother, so its own allies would betray it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Day of the LORD**

We've seen the phrase the Day of the LORD in Joel and Amos. It describes a time when God steps into history to judge evil and set things right. Sometimes it refers to a nearby event, like an invasion. Sometimes it refers to the final day when God will judge the whole world. Obadiah seems to have both in view. Edom's downfall would be one example of the Day of the LORD, and it would point to a bigger day when all nations would answer to God.

REAL TALK **The Boomerang**

Paul wrote, "God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." That's not karma, a cold, automatic force. It's the justice of a personal God who sees everything. It's a warning: how you treat others matters, because God notices. But it's also a comfort. If you've been hurt, you don't have to get revenge. Paul says, "Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but

> give place to God's wrath." You can leave justice in God's hands, and let Him deal with what's not yours to carry.

Then Obadiah uses a picture of drinking. "For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations will drink continually." Edom had celebrated on Mount Zion, maybe even partying in the ruins of Jerusalem. But the prophets often use drinking as a picture of judgment, drinking the cup of God's anger. The nations who had celebrated Judah's fall would one day drink a much more bitter cup.

But then the tone changes completely. "But in Mount Zion, there will be those who escape, and it will be holy." The very refugees Edom tried to trap at the crossroads would survive. God would protect a remnant. And Mount Zion, the hill where Jerusalem's temple stood, which had been looted and mocked, would be holy again.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Mount Zion**
>
> Zion was originally the name of a fortress in Jerusalem that King David captured. Over time, it came to mean the temple mountain, the city of Jerusalem, and even God's people as a whole. In the prophets, Zion often represents the place where God lives among His people. In the New Testament, Hebrews says believers in Jesus have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God. Obadiah contrasts two mountains: the mountain of Esau, a symbol of pride, and Mount Zion, a symbol of God's kingdom.

Obadiah then describes a great reversal. "The house of Jacob will be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble." Stubble is the dry leftover stalks in a field after harvest. It burns instantly. The proud nation that thought it was untouchable would go up in smoke.

Verses 19 and 20 read like a map. God's people would return and spread out in every direction. Those in the south would possess the

mountain of Esau. Others would reclaim the lowlands, Ephraim, Samaria, and Gilead. Even exiles scattered far away, as far as a place called Sepharad, would come home and possess the cities of the Negev.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Where Was Sepharad?**

No one knows for sure where Sepharad was. Many scholars think it was Sardis, a city in Asia Minor, modern Turkey, where Jewish exiles lived. Much later, Jewish tradition identified Sepharad with Spain, which is why Jews of Spanish and Portuguese background are still called Sephardic Jews today. Obadiah's point is that no matter how far God's people were scattered, God would bring them home.

REAL TALK **Is This About Hating Edomites?**

Reading Obadiah, someone might wonder, Is God against a certain group of people? It's important to read carefully. Obadiah's judgment was aimed at Edom's pride, violence, and betrayal, not at people for their ethnicity. In fact, the law told Israel not to hate Edomites, and the New Testament shows Idumeans coming to Jesus. The Bible never gives anyone permission to hate a group of people today. Obadiah is a warning to all of us, whatever our background: God opposes pride and cruelty wherever He finds it, including in our own hearts.

Then comes the final verse, the climax of the whole book. "Saviors will go up on Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will be the LORD's."

The word saviors can also be translated deliverers. In the book of Judges, God raised up deliverers to rescue Israel from its enemies. Obadiah promises that God would raise up deliverers again. And the result would be clear: the kingdom will be the LORD's.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Saviors on Mount Zion**

Who are the saviors of verse 21? Some interpreters think Obadiah meant leaders like the judges, or later rulers like the Maccabees, who would rescue God's people. Others see it pointing forward to the Messiah and those who serve with Him. Christians have often read it as ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, the one true Savior, who rules from the heavenly Mount Zion. These readings don't have to cancel each other out. God has raised up many deliverers, and all of them point to the final Deliverer.

That last line is the point of the whole book. Edom thought the world belonged to the strong, the clever, and the ruthless. It thought it could live high above everyone else and take what it wanted. But history doesn't belong to Edom. It doesn't belong to Babylon, Rome, or any nation. It doesn't belong to the most popular kids, the richest people, or the strongest armies. In the end, the kingdom will be the LORD's.

REAL TALK **Whose Kingdom Are You Building?**

Everyone is building some kind of kingdom. Maybe it's your reputation, your social media presence, your future career, or your friend group. Those things aren't wrong. But Obadiah reminds us that every human kingdom eventually falls. Only God's kingdom lasts forever. Jesus taught us to pray, "Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That prayer is about more than the future. It's about letting God be King of your choices, your relationships, and your plans right now.

Edom's mountain cliffs still stand today, but the Edomites are gone. Their proud cities are ruins. The nation that asked, Who will bring me down? was brought down. But God's kingdom is still growing, as people from every nation come to know Him.

REAL TALK **When Evil Seems to Win**

Sometimes it feels like proud, cruel people get away with everything. Bullies seem to win. Liars seem to get ahead. People who hurt others seem to face no

consequences. Obadiah was written for people who felt exactly that way, people who had watched their city burn while their enemies laughed. God's answer was, I see it, and it won't last. The last word belongs to God. That doesn't mean you should stay silent about wrong things. Tell a trusted adult, report abuse, and stand up for what's right. But you can do it with hope, knowing that the kingdom will be the LORD's.

KEY VERSE

Saviors will go up on Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will be the LORD's.

Obadiah 21 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does Obadiah 15 mean when it says your deeds will return upon your own head?
2. Why is it a relief that you don't have to get revenge yourself?
3. Why do you think the book ends with the kingdom will be the LORD's?
4. What would it look like to let God be King of one area of your life right now?

TRY THIS *Pray the line "Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done" every morning this week. Before you pray it, name one specific area of your life where you want God to be King that day.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Obadiah ends with a promise that saviors will go up on Mount Zion and the kingdom will be the LORD's. Jewish readers treasure that promise as a hope for God's final reign. Christians believe it points to Jesus.

Think about the irony. When Jesus was born, the king in Jerusalem was Herod the Great, an Idumean, a descendant of Edom. Herod was proud, paranoid, and brutal. When he heard that wise men were looking for the newborn "King of the Jews," he tried to kill Jesus by murdering the baby boys of Bethlehem. It was the old rivalry between Esau and Jacob, playing out one more time. But the proud king died, and the humble King lived. Jesus did the opposite of Edom. Edom stood on the other side when its brother was crushed. Jesus didn't stand aloof when we were crushed by sin and pain. He came close. He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant," and "humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death." The prophet Isaiah said, "He was crushed for our iniquities." Jesus let Himself be crushed so we could be rescued. And the story has an amazing twist. When crowds came to hear Jesus, they came from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, and "from Idumaea." Even Esau's descendants were coming to Jacob's greatest Son. That's how the kingdom becomes the LORD's: not by wiping out enemies, but by turning enemies into family. One day, heaven will announce, "The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ."

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He sees when you are hurt and when you are left alone.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Like Edom, all of us have been proud or stood by while others were hurt. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus came close.

Jesus didn't stand on the other side. He came close, died for our sins, and rose again, so even His enemies could become His family.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Pride says you can climb high enough on your own. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Make Him your King.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Obadiah says the kingdom will be the LORD's. You can make Him your King today. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've gone my own way. I've been proud, and sometimes I've stood by while others were hurt. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus didn't stand far away, but came close, died for my sins, and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me to be humble and to stand with people who are hurting. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read all of Obadiah, then Matthew 2 and Philippians 2:1-11.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Stand with someone. Look for one person this week who is being left out or picked on, and stand with them.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Obadiah is short, but its questions are big. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Obadiah is right, every proud throne will fall, and the kingdom will belong to the humble King who came close.

Saviors will go up on Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will be the LORD's.

Obadiah 21 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF JONAH

The King Who Loves His Enemies

Jonah, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Loves His Enemies: The Book of Jonah, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You probably know the story. A man gets swallowed by a big fish, prays, and gets spit out on the beach. Maybe you saw it on a felt board in Sunday school, or in a cartoon with a smiling whale. It's a cute story for kids. Except it isn't.

Jonah is one of the sharpest, most uncomfortable books in the Bible. It's about a prophet who ran away from God, not because he was scared, but because he knew God was kind. God wanted to give a second chance to Nineveh, the capital of the most brutal empire of its day, and Jonah would rather die than see his enemies forgiven.

The fish isn't the main character. Neither is Jonah. The main character is God, who chases down a runaway prophet, rescues pagan sailors, forgives a violent city, and then gently argues with a pouting prophet about why mercy matters. And the book ends with a question that's left for you to answer.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Jonah in four chapters, one for each chapter of the Bible book: running the wrong way (Jonah 1), prayer from rock bottom (Jonah 2), a five-word sermon and a citywide revival (Jonah 3), and mad at God's mercy (Jonah 4).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Jonah was, why Nineveh was so feared, and the different ways Christians read the book. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as whether Jonah is a historical account or a parable, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Jonah in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-second book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Jonah is often treated as a children's story, but this book presents it as a sharp mirror: a prophet angry that God loves his enemies. It explains the background of Assyria and Nineveh, notes that Jonah is read in synagogues on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and presents fairly the view that Jonah is a historical account and the view that it is a God-inspired parable or teaching story, while noting that Jesus referred to Jonah in Matthew 12:39-41.

Real Talk boxes address running from God, honesty with God in prayer, second chances, prejudice and hatred of enemies, and anger. In Jonah 4, the prophet says it would be better for him to die. A brief, compassionate box explains that God responded to Jonah with gentle care, and encourages any teen who has thoughts like that to talk with a trusted adult right away or call or text 988.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows Jesus as someone greater than Jonah, who spent three days in the tomb and willingly died to rescue His enemies instead of running from them. Wherever

Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will stop running, receive God's mercy, and learn to share it, even with their enemies.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

Who Was Jonah?

Jonah son of Amittai is mentioned outside his book in 2 Kings 14:25. There, he is a prophet from Gath Hepher, a town in Galilee, who predicted that King Jeroboam II would restore Israel's borders. That places him in the northern kingdom of Israel around 780-760 BC, about the same time as Amos and Hosea. Jonah was a prophet with good news for his own nation. He liked it when God blessed Israel. What he didn't like was God blessing Israel's enemies.

Nineveh: Enemy Number One

Nineveh was one of the great cities of Assyria, on the Tigris River in what is now northern Iraq, across from the modern city of Mosul. Assyria was the superpower of the ancient Middle East, and it was famous for terror. Assyrian kings bragged in their own inscriptions about burning cities, skinning captives, and stacking the heads of their enemies in piles. Their palace walls were carved with scenes of conquered people being tortured. The prophet Nahum later called Nineveh the bloody city. About forty years after Jonah's time, Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and carried its people away. To Jonah, Nineveh wasn't just a foreign city. It was the enemy.

Not Just a Fish Story

The book of Jonah is only four chapters long, and only five words of it are Jonah's actual sermon to Nineveh in Hebrew. Most of the book

is about Jonah's heart. The story is carefully built, full of wordplay and repeated phrases like great and went down. It ends with a question, not an answer. It's a mirror. Readers who start by laughing at Jonah slowly realize they may be more like him than they want to admit.

History or Parable?

Christians read Jonah in two main ways. Many believe it is a historical account of real events, pointing out that Jonah was a real prophet named in 2 Kings, that the book is written like a narrative, and that Jesus spoke of Jonah and the Ninevites as real people who will rise at the judgment. Others believe Jonah is a God-inspired parable or teaching story, like the parables Jesus told, pointing to its symbolic style, its humor, and its focus on a lesson. Both groups agree that the book is Scripture and that its message is true. Jesus said, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the huge fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Whichever view you hold, Jesus treated Jonah's story as a sign pointing to Himself.

Read on the Day of Atonement

Every year, Jewish communities read the whole book of Jonah in synagogues on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Jewish year. On that day, people fast, confess their sins, and ask God for forgiveness. Jonah fits perfectly. It shows that no one can run from God, that repentance is real, and that God's mercy reaches even the people we'd least expect.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Jonah 1): Running the wrong way.

Chapter 2 (Jonah 2): Prayer from rock bottom.

Chapter 3 (Jonah 3): A five-word sermon and a citywide revival.

Chapter 4 (Jonah 4): Mad at God's mercy.

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CHAPTER 1

Running the Wrong Way

Jonah 1

The book starts with a command. “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.”

God wanted Jonah to go east, about five hundred miles overland, to the capital of Assyria. It was the last place any Israelite would want to go. Imagine being told to walk into the headquarters of the most violent group in the world and tell them God has noticed their evil.

So Jonah got up. And went the opposite direction.

“But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.” He went down to Joppa, the seaport, found a ship going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Where Was Tarshish?**

Tarshish was a distant port, probably in southern Spain, near the Atlantic Ocean, though some scholars suggest other locations around the Mediterranean. To an Israelite, it was the edge of the known world, about two thousand miles west. Nineveh was east. Jonah wasn’t just avoiding his assignment. He was trying to get as far away as humanly possible, in exactly the wrong direction. It’s like being told to go to New York and buying a ticket to Hawaii.

Notice something about the language. Jonah went down to Joppa. He went down into the ship. Later, he'll go down into the hold of the ship, and then down into the sea. Running from God is always a downward journey.

Notice also the phrase from the presence of the LORD. It appears twice in one verse. Jonah knew better than anyone that God is everywhere. Psalm 139 asks, "Where could I flee from your presence?" The answer is nowhere. Jonah wasn't really trying to escape God's presence. He was trying to escape God's call.

> **REAL TALK** **Running from God**
>
> You don't need a ship to run from God. People run in all kinds of ways. You can stay so busy you never have time to think. You can keep your earbuds in all day so you never have silence. You can avoid church, avoid Christian friends, or avoid reading the Bible because you know it might say something you don't want to hear. Sometimes we run because we're scared. Sometimes, like Jonah, we run because we don't like what God is asking. But running never takes us anywhere good. And God doesn't give up on runaways.

Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea. The storm was so violent that the ship was about to break apart. The sailors were terrified. Every man cried out to his own god. They threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

And Jonah? He was below deck, fast asleep.

The captain found him and woke him up. "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God! Maybe your God will notice us, so that we won't perish."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Sailors**
>
> The sailors on Jonah's ship were probably Phoenicians, the great seafaring people of the ancient world, from cities like Tyre and Sidon. They would have worshiped many gods, including gods of the sea and storms. Ancient sailors

were famously superstitious, and they believed storms could be caused by angry gods punishing someone on board. That's why they cast lots, a bit like drawing straws, to find out who was responsible.

There's a sad irony here. The pagan captain was begging the prophet to pray. The man who knew the true God was the only one on the ship not praying.

The sailors cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. They fired questions at him. Who are you? What do you do? Where are you from? What people are you from?

Jonah's answer sounds impressive. "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who has made the sea and the dry land."

But think about what he just said. He worships the God who made the sea, and he's trying to escape that God by sea. The sailors immediately saw the problem. "What have you done?"

REAL TALK **Saying One Thing, Doing Another**

Jonah's theology was perfect. He said all the right words about God. But his actions told a different story. It's possible to know all the right answers and still be running from God. You might know the Bible stories, the Sunday school songs, and the right things to say in youth group, while your life is heading toward Tarshish. Faith isn't just what you say about God. It's what you do when He calls.

The storm kept getting worse. The sailors asked Jonah what they should do. He said, "Take me up, and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will be calm for you; for I know that because of me this great storm is on you."

Some people see this as Jonah finally being brave and taking responsibility. Others notice that he still didn't pray or repent. He

would rather die than go to Nineveh. Either way, the sailors didn't want to do it.

So they rowed hard, trying to get back to land. They didn't want to throw a man overboard. But the sea only grew wilder. Finally, they prayed, not to their own gods, but to the LORD. "We beg you, LORD, we beg you, don't let us die for this man's life, and don't lay on us innocent blood."

> **REAL TALK** **When Outsiders Act Better**
>
> In Jonah 1, the pagan sailors come off better than the prophet. They work hard to save his life. They pray. They care about innocent blood. Jonah sleeps through the crisis and doesn't seem to care whether they live or die. That's a humbling picture. Sometimes people who don't know God show more kindness, honesty, and compassion than people who say they do. Instead of looking down on people outside the church, we can learn from them, and let their kindness challenge us to live up to what we believe.

Then they threw Jonah into the sea. Immediately, the sea stopped raging.

The sailors were stunned. "Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows." The sailors who started the chapter praying to many gods ended it worshiping the one true God. Even while Jonah was running, God was using him to reach people.

> **REAL TALK** **God Uses Imperfect People**
>
> Jonah was the worst missionary ever in chapter 1. He ran away, slept through a storm, and didn't pray. And yet a whole ship full of sailors ended up worshiping the LORD. That doesn't mean disobedience is okay. But it does show that God's plans are bigger than our failures. If you've made a mess of things, God is not finished with you. He can still use your story, even the parts you're ashamed of.

And then comes the most famous verse in the book. "The LORD prepared a huge fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Great Fish**

Fun fact: the Bible never says Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The Hebrew just says a huge fish, and the Greek word used in Matthew 12 can mean any large sea creature. People have long debated what kind it might have been. Sperm whales can swallow giant squid whole, and whale sharks and great white sharks are enormous. There are also old sailors' stories of people swallowed and surviving, but those stories are hard to confirm and many have been shown to be legends. Those who read Jonah as history say the point is that God prepared the fish, which makes it a miracle, not a biology project. Those who read it as a parable say the fish is part of the story's message. Either way, the fish isn't a punishment. It's a rescue. Jonah was drowning, and God sent a ride.

Notice the word prepared. It shows up four times in Jonah: God prepared a fish, a vine, a worm, and a wind. God was in control of every detail, even of a runaway's journey.

KEY VERSE

But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid its fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah 1:3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Jonah ran in the opposite direction instead of just staying home?
2. What are some ways people run from God today?
3. Why do you think the sailors acted more kindly than Jonah?
4. Is there anything God has been asking you to do that you've been avoiding?

TRY THIS *Take ten minutes of silence this week, with no phone, music, or screens. Ask God, Is there anywhere I'm running from You? Write down whatever comes to mind.*

CHAPTER 2

Prayer from Rock Bottom

Jonah 2

Chapter 2 opens in the strangest prayer room in history. “Then Jonah prayed to the LORD, his God, out of the fish’s belly.”

It’s dark. It’s wet. It smells terrible. And for the first time in the book, Jonah prays.

It’s interesting that it took this. When God called him, Jonah ran. When the storm hit, he slept. When the sailors begged him to pray, he didn’t. Only when he hit rock bottom, literally at the bottom of the sea, did he cry out to God.

> **REAL TALK** **Rock Bottom**
>
> Sometimes it takes hitting rock bottom to look up. Maybe you’ve been there: after getting caught in a lie, after a relationship fell apart, after failing something important, or after a choice that went really wrong. Rock bottom is painful. But it can also be the place where you finally stop running and turn to God. The good news is that God can hear you from anywhere, even from the belly of a fish. And if you’re in a hard place right now, you don’t have to stay there alone. Talk to God, and talk to a trusted adult who can help.

Jonah’s prayer is actually a psalm, a poem of thanksgiving. He describes what happened. “I called because of my affliction to the LORD. He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. You heard my voice.”

BACKGROUND CHECK **Sheol**

Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave, or the underworld. In the Old Testament, it often describes being as close to death as a person can get. When Jonah says he cried out from the belly of Sheol, he means he was as good as dead. He was sinking toward the bottom of the sea, beyond any human help. That makes his rescue even more amazing.

Then he describes sinking. "For you threw me into the depths, in the heart of the seas. The flood was all around me. All your waves and your billows passed over me."

Notice that Jonah says you threw me. The sailors had thrown him overboard, but Jonah knew God was behind it. He wasn't blaming God. He was recognizing that God was in control, even of his discipline.

He felt cut off from God. "I said, I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple."

That word yet is huge. Jonah felt banished. But even then, he chose to look toward God.

Then comes some of the most vivid poetry in the Bible. The waters were up to his neck. The deep was all around him. Seaweed wrapped around his head. He sank to the roots of the mountains. The earth's gates were locked behind him. And then, "yet you have brought my life up from the pit, LORD my God."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Praying Scripture**

Jonah's prayer is packed with phrases from the Psalms. Compare it with Psalm 120:1, "In my distress, I cried to the LORD. He answered me." Or Psalm 42:7, "All your waves and your billows have swept over me." Or Psalm 31:22, "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before your eyes." Or Psalm 3:8, "Salvation belongs to the LORD." Jonah had memorized the songs of his people. When he

was drowning, those words came back to him. He prayed Scripture from the belly of the fish.

REAL TALK **Words for When You Have No Words**

There will be times in your life when you don't know how to pray. You're too sad, too scared, or too overwhelmed to find words. That's when it helps to have Scripture stored up in your heart. The Psalms are full of honest prayers for every emotion: joy, grief, fear, anger, and hope. Try memorizing a few short verses now, so they're ready when you need them. Even praying one line, like Psalm 120:1, can be a lifeline in a storm.

Jonah remembered God at his lowest point. "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD. My prayer came in to you, into your holy temple."

Then he makes a sharp statement. "Those who regard vain idols forsake their own mercy." People who cling to worthless idols give up the mercy that could have been theirs. Ironically, Jonah himself had been trying to run from God's mercy, and he would soon be angry when God gave mercy to others.

REAL TALK **Modern Idols**

An idol is anything we trust, love, or depend on more than God. In Jonah's day, it was statues of gods. Today, idols are usually less obvious. They can be popularity, success, money, a relationship, a sport, a phone, or even our own plans. Idols always promise more than they can give. Jonah says that clinging to them means walking away from the mercy God offers. What are you tempted to hold onto more tightly than God?

Then Jonah ends with a promise and a shout of praise. "But I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation belongs to the LORD."

That last line is the heart of the whole book. Salvation belongs to the LORD. Not to Jonah. Not to Israel. Not to anyone who thinks they

deserve it. God is the one who saves, and He gets to decide whom He saves. Jonah was happy about that truth when it applied to him. In chapter 4, he'll be furious when it applies to Nineveh.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Thanksgiving Before the Rescue**

Notice when Jonah gave thanks. He was still inside the fish. He hadn't reached dry land yet. But he was already thanking God for saving him. Many scholars point out that the fish itself was the rescue, saving him from drowning. Jonah understood that God was already at work, even before his situation changed. That's a powerful kind of faith: thanking God in the middle of the storm, not just after it's over.

Then, one of the funniest lines in the Bible. "Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah on the dry land."

The fish obeyed God immediately. Jonah hadn't. Even the sea creature was more obedient than the prophet. And the way it obeyed, by throwing up, is not exactly a glamorous ending. Jonah was back on dry land, alive, and probably smelling awful. But he was ready for a second chance.

REAL TALK **Honest Prayer**

Jonah's prayer was real. He didn't pretend everything was fine. He talked about drowning, feeling banished, and being trapped. God doesn't need us to pretend. You can tell Him exactly how you feel, even when you're scared, angry, or ashamed. The Psalms show us that honest prayer isn't a lack of faith. It's what faith looks like when life is hard. And like Jonah, you can end an honest prayer with hope, because salvation belongs to the LORD.

KEY VERSE

But I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation belongs to the LORD.

Jonah 2:9 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think it took hitting rock bottom for Jonah to pray?
2. How did knowing the Psalms help Jonah pray?
3. What does Salvation belongs to the LORD mean to you?
4. Have you ever thanked God before a hard situation was over? What happened?

TRY THIS *Memorize Jonah 2:9 or Psalm 120:1 this week. Write it on a card and keep it somewhere you'll see it every day.*

CHAPTER 3

Five-Word Sermon, Citywide Revival

Jonah 3

Chapter 3 starts almost exactly like chapter 1. "The LORD's word came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I give you."

The second time. Those three words are full of grace. God didn't fire Jonah. He didn't find a better prophet. He gave the same assignment again.

> **REAL TALK** **Second Chances**
>
> Maybe you've blown it. Maybe you ran from something God asked you to do, broke a promise, or made a choice you regret. Jonah 3:1 is for you. God is the God of second chances, and third chances, and more. Peter denied Jesus three times, and Jesus restored him and gave him a job to do. Second chances don't mean what you did wasn't serious. They mean God's grace is bigger than your failure. If you've been running, it's not too late to turn around.

This time, Jonah obeyed. "So Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD's word."

The book says Nineveh was "an exceedingly great city, three days' journey across." Scholars debate what that means. It could mean it

took three days to walk across the city and its surrounding district, or three days to visit every part of it. Either way, Nineveh was huge.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The City of Nineveh**
>
> Archaeologists have excavated the ruins of Nineveh near modern Mosul in Iraq. At its height, its walls stretched about seven and a half miles around, with fifteen gates. Later Assyrian kings built enormous palaces there, decorated with carved stone panels showing military victories. One king, Ashurbanipal, collected a library of tens of thousands of clay tablets, including the famous Epic of Gilgamesh. The greater Nineveh region included surrounding towns and farmland. It was one of the largest and most impressive cities in the world.

Jonah walked a day's journey into the city and preached. His entire recorded sermon was this: "In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!"

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Five-Word Sermon**
>
> In Hebrew, Jonah's sermon is only five words long. It's probably the shortest sermon in the Bible. There's no mention of God's name, no explanation, no call to repent, and no promise of mercy. It's just a warning. And yet, it worked. Some scholars also notice that the Hebrew word for overthrown can also mean turned over or changed. Nineveh would be overturned, one way or another. In the end, it was overturned, not by destruction, but by repentance.

What happened next is astonishing. "The people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even to their least."

The whole city responded. Rich and poor, powerful and ordinary. They believed God, stopped eating, and put on sackcloth, a rough, scratchy fabric worn as a sign of grief and repentance.

Then the news reached the king. He got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. The most powerful man in the city took the lowest seat.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Sackcloth and Ashes**
>
> Sackcloth was coarse cloth made from goat or camel hair, the kind used for grain sacks. Wearing it was uncomfortable, and that was the point. People wore it when they were mourning a death, facing disaster, or repenting of sin. Sitting in ashes or putting dust on your head was another way of showing grief and humility. It was like saying, I am nothing before God. For a king to do this was a dramatic act of humility.

Then the king made a decree. No one was to eat or drink, not even the animals. "But let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and animal, and let them cry mightily to God."

Yes, the cows were wearing sackcloth too. Picture sheep, goats, oxen, and donkeys draped in scratchy sacks, mooing and bleating with hunger. It sounds almost funny. But it shows how serious the city was. Everyone and everything was turning to God.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Animals in Mourning**
>
> Ancient writers sometimes describe animals taking part in mourning rituals. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote about Persians shaving their horses' manes during a time of national grief. Some scholars think the Ninevites' decree reflects similar customs. In Jonah, it also sets up the book's final verse, where God mentions His concern for the many animals in Nineveh. God cares about His whole creation, and the whole creation was joining the city's cry for mercy.

The king's decree also went deeper than outward signs. "Yes, let them turn everyone from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands." Nineveh was known for violence. The king called them to stop.

Then he said, "Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we might not perish?" He didn't know whether God would forgive them. Jonah hadn't told them that God was merciful. But the king hoped anyway.

REAL TALK **Real Repentance**

Repentance isn't just saying sorry. It's turning around. The people of Nineveh didn't just feel bad. They changed their behavior. They stopped the violence. Real repentance means admitting what you did was wrong, telling God the truth, and, with His help, actually changing direction. Sometimes it means apologizing to people you've hurt or making things right. It isn't about earning forgiveness. It's about responding to a God who is ready to forgive.

And here's how the chapter ends. "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which he said he would do to them, and he didn't do it."

The most violent city in the world repented, and God forgave them. It may have been the greatest revival in history, and it came from the shortest sermon, preached by the most reluctant preacher.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Did It Last?**

The book of Jonah doesn't record whether Nineveh's repentance lasted. Assyrian records from Jonah's general era mention times of plague, revolts, and a solar eclipse in 763 BC, which some scholars suggest might have made people especially open to a prophet's warning, though this is uncertain. What we do know is that later generations of Assyrians returned to brutal violence. About a century and a half after Jonah, the prophet Nahum announced Nineveh's final judgment, and the city was destroyed in 612 BC. God's mercy is real, but each generation must respond to Him for itself.

REAL TALK **Nobody Is Too Far Gone**

Is there someone you think is too far gone for God to save? A bully, an abuser, a celebrity, a politician, or someone who has hurt you deeply? Nineveh was

the most violent city in the world, and God still offered mercy. That doesn't mean what they did was okay, or that you should trust someone who has hurt you. Forgiveness and safety are different things. But it does mean no one is beyond God's reach. Peter says God is not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

KEY VERSE

God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which he said he would do to them, and he didn't do it.

Jonah 3:10 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does it mean to you that God's word came to Jonah a second time?
2. Why do you think such a short sermon had such a huge effect?
3. What's the difference between saying sorry and repenting?
4. Is there someone you've written off as too far gone for God?

TRY THIS *Think of one way you need to turn around, like a habit, an attitude, or a relationship. Talk to God about it, and take one concrete step this week to change direction.*

CHAPTER 4

Mad at God's Mercy

Jonah 4

If the book ended with chapter 3, it would be a happy story. A prophet gets a second chance, a city repents, and God shows mercy. But there's a chapter 4. And it's the most important chapter in the book.

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry."

Jonah had just seen the greatest revival in history. And he was furious.

Then he finally tells us why he ran away in chapter 1. "Please, LORD, wasn't this what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore I hurried to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and you relent of doing harm."

Jonah didn't run because he was afraid of the Assyrians. He ran because he knew God would forgive them. He knew God was kind, and he didn't want God to be kind to his enemies.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Quoting God Against God**
>
> Jonah's description of God comes almost word for word from Exodus 34:6, where God revealed Himself to Moses as "a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth." This was one of Israel's most beloved descriptions of God. The prophet Joel quoted it to call people

to repentance. Jonah quoted it as a complaint. He knew God's character perfectly. He just didn't like it when it applied to people he hated.

REAL TALK **Mercy for Me, Not for You**

It's easy to love God's mercy when it's for us. It's much harder when it's for someone who hurt us, or for people we think don't deserve it. Maybe you've felt that way about a sibling who always seems to get away with things, a classmate who bullied you, or a group of people you've been taught to dislike. Jonah's anger is a mirror. Jesus told a story about an older brother who was angry when his father welcomed home a runaway son. The older brother refused to join the party. Sometimes we're the older brother. God invites us to come in and celebrate.

Then Jonah said something heartbreaking. "Therefore now, LORD, take, I beg you, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety: If You Feel Like Jonah**

Jonah was so angry and hopeless that he said it would be better for him to die. Notice how God responded. He didn't yell at Jonah or abandon him. He asked him a gentle question and stayed with him. If you've ever felt like life isn't worth living, please know that God cares about you deeply, and so do the people around you. You don't have to carry those feelings alone. Talk to a trusted adult right away, like a parent, school counselor, teacher, coach, or pastor. You can call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

God answered with a simple question. "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Jonah didn't answer. Instead, he stomped out of the city, went to the east side, built a little shelter, and sat down to watch, hoping God might still destroy Nineveh.

REAL TALK **Is It Right for You to Be Angry?**

Anger isn't always wrong. Jesus was angry when people turned the temple into a marketplace. God is angry at injustice. But anger can also come from pride, jealousy, or a desire for revenge. God's question to Jonah is a good one to ask yourself when you're angry: Is this right? Is my anger about something that's truly wrong, or is it about not getting my way? Talking honestly with God, and with someone you trust, can help you sort it out.

Then God did something tender, and a little bit funny. "The LORD God prepared a vine and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the vine."

For the first time in the whole book, Jonah was happy. Not about the sailors being saved. Not about the city repenting. About a plant that gave him shade.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Vine**

Scholars aren't sure what kind of plant this was. The Hebrew word, qiqayon, may refer to the castor-oil plant, which grows quickly in hot climates and has large leaves that give good shade. Some older translations call it a gourd. Whatever it was, God made it grow fast, overnight, to shade Jonah in the blazing Middle Eastern heat.

But the next morning, God prepared a worm. The worm chewed the vine, and it withered. Then God prepared a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah's head until he felt faint. And Jonah said again that it would be better for him to die than to live.

Remember the word prepared? God prepared a fish, a vine, a worm, and a wind. Every one of them was part of God's plan to teach Jonah.

God asked again, "Is it right for you to be angry about the vine?" This time, Jonah answered. "I am right to be angry, even to death."

Then God made His point. Jonah cared about a plant that he didn't plant, didn't water, and didn't grow. It came up in a night and died in a night. If Jonah could care that much about a plant, shouldn't God care about a city full of people?

> **REAL TALK** **Caring About the Wrong Things**
>
> Jonah was more upset about losing his shade than about the possibility of a whole city being destroyed. It's easy to laugh at him. But we can be like that too. We can get more upset about a slow phone, a bad haircut, or losing a game than about people who are suffering. God isn't saying small things don't matter. He's asking whether our hearts are big enough to care about what He cares about.

And then the book ends with a question. "Shouldn't I be concerned for Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred twenty thousand persons who can't discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also many animals?"

The phrase can't discern between their right hand and their left hand probably means they were morally lost or confused, or possibly refers to young children. Either way, God saw them with compassion. And notice that He mentions the animals too. God cares about all of His creation.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Unanswered Question**
>
> The book of Jonah is the only book in the Bible that ends with a question. We never find out how Jonah answered. Did he soften his heart? Did he keep pouting? The book doesn't say. That's intentional. The question isn't just for Jonah. It's for every reader. The author leaves it hanging so that we have to answer it ourselves.

So the question is for you. Should God care about the people you don't like? The people who hurt you? The people from the other

group, the other school, the other side? Should God be concerned for your Nineveh?

REAL TALK **Your Answer**

Jesus said, "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you." That doesn't mean pretending people didn't hurt you, staying in unsafe situations, or excusing wrongdoing. It means asking God for a heart that wants good for others, even people who are hard to love. That's not something you can do on your own. It takes God's help. Start by praying for one person by name. You might be surprised at what God does, both in them and in you.

KEY VERSE

He prayed to the LORD, and said, "Please, LORD, wasn't this what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore I hurried to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and you relent of doing harm.

Jonah 4:2 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why was Jonah angry that God forgave Nineveh?
2. Have you ever been upset that someone else received mercy? Why?
3. Why do you think God used a plant, a worm, and a wind to teach Jonah?
4. How would you answer God's question at the end of the book?

TRY THIS *Write down the name of one person or group you find hard to love. Every day this week, pray for them by name, asking God to bless them and to change your heart toward them.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Jonah ends with a question about whether God should care for His enemies. Jewish readers have treasured the book for centuries as a call to repentance and a picture of God's mercy to all people. Christians believe the full answer to Jonah's question is Jesus.

When religious leaders demanded a miracle from Jesus, He said that no sign would be given except "the sign of Jonah the prophet." Then He explained, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the huge fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Jesus was predicting His death, burial, and resurrection. And He added, "behold, someone greater than Jonah is here." Think about how much greater. Jonah ran away from his enemies. Jesus came toward His. Jonah was thrown into the sea because of his own disobedience. Jesus went to the cross because of ours. Jonah went into the depths unwillingly. Jesus said of His life, "No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself." Jonah was angry that God forgave his enemies. Jesus prayed for His enemies while they were crucifying Him: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." The Bible says that "while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son." We were the Ninevites. And Jesus didn't run.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He cares about every person, even the ones we would write off.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Like Jonah, all of us have run from God, and like Nineveh, all of us need mercy. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus did not run.

Jesus, someone greater than Jonah, willingly died for our sins, spent three days in the tomb, and rose again to rescue His enemies.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation belongs to the LORD. It isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Stop running.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Like the people of Nineveh, you can turn to God and find Him gracious and merciful. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been running from You. I've gone my own way, and sometimes I've wanted mercy for me but not for others. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus didn't run, but willingly died for my sins, spent three days in the tomb, and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Give me a heart like Yours for people I find hard to love. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read all of Jonah, then Matthew 12:38-41 and Luke 15:11-32.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Pray for an enemy. Choose one person you find hard to love, and pray for them by name every day this week.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Jonah argued with God right to the end, and God kept talking with him. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Jonah is right, you can't outrun God, and His mercy is bigger than you ever imagined.

But I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation belongs to the LORD.

Jonah 2:9 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF MICAH

The King from Bethlehem

Micah, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King from Bethlehem: The Book of Micah, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Have you ever noticed that the people in charge don't always play fair? Leaders who take advantage of people. Powerful people who grab what they want. Religious voices who say whatever they're paid to say. It can make you cynical fast.

Micah noticed too. He was a small-town guy from the farm country of Judah, and he watched the rich and powerful in Jerusalem crush ordinary families like his. So he spoke up. He called out corrupt judges, greedy land-grabbers, and preachers-for-hire. He even predicted that Jerusalem would be plowed like a field.

But Micah isn't only angry. He also paints some of the most beautiful pictures of hope in the whole Bible: weapons turned into farm tools, everyone resting under their own fig tree, a Ruler born in tiny Bethlehem, and a God who throws our sins into the deepest sea. And he gives us one of the clearest answers ever written to the question, What does God really want from me?

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Micah in five chapters: corrupt leaders and preachers-for-hire (Micah 1-3), swords into plowshares (4), Bethlehem Ephrathah (5), God's courtroom and what God really wants (6), and who is a God like You? (7).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Micah was, when he lived, and how his book is put together. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how Micah's prophecies of peace will be fulfilled, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Micah in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-third book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Micah was a prophet from the small town of Moresheth who spoke to Jerusalem's elites in the 700s BC, at the same time as Isaiah. This book explains his background, the three cycles of judgment and hope that shape his book, and how his prophecy in Micah 3:12 was remembered a century later and helped save the prophet Jeremiah's life (Jeremiah 26:18).

It covers Micah's call for justice, the vision of swords beaten into plowshares (shared with Isaiah 2), the prophecy of a Ruler from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), the famous summary of what God requires in Micah 6:8, and the closing praise of a God who pardons sin. It notes the Jewish custom of Tashlich, connected with Micah 7:19. Where Christians differ on how Micah's visions of peace will be fulfilled, the book presents the main views fairly, and it avoids partisan politics.

Real Talk boxes address corrupt leaders, honesty, peace and conflict, feeling small or overlooked, justice and mercy, family tension, and forgiveness. Because Micah 7 describes conflict within

families, one box encourages teens dealing with serious trouble at home to talk with a trusted adult and lists Childhelp (1-800-422-4453), 988, and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows Jesus born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:5-6), the Shepherd-King who is our peace, and the Savior who casts our sins into the depths of the sea. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will learn to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

A Small-Town Prophet

Micah came from Moresheth, also called Moresheth Gath, a small farming town in the rolling foothills of Judah, about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem, near the border with the Philistines. It was the kind of place big-city people overlooked. Micah's neighbors were farmers and shepherds, the very people who were losing their land to wealthy officials from the capital. When Micah spoke against injustice, he wasn't talking about strangers. He was talking about his own community.

Micah and Isaiah

Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, roughly 740 to 700 BC. That means he lived at the same time as Isaiah. But the two men came from very different worlds. Isaiah was a Jerusalem insider who had direct access to kings. Micah was an outsider from the countryside. Yet God gave them strikingly similar messages, including one nearly identical prophecy about swords and plowshares. God speaks through both the well-connected and the overlooked.

Dangerous Times

During Micah's lifetime, the Assyrian Empire swept through the region. In 722 BC, Assyria destroyed Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, as Micah had warned. In 701 BC, the Assyrian king Sennacherib invaded Judah and destroyed dozens of

towns, including Lachish, which was close to Micah's hometown. Sennacherib was so proud of capturing Lachish that he had the siege carved on the walls of his palace in Nineveh. Those carvings are now in the British Museum. Micah's own neighbors may have been among the captives.

Three Cycles

The book of Micah is organized into three main sections. Each one begins with a call to Hear! or Listen! (Micah 1:2, 3:1, and 6:1), and each moves from judgment to hope. The first cycle is chapters 1-2, the second is chapters 3-5, and the third is chapters 6-7. Over and over, Micah tells hard truths about sin, then turns to God's promise of a better future. It's a pattern that shows God's heart: He confronts sin because He wants to restore His people.

What's in a Name?

Micah's name is a short form of a Hebrew name that means Who is like the LORD? It's a question with an obvious answer: no one. At the end of his book, Micah plays on his own name when he asks, "Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity?" His whole life and message were a living question pointing to the one true God.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Micah 1-3): Corrupt leaders, land-grabbers, and preachers-for-hire.

Chapter 2 (Micah 4): Swords into plowshares.

Chapter 3 (Micah 5): Bethlehem Ephrathah.

Chapter 4 (Micah 6): God's courtroom and what God really wants.

Chapter 5 (Micah 7): Who is a God like You?

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CHAPTER 1

Corrupt Leaders and Preachers-for-Hire

Micah 1–3

Micah opens like a courtroom drama with the whole world as the jury. "Hear, you peoples, all of you! Listen, O earth, and all that is therein. Let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple."

Then God Himself steps out. "For behold, the LORD comes out of his place, and will come down and tread on the high places of the earth." Mountains melt under Him like wax near a fire. Valleys split open like water pouring down a steep slope.

Why is God coming? "All this is for the disobedience of Jacob, and for the sins of the house of Israel." And where was the sin centered? In the capital cities. Samaria in the north and Jerusalem in the south. The problems started at the top.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **High Places**
>
> The high places were hilltop shrines where people worshiped. Some were used to worship the LORD in ways He hadn't approved. Many were used to worship other gods, like Baal and Asherah, often with practices God called detestable. Micah asks, "And what are the high places of Judah? Aren't they Jerusalem?" In other words, the capital city itself, home of God's temple, had become as corrupt as a pagan shrine.

Micah announced that Samaria would become a heap of rubble. Its stones would be poured down into the valley. That came true in 722 BC, when Assyria destroyed it. And Micah didn't celebrate. "For this I will lament and wail." He mourned for the people he was warning.

Then he lists a series of towns near his home, most of them in the foothills where he grew up. In Hebrew, almost every line is a pun on a town's name. It's like saying, Dustville will roll in the dust, or, Beautyburg will be ashamed. Lachish, a major fortress city, sounds like the Hebrew word for horse team, so Micah tells them to harness their chariots and run.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Lachish**

Lachish was Judah's second most important city, a heavily fortified town southwest of Jerusalem. In 701 BC, the Assyrian king Sennacherib besieged and captured it. He was so proud of this victory that he had the whole siege carved in stone panels in his palace in Nineveh, showing battering rams, archers, and captives being led away. Archaeologists have excavated Lachish and found the Assyrian siege ramp, arrowheads, and evidence of the destruction. Micah's wordplay warning came true just as he said.

REAL TALK **Caring About the People You Warn**

Micah's message was hard, but his heart was broken. He wept over the people he warned. That's a good model. If you ever need to confront a friend about something wrong, like drinking, cheating, or a dangerous relationship, do it because you care, not because you want to feel superior. Speak honestly, but with tears in your eyes, not a smirk on your face. People can usually tell the difference.

In chapter 2, Micah gets specific. "Woe to those who devise iniquity and work evil on their beds! When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand."

These people lay awake at night planning how to take advantage of others. Then in the morning, they did it, simply because they could. "They covet fields and seize them, and houses, then take them away. They oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Land-Grabbing**

In ancient Israel, land wasn't just property. It was a family's inheritance from God, passed down for generations. The law of Moses protected it carefully. Land could be sold only temporarily, and it was supposed to return to the original family in the Year of Jubilee. But in Micah's day, wealthy officials used debt, bribes, and corrupt courts to take farms from poor families permanently. For farmers like Micah's neighbors, losing land meant losing everything: their home, their income, and their family's future.

So God said He was planning disaster for these planners. They would lose their own land. The land-grabbers would get grabbed.

The people didn't want to hear it. "Don't prophesy!" they said. "Don't prophesy about these things. Disgrace won't overtake us." They wanted religion that made them feel good.

Micah responds with sarcasm. If a man came along and said, I'll preach to you about wine and beer, he'd be the perfect prophet for these people.

REAL TALK **Telling People What They Want to Hear**

It's tempting to follow voices that only tell us what we want to hear. Some online influencers, even some religious ones, are popular because they never challenge anyone. They say you're always right, you deserve whatever you want, and nothing you do has consequences. Micah warns against that. Real friends, real mentors, and real truth sometimes say hard things. If everything you listen to only makes you comfortable, you might be missing what you need to hear.

Then, suddenly, chapter 2 ends with hope. God promises to gather the remnant of His people like sheep in a pen. "He who breaks open the way goes up before them." A leader would break through the gate and lead them out, with the LORD at their head.

Chapter 3 begins the second cycle with another Hear! This time, Micah addresses the leaders directly. "Please listen, you heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel: Isn't it for you to know justice?"

Then he uses some of the most graphic language in the Bible. He says the leaders were treating the people like meat, tearing off their skin and chopping them up for the cooking pot. It's a shocking picture, meant to wake people up. The leaders weren't literally cannibals. But they were devouring ordinary people, eating up their lives for their own gain.

Then Micah turned to the prophets, the preachers-for-hire. If you fed them, they proclaimed, "Peace!" If you didn't, they declared war on you. Their message depended on who was paying.

> **REAL TALK** **Influence for Sale**
>
> Micah's false prophets were like influencers who promote anything for the right price. Today, it's worth asking: Who is paying for the messages I'm hearing? Sponsored posts, ads disguised as advice, and people who change their opinions depending on who's watching can all shape what you believe. That doesn't mean you can't trust anyone. But it does mean you should think critically, check sources, and look for people whose words and lives match.

Then Micah makes a bold statement about himself. "But as for me, I am full of power by the LORD's Spirit, and of judgment, and of might, to declare to Jacob his disobedience, and to Israel his sin."

Micah wasn't for sale. His courage came from God's Spirit, not from money or popularity.

Then he summed up the corruption. "Her leaders judge for bribes, and her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money." And yet, they still said, "Isn't the LORD among us? No disaster will come on us."

They thought having God's temple in their city made them safe. So Micah gave one of the most shocking prophecies in the Old Testament. "Therefore Zion for your sake will be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem will become heaps of rubble, and the mountain of the temple like the high places of a forest."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Prophecy That Saved Jeremiah**

About a hundred years after Micah, the prophet Jeremiah stood in the temple and warned that it would be destroyed. The priests and prophets wanted him executed. But some elders spoke up. They reminded everyone that Micah had said the same thing in King Hezekiah's day. Hezekiah didn't kill Micah. Instead, he feared the LORD and prayed, and God held back the disaster. The elders argued that killing Jeremiah would be a great evil. Jeremiah's life was spared. Micah's words, spoken a century earlier, protected another prophet. And in 586 BC, Jerusalem was finally destroyed, just as both prophets had warned.

REAL TALK **When Words Outlive You**

Micah never knew that his words would save Jeremiah's life a hundred years later. You may never know the full impact of the things you say and do. A word of truth, an act of courage, or a kind message might matter to someone years from now. That's a good reason to speak carefully, to stand for what's right, and to be faithful even when you don't see results.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Hezekiah's Reforms**

According to Jeremiah 26, King Hezekiah responded to Micah's warning by fearing the LORD and praying for mercy. Second Kings and Second Chronicles describe Hezekiah tearing down the high places, smashing idols, reopening the temple, and calling the nation back to God. Hezekiah also dug a tunnel to bring water into Jerusalem before the Assyrian siege. That tunnel still exists today, and visitors can walk through it. Micah's preaching may have been one of the reasons for Hezekiah's reforms, and God spared Jerusalem from the Assyrians in 701 BC.

KEY VERSE

But as for me, I am full of power by the LORD's Spirit, and of judgment, and of might, to declare to Jacob his disobedience, and to Israel his sin.

Micah 3:8 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Micah focused so much on leaders and capital cities?
2. What did the land-grabbers do, and why was it so serious?
3. How can you tell the difference between someone who tells the truth and someone who just tells people what they want to hear?
4. Where do you need courage from God's Spirit to stand for what's right?

TRY THIS *This week, pay attention to the voices you listen to, like influencers, music, and friends. For each one, ask: Does this tell me the truth, or just what I want to hear? Unfollow or step back from one voice that's pulling you the wrong way.*

CHAPTER 2

Swords into Plowshares

Micah 4

After the shock of 3:12, where Jerusalem is plowed like a field, chapter 4 opens with a complete change of tone. "But in the latter days, it will happen that the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established on the top of the mountains, and it will be exalted above the hills; and peoples will stream to it."

The same mountain that would become a heap of ruins would one day be the highest mountain in the world, not in height but in importance. And people from every nation would stream to it.

Think about that picture. Rivers normally flow downhill. But here, people flow uphill, toward God.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Micah 4 and Isaiah 2**
>
> Micah 4:1-3 is almost word for word the same as Isaiah 2:2-4. Since Micah and Isaiah lived at the same time, scholars wonder who said it first. Some think Micah borrowed from Isaiah. Others think Isaiah borrowed from Micah. Still others think both drew from an older song or prophecy that was well known in Jerusalem. Whatever the answer, God thought this vision was important enough to put in the Bible twice. Micah also adds a line that Isaiah doesn't have, about people sitting under their own vine and fig tree.

Many nations would say, "Come! Let's go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths."

People wouldn't come just to visit. They would come to learn. They would want God to teach them how to live.

Then comes one of the most famous lines in the Bible. "They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Plowshares and Pruning Hooks**
>
> A plowshare is the metal blade of a plow that cuts into the soil. A pruning hook is a curved knife used to trim grapevines and fruit trees. Weapons in Micah's day were made of iron or bronze, and metal was valuable. When war ended, it made sense to melt down weapons and turn them into farm tools. The picture is of a world where people no longer need weapons, so they turn them into tools that grow food. Destruction becomes production.

Today, a statue called Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares stands in the garden of the United Nations headquarters in New York. It shows a man hammering a sword into a plow. Micah's vision has inspired people all over the world who long for peace.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **When Will This Happen?**
>
> Christians understand this prophecy in different ways. Some believe it describes a future time when Jesus returns and reigns on earth, bringing complete peace among nations. Others believe it is being fulfilled spiritually now, as people from every nation come to Jesus and learn to live at peace, and will be fully completed in the new creation. Most agree that the church gives a preview of it whenever people from different nations worship together in peace. All agree that the final fulfillment belongs to God, and that the world we live in still waits for it.

Then Micah adds his own beautiful detail. “But every man will sit under his vine and under his fig tree. No one will make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of Armies has spoken.”

For a farmer like Micah, this was the dream. Not a mansion. Not great wealth. Just your own little piece of land, your own vine and fig tree, and the freedom to sit in its shade without fear. After all the land-grabbing in chapter 2, this was a promise that ordinary families would get their homes back.

> **REAL TALK** **Peace Starts Small**
>
> World peace can feel impossibly far away. But Micah’s vision starts with something simple: people sitting safely under their own trees, without fear. Peace often begins in small places, like your family, your friend group, and your school. Paul wrote, “If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men.” What sword could you turn into a plowshare? Maybe it’s a grudge, a cruel joke, or a habit of arguing. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”

Then Micah describes God gathering the lame, the scattered, and the hurting. “I will assemble that which is lame, and I will gather that which is driven away, and that which I have afflicted.” God would take the weakest people and make them into a strong nation. And the LORD would reign over them forever.

> **REAL TALK** **God Gathers the Hurting**
>
> God’s kingdom isn’t built from the strongest, coolest, or most impressive people. It’s built from the limping, the left-out, and the hurting. If you feel weak, broken, or like you don’t belong, Micah 4:6 is for you. God specializes in gathering people who’ve been pushed aside. And if you’re in a stronger place right now, look for the people at your school or church who are limping, and help bring them in.

The chapter ends by switching back to the near future. Jerusalem would go through labor pains. The people would be taken all the way to Babylon. But even there, God would rescue them. Notice that Micah names Babylon over a century before Babylon conquered Jerusalem, at a time when Assyria was the great power.

Many nations would gather against Jerusalem, hoping to gloat. "But they don't know the thoughts of the LORD, neither do they understand his counsel." The enemies thought they were in control. But God was gathering them like bundles of grain onto a threshing floor. Their plans would serve His purpose.

REAL TALK **When It Feels Like Everyone's Against You**

Sometimes it feels like the whole world is against you. Maybe you're being left out, criticized, or attacked. Micah 4:12 reminds us that people who oppose God's people don't know the thoughts of the LORD. God is still in control, even when it doesn't look like it. That doesn't mean you should just put up with bullying or abuse. Talk to a trusted adult and get help. But you can also have hope, because your story isn't over.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tower of the Flock**

Micah 4:8 mentions the tower of the flock, in Hebrew Migdal Eder. Genesis mentions a place called Migdal Eder near Bethlehem, where Jacob camped after Rachel died. Shepherds used watchtowers to guard their flocks from thieves and wild animals. Some ancient Jewish traditions connected this tower with the place where the Messiah would be revealed. Many Christians have noticed that shepherds near Bethlehem were the first to hear the news of Jesus' birth. Micah uses the image to say that God's kingdom would one day return to Jerusalem.

KEY VERSE

and he will judge between many peoples, and will decide concerning strong nations afar off. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more.

Micah 4:3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the people in Micah 4 come to God's mountain to learn?
2. What does the picture of sitting under your own vine and fig tree tell you about what God wants for people?
3. What is one sword in your life that you could turn into a plowshare?
4. Who are the lame and left-out people around you that God might want you to gather in?

TRY THIS *Think of one relationship where there's tension or conflict. Take one step toward peace this week, like apologizing, forgiving, or simply being kind.*

CHAPTER 3

Bethlehem Ephrathah

Micah 5

Chapter 5 starts in a dark place. Jerusalem is under siege. "They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek." Israel's ruler would be humiliated, slapped in the face by enemies.

Then, out of nowhere, comes one of the most famous prophecies in the whole Bible. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come out to me who is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings out are from of old, from ancient times."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Bethlehem Ephrathah**
>
> Bethlehem is a small town about six miles south of Jerusalem. Its name means house of bread. Ephrathah was the name of the clan or district around it, used to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the north. Bethlehem had a long history. Rachel was buried on the way there. Ruth and Boaz lived there. Most importantly, it was the hometown of King David, where Samuel anointed him as a shepherd boy. When Micah mentions Bethlehem, he's pointing back to David's roots.

Notice how Micah describes Bethlehem: small among the clans of Judah. It wasn't a famous city. It wasn't the capital. It was a tiny village. But God chose it.

This is a pattern in the Bible. God chose David, the youngest son, who was out watching sheep while his older brothers were being considered for king. He chose Gideon, from the weakest clan. He chose Israel, a small nation. And now He promised that the greatest Ruler of all would come from the smallest town.

> **REAL TALK** **Small and Overlooked**
>
> Maybe you feel small. Maybe you're from a small town, a small school, or a family nobody's heard of. Maybe you're not the star athlete or the popular kid. Micah 5:2 says God doesn't overlook small places or small people. In fact, He seems to love using them. Your size, your background, or your status doesn't limit what God can do through you. You are not too small for God's plans.

Then Micah says something mysterious about this Ruler. His "goings out are from of old, from ancient times." This Ruler wouldn't just be born in Bethlehem. His origins went back much further, to ancient days.

Some scholars understand this as pointing to David's ancient family line. Others see it as a hint that the Ruler would be eternal, existing before He was born. Christians have long read it as pointing to Jesus, who existed with God from the beginning and was born as a human baby in Bethlehem.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Seven Hundred Years Early**
>
> Micah gave this prophecy around 700 BC. About seven hundred years later, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The Gospels explain how it happened. Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, in Galilee, but a Roman census required Joseph to travel to Bethlehem, because he was from David's family line. That's where Jesus was born. When the wise men came looking for the newborn King, the religious leaders in Jerusalem immediately pointed to Micah 5:2. Even the crowds in John 7 knew the Messiah was supposed to come from Bethlehem.

Micah says God would give up His people for a while, "until the time that she who is in labor gives birth." Many Christians connect this with Mary giving birth to Jesus, and also with Isaiah's prophecy that "the virgin will conceive, and bear a son." Others understand the woman in labor as a picture of the nation going through hardship before deliverance. Both readings point to a time of pain followed by new life.

Then Micah describes what this Ruler would do. "He shall stand, and shall shepherd in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. They will live, for then he will be great to the ends of the earth."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Shepherd-King**
>
> In the ancient world, kings were often called shepherds of their people. A good king was supposed to protect, feed, and guide his people like a shepherd cares for sheep. David was literally a shepherd before he became king. But many of Israel's kings were terrible shepherds who used their people instead of caring for them. Micah promises a new Shepherd-King, like David but greater, who would rule in God's strength and whose greatness would reach the ends of the earth.

And then, a short but powerful phrase. "He will be our peace." Not just, He will bring peace. He Himself will be peace.

The rest of chapter 5 describes God's people being protected from Assyria and becoming a blessing among the nations, "like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass." Dew and rain bring life. God's people would be a source of refreshment in the world.

> **REAL TALK** **Like Dew**
>
> Dew is quiet. It appears overnight without anyone noticing, and it refreshes everything it touches. Micah says God's people would be like dew among the nations. That's a beautiful picture of how you can affect the world around

you. You don't have to be loud or famous to make a difference. A kind word, an encouraging text, a helping hand, or a quiet prayer can bring life to someone who's dry and weary.

Finally, God promises to remove everything His people had wrongly trusted in: horses and chariots, fortresses, witchcraft, and idols. All the things they leaned on instead of God would be taken away, so they could lean on Him alone.

REAL TALK **What Are You Leaning On?**

God's people trusted in military power, fortresses, fortune-tellers, and idols. Today, people lean on many things for security: money, popularity, grades, relationships, horoscopes, or their own strength. God promised to remove those false supports, not to hurt His people, but so they would lean on Him. Sometimes when something we depend on is taken away, it's an invitation to trust God more deeply.

BACKGROUND CHECK **House of Bread**

Bethlehem's name means house of bread, and it sat in farm country known for its grain fields. That's where Ruth gleaned barley in the fields of Boaz. Many Christians see a beautiful connection here. Jesus, born in the house of bread, later said that He is the bread of life, the one who satisfies our deepest hunger. Whether or not you think the town's name was meant as a sign, it's a fitting place for the One who came to feed the world.

Micah's prophecy also shows that God works through ordinary history. Caesar Augustus, the most powerful man in the world, ordered a census for his own reasons, probably taxes. He had no idea he was moving one young couple to the very town Micah had named seven centuries earlier. God can use even the decisions of emperors to keep His promises. That's encouraging when the world feels out of control. The people in charge may think they're running things, but God is still writing the story.

REAL TALK **The King Who Came Small**

When Jesus came, He didn't arrive with armies or a palace. He came as a baby in a small town, born to a working family, laid in a feeding trough. The King of the universe chose to come small. That tells us something about what God values. He isn't impressed by status or wealth. He came close to ordinary people. If you've ever felt like you don't matter, remember that the King came to a little town like Bethlehem, and He came for people like you.

KEY VERSE

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come out to me who is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings out are from of old, from ancient times.

Micah 5:2 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God chose a small town like Bethlehem?
2. What does it mean that this Ruler's goings out are from of old?
3. How does Jesus fit Micah's picture of a Shepherd-King?
4. Where do you feel small or overlooked? How does Micah 5:2 speak to that?

TRY THIS *Read Matthew 2:1-12 and Luke 2:1-20. Write down every connection you can find to Micah 5.*

CHAPTER 4

God's Courtroom and What God Really Wants

Micah 6

Chapter 6 begins the third and final cycle with another call to listen. "Listen now to what the LORD says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear what you have to say."

God sets up a courtroom. The mountains and hills are the jury, ancient witnesses that have watched human history from the beginning. "For the LORD has a case against his people, and he will contend with Israel."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **A Covenant Lawsuit**
>
> Scholars call this kind of passage a covenant lawsuit. In the ancient world, when a king made a treaty with another nation, both sides promised to keep certain commitments. Gods, or the heavens and earth, were called as witnesses. If one side broke the treaty, the other could bring a lawsuit. Israel had made a covenant with God at Mount Sinai, and Moses had called heaven and earth as witnesses. Now God brings His case before those same witnesses.

You'd expect God to start with a list of accusations. Instead, He starts with heartbreak. "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me!"

It's the voice of a hurt parent, or a friend who's been betrayed. What did I do to deserve this? Then God reminds them of everything He had done. He brought them out of Egypt. He freed them from slavery. He sent them leaders: Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. He protected them when the king of Moab hired the prophet Balaam to curse them, and turned the curse into a blessing.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Miriam**

Notice that Micah names Miriam alongside Moses and Aaron as one of the leaders God sent to Israel. Miriam was the sister of Moses and Aaron. As a girl, she watched over baby Moses in the Nile. Later, she was called a prophetess, and she led the women of Israel in a song of praise after crossing the Red Sea. Micah's mention of her shows that God honored her leadership as part of the story of Israel's rescue.

REAL TALK **Remember What God Has Done**

God's answer to His people's drifting was, Remember. When we forget what God has done for us, it's easy to drift away. That's why it helps to keep track of the ways God has been faithful in your life. Maybe He answered a prayer, brought a good friend into your life, helped you through a hard time, or gave you peace when you needed it. Try writing those things down. On days when God feels far away, your list can remind you of the truth.

Then the scene shifts. A person speaks up, as if answering God's charge. "How shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?"

Then the offers get bigger and bigger. "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams? With tens of thousands of rivers of oil?" And then, shockingly: "Shall I give my firstborn for my disobedience?"

The person is trying to figure out what price will satisfy God. One calf? A thousand rams? Rivers of oil? A child? It's like a bidding war. What's it going to take?

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Child Sacrifice**
>
> The worst offer, giving a firstborn child, was something the pagan nations around Israel actually did. Some worshipers of the god Molech burned their children as sacrifices. Tragically, a few kings of Judah, including King Ahaz during Micah's lifetime, did this too. God's law strictly forbade it and called it detestable. Micah includes this offer to show how twisted religion becomes when people think they must pay God off. God never wanted child sacrifice. He wanted something much different.

Then comes Micah's famous answer. "He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does the LORD require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

God isn't hiding what He wants. He has already shown it. And it isn't more sacrifices or bigger offerings. It's a way of life.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Three Words**
>
> The three parts of Micah 6:8 use rich Hebrew words. Act justly uses mishpat, which means treating people fairly and making sure the weak are protected. Love mercy uses hesed, one of the most beautiful words in the Old Testament. It means loyal, faithful, steadfast love, the kind of love God has for His people. Walk humbly means to live carefully and modestly in God's presence, not proudly or on your own terms. Together, they describe how to live rightly with others and with God.

Notice the balance. Justice and mercy go together. Justice without mercy can become harsh. Mercy without justice can ignore real wrongs. God wants both. And both flow from walking humbly with Him. When you know how much mercy God has shown you, it changes how you treat others.

Many people have called Micah 6:8 one of the best summaries of the Old Testament. Jesus said something similar when He criticized religious leaders for focusing on tiny rules while neglecting "justice, mercy, and faith."

REAL TALK **What Does God Want from Me?**

Many teens wonder, What does God want from me? Sometimes it feels like the answer is a long list of rules. Micah makes it simple. Act justly: treat people fairly, stand up for people who are mistreated, and be honest. Love mercy: be kind, forgive, and give people second chances. Walk humbly with God: stay close to Him, pray, listen to Him, and remember you need Him. You can do all three today, at home, at school, and online.

REAL TALK **You Can't Buy God Off**

The person in Micah 6 tried to buy God's favor with bigger and bigger offerings. People still do that today. They think if they go to church enough, give enough, or do enough good things, God will owe them. But God can't be bought. The good news is that we don't have to pay our way to God. Later, Jesus would give His own life as the one sacrifice that truly pays for sin. Our part is to receive that gift and let it change how we live.

The rest of chapter 6 returns to the courtroom. God points out the cheating going on in Jerusalem. Merchants used dishonest scales and "a bag of deceitful weights." The rich were violent. People told lies. So God warned that they would eat and not be satisfied, plant and not harvest, and make wine they would never drink.

REAL TALK **Honesty in Small Things**

Dishonest scales might sound old-fashioned, but the temptation is the same today. It looks like cheating on tests, lying about why you're late, plagiarizing, or exaggerating to get ahead. God cares about honesty because every lie hurts someone, even if it's just a small one. Acting justly starts with being someone people can trust. When you mess up, own it. Honesty takes courage, but it builds a life that lasts.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Balaam and Balak**

Micah 6:5 refers to a strange story in Numbers 22-24. Balak, the king of Moab, was terrified of Israel, so he hired a famous prophet named Balaam to curse them. But every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse Israel, God made him bless them instead. Along the way, Balaam's donkey even spoke to him. Micah reminds the people of this story to show how God had protected them from enemies they didn't even know about. Archaeologists have found an ancient inscription at Deir Alla, in Jordan, that mentions a seer named Balaam son of Beor, showing that his name was known outside the Bible too.

Micah 6:8 has been quoted by presidents, carved into buildings, and written on countless school walls. But it's not just a nice motto. It's a challenge for every day. It's easy to agree with it in theory and much harder to live it when someone cuts you off in the hallway, when a friend is being mocked, or when you could get ahead by cutting a corner. The good news is that God doesn't just command these things. Through Jesus, He gives us His Spirit to help us live them out.

KEY VERSE

He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does the LORD require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God started His case with the question What have I done to you?
2. Why do you think people try to buy God's favor?
3. Which of the three parts of Micah 6:8 is hardest for you? Why?
4. What would it look like to live out Micah 6:8 at your school this week?

TRY THIS *Write Micah 6:8 on a card. Each day this week, write down one way you acted justly, one way you loved mercy, and one way you walked humbly with God.*

CHAPTER 5

Who Is a God Like You?

Micah 7

Chapter 7 starts with Micah feeling miserable. “Misery is mine!” He feels like a hungry person walking through a vineyard after the harvest, looking for grapes and finding none. He was looking for good people, and he couldn’t find any.

“The godly man has perished out of the earth, and there is no one upright among men.” Everyone seemed to be out for themselves. Rulers and judges demanded bribes. Powerful people got whatever they wanted. Even the best of them were like thorn bushes.

> **REAL TALK** **When It Feels Like Nobody Is Good**
>
> Have you ever felt like Micah? Like everyone around you is fake, selfish, or untrustworthy? It can be discouraging when friends lie, adults let you down, and the news is full of corruption. Micah felt that way too. It’s okay to be honest about your disappointment. But Micah didn’t stop there. He turned his eyes to God. And there are probably more good people around you than you realize. Look for them, and be one of them.

Then Micah describes something even more painful: broken trust in families. “Don’t trust in a neighbor. Don’t put confidence in a friend.” Families were turning on each other. “For the son dishonors the father, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies are the men of his own house.”

Jesus later quoted these words when He warned His followers that choosing to follow Him might cause tension, even in their own families.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Safety: When Home Isn't Safe**
>
> Micah describes families where trust has broken down. Sometimes families go through hard seasons, with arguments, tension, or misunderstandings. That's painful but normal. But if anyone at home is hurting you, threatening you, or making you feel unsafe, that is not okay, and it's not your fault. Please talk to a trusted adult, like a teacher, school counselor, coach, pastor, or relative. You can call or text the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453 any time. If you're thinking about hurting yourself, call or text 988. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

But then comes a turning point. "But as for me, I will look to the LORD. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me."

Micah couldn't fix everything around him. But he could choose where to look.

Then he speaks for the whole nation, like a person who has fallen. "Don't rejoice against me, my enemy. When I fall, I will arise. When I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me."

> **REAL TALK** **When I Fall, I Will Arise**
>
> Micah 7:8 is a verse for anyone who has failed, fallen, or been knocked down. Notice that Micah doesn't say, I will never fall. He says, When I fall, I will arise. Falling is part of life. What matters is getting back up, and you don't have to do it alone. Even in darkness, God is your light. If you're in a dark season right now, hold onto this verse. And reach out to someone who can help you get back up.

Micah even admits that the nation deserved God's discipline. "I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my case." That's honest. He doesn't blame everyone

else. He owns his sin, and he trusts that God will eventually bring him out into the light.

Then Micah prays for God to shepherd His people again, "as in the days of old." And God promises to show them wonders like He did when they came out of Egypt. The nations would see it and be amazed.

And then, the book ends with a song of praise. "Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the disobedience of the remnant of his heritage? He doesn't retain his anger forever, because he delights in loving kindness."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **A Play on Micah's Name**
>
> Remember that Micah's name means Who is like the LORD? At the very end of his book, he asks almost the same question: Who is a God like You? It's as if he's signing his name to the book. His whole life had been a question, and his answer was clear: there's no one like Him. No other god forgives. No other god delights in mercy. No other god keeps His promises like this.

Notice what makes God different. Other gods in the ancient world were thought to be moody, angry, and demanding. People tried to keep them happy with sacrifices. But Micah says the LORD "delights in loving kindness." God doesn't forgive reluctantly. He loves to forgive.

Then Micah gives two powerful pictures of forgiveness. "He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

First, God stomps on our sins, like you would crush something dangerous under your foot. Second, He hurls them into the deepest part of the ocean, where they can never be found again.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tashlich**

Every year, on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, many Jewish communities practice a custom called Tashlich, a Hebrew word meaning you will cast, taken from Micah 7:19. People gather by a river, lake, or ocean, recite prayers including Micah 7:18-20, and often throw small pieces of bread into the water. It's a symbol of casting away sins and starting the new year with a clean slate. The custom shows how deeply Micah's words have shaped worship for centuries.

REAL TALK **Your Sins in the Deep**

Some people believe God forgives them but still feel guilty and keep bringing up their past mistakes. If God has thrown your sins into the depths of the sea, you don't have to go diving for them. The Bible says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." When you confess your sins to God and trust Jesus, you are forgiven. Completely. You can stop carrying the weight. If guilt keeps haunting you, talk to a pastor or trusted Christian adult who can help you understand God's forgiveness.

The book ends with God's faithfulness to His promises. "You will give truth to Jacob, and mercy to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old." God had made promises to Abraham and Jacob centuries before Micah. And He would keep every one of them. When Zechariah praised God at the birth of John the Baptist, he celebrated God remembering "the oath which he swore to Abraham our father." God's promises take time, but they never fail.

REAL TALK **No One Like Him**

Micah's book started with God coming down to judge and ended with God delighting in mercy. That's the story of the whole Bible. God takes sin seriously, but He takes mercy even more seriously. There is no one like Him. No friend, no parent, no leader, no influencer will ever love you the way God

does. When you feel unworthy, remember Micah's question. Who is a God like this? No one. And He wants you.

REAL TALK **Waiting on God**

Micah said, I will wait for the God of my salvation. Waiting is hard, especially in a world of instant downloads and same-day delivery. Maybe you're waiting for God to answer a prayer, heal a hurt, fix a family situation, or show you what to do next. Waiting on God isn't sitting around doing nothing. It's trusting Him while you keep doing what's right. It's praying, staying faithful, and believing that He hears you, even when you don't see the answer yet.

KEY VERSE

Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the disobedience of the remnant of his heritage? He doesn't retain his anger forever, because he delights in loving kindness.

Micah 7:18 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What did Micah do when it felt like nobody around him was good?
2. What does Micah 7:8 mean to you?
3. How does Micah's name connect with the end of his book?
4. Is there a sin you keep bringing back up after God has thrown it into the sea?

TRY THIS *Write down something you've been carrying guilt about. Confess it to God, then tear up the paper and throw it away as a reminder that God has cast your sins into the depths of the sea.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Micah promised that a Ruler would come out of tiny Bethlehem, someone whose origins were from ancient times, who would shepherd His people and be their peace. Jewish readers have long treasured Micah's hope for a coming King from David's line. Christians believe that promise came true in Jesus.

About seven hundred years after Micah, wise men arrived in Jerusalem asking where the newborn King of the Jews was. King Herod called the religious experts, and they knew the answer right away. "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is written through the prophet," they said, and they quoted Micah. Jesus was born in David's little hometown, not in a palace, but in a place so humble His first bed was a feeding trough. Micah said this Ruler would "shepherd in the strength of the LORD," and Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Micah said, "He will be our peace," and Paul wrote of Jesus, "For he is our peace." And Micah ended by praising a God who would "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." That's exactly what Jesus did on the cross. He took our sins and buried them so deep they can never come back to accuse us.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He notices the small and overlooked.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Micah shows that even leaders and religious people can crush others. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the King from Bethlehem.

Jesus, the Shepherd-King born in Bethlehem, died for our sins and rose again, casting our sins into the depths of the sea.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Micah says no sacrifice could pay for sin. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Walk humbly with Him.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Micah asks, Who is a God like You? You can come to Him today and find out for yourself. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, I've gone my own way. I haven't always acted justly, loved mercy, or walked humbly with You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus, the King from Bethlehem, died for my sins, rose again, and threw my sins into the depths of the sea. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Be my Shepherd and my peace. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Micah 5-7, then Matthew 2:1-12 and John 10:1-18.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Live Micah 6:8. Each day this week, choose one way to act justly, one way to love mercy, and one way to walk humbly with God.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Micah asked hard questions, and God answered them. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Micah is right, there is no God like Him, and He delights in showing mercy.

He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Micah 7:19 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF NAHUM

The King Who Is Our Stronghold

Nahum, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Is Our Stronghold: The Book of Nahum, Unfiltered

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Remember Jonah? The prophet who ran away because he knew God would forgive Nineveh? God did forgive them. The whole city repented, from the king down to the cows. It looked like a happy ending.

Nahum is the sequel. About a hundred years later, Nineveh had gone right back to its old ways, and worse. Assyria had become the most feared empire on earth. It crushed nations, tortured prisoners, and bragged about it. It destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and nearly took Jerusalem. For the smaller nations of the world, Assyria was the ultimate bully, and nobody could stop it.

Then God sent Nahum, whose name means comfort, with a message: the bully's time is up. Nahum is a hard book, full of war and judgment. But it's also a book of comfort for anyone who has ever been crushed by someone stronger. It says that God is slow to anger, but He is never indifferent to evil. And it says that for people who run to Him, He is a stronghold in the day of trouble.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Nahum in three chapters, one for each chapter of the Bible book: slow to anger, never indifferent (Nahum 1), the fall of the unstoppable city (Nahum 2), and why bullies collapse (Nahum 3).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains how Nahum connects to Jonah, when it was written, and why Nineveh was so feared. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how to understand the harsh war imagery in books like Nahum, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Nahum in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-fourth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Nahum, whose name means comfort, is in many ways the sequel to Jonah. A century or more after Nineveh repented, Assyria had returned to brutal violence. This book explains the date of Nahum, between the fall of Thebes in 663 BC (mentioned in Nahum 3:8) and the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC, the partial alphabet poem in chapter 1, its echo of Exodus 34:6-7, and the historical fall of Nineveh. It also notes that Jonah and Nahum are the only two books in the Old Testament that end with a question.

Nahum contains intense war imagery. This book handles it honestly but without graphic detail, presenting it as God's justice against a brutal empire, not as permission for personal revenge. Real Talk boxes address God's patience and justice, trusting God in trouble, good news, pride and power, and how bullies fall. A brief safety box encourages any teen facing bullying or abuse to talk with a trusted adult and lists Childhelp (1-800-422-4453), 988, and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows Jesus as the true good news announced on the mountains (Nahum 1:15, Romans

10:15), our stronghold (Nahum 1:7), and the One who breaks the yoke of evil forever through the cross and His return. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will find comfort in a God who sees injustice, and will run to Him as their stronghold.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

The Sequel to Jonah

In the book of Jonah, the people of Nineveh repented after hearing a five-word sermon, and God spared their city. But repentance doesn't automatically pass to the next generation. Within a century or so, Nineveh returned to cruelty and pride. The Assyrian kings of this era, like Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, filled their palaces with carvings of their brutal victories. Jonah shows God's mercy toward Nineveh. Nahum shows that God's patience has limits. Both books are about the same God, who is slow to anger but who will not ignore evil forever.

A Prophet Named Comfort

We know very little about Nahum. His name means comfort. The book calls him Nahum the Elkoshite, meaning he was from a town called Elkosh, but no one knows for sure where it was. Some ancient traditions place it in Galilee. Some connect it with Capernaum, whose name means village of Nahum. Another tradition places it near Mosul in Iraq, close to the ruins of Nineveh. Others suggest a town in Judah. What matters most is his message: comfort for God's people, and judgment on their oppressor.

When Was It Written?

Nahum can be dated fairly precisely. In Nahum 3:8, he mentions the fall of No-Amon, the Egyptian city of Thebes, which the Assyrians conquered in 663 BC. So Nahum wrote after that. And he predicts

the fall of Nineveh, which happened in 612 BC. So most scholars date Nahum between 663 and 612 BC, probably during the long reign of King Manasseh or the early reign of King Josiah of Judah. At the time, Assyria still seemed unstoppable.

The Superpower

Assyria was the first great empire of the ancient Middle East. Its armies were highly organized, with chariots, cavalry, siege engines, and battering rams. Its kings deported entire populations to break their spirit. They destroyed Samaria and carried away the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, and they forced Judah to pay heavy tribute for decades. Nineveh, the capital, was enormous, with massive walls, palaces, gardens, and a library. To everyone around it, Nineveh looked permanent.

Two Books, Two Questions

Jonah and Nahum are the only two books in the Old Testament that end with a question. Jonah ends with God asking, “Shouldn’t I be concerned for Nineveh, that great city?” Nahum ends with a question to the king of Assyria: “for who hasn’t felt your endless cruelty?” Together, the two questions show both sides of God’s character. He is concerned for sinners and offers mercy. And He is concerned for the victims of sin and brings justice.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Nahum 1): Slow to anger, never indifferent.

Chapter 2 (Nahum 2): The fall of the unstoppable city.

Chapter 3 (Nahum 3): Why bullies collapse.

Contents

Setting the Scene 1

1 Slow to Anger, Never Indifferent 1

2 The Fall of the Unstoppable City 2

3 Why Bullies Collapse 3

Where This Points 4

CHAPTER 1

Slow to Anger, Never Indifferent

Nahum 1

Nahum opens with a title. "A revelation about Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite." The word translated revelation can also mean burden. This message was heavy. It was a burden Nahum had to carry and deliver.

Then, before he says a word about Nineveh, Nahum talks about God. "The LORD is a jealous God and avenges. The LORD avenges and is full of wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries, and he maintains wrath against his enemies."

That's a lot of strong words in one verse: jealous, avenges, wrath, vengeance. They can make us uncomfortable. But they need to be understood correctly.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **A Jealous God?**
>
> When people are jealous, it's usually a selfish feeling, like envy over someone else's stuff. But when the Bible says God is jealous, it means something different. It describes His passionate, protective love for His people, like a husband or wife who refuses to share their spouse with someone else, or a parent who fiercely protects a child. God's jealousy isn't insecurity. It's love that refuses to be indifferent when His people are harmed or led away.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Vengeance and Wrath**

God's vengeance is not like human revenge. Human revenge is often out of control, personal, and unfair. God's vengeance is justice: perfectly fair, never excessive, and aimed at real evil. His wrath isn't a temper tantrum. It's His settled opposition to everything that destroys what He loves. A God who never got angry at cruelty, abuse, or murder wouldn't be loving. He'd be indifferent. Nahum shows a God who cares too much to look away.

Then comes a crucial balance. "The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

This is an echo of one of the most important passages in the Old Testament. When God revealed His glory to Moses in Exodus 34, He described Himself as merciful, gracious, and slow to anger, abundant in loving kindness, forgiving sin, but one "who will by no means clear the guilty."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jonah, Nahum, and Exodus 34**

Both Jonah and Nahum quote God's self-description from Exodus 34:6-7, but they emphasize different halves. Jonah quotes the first part, complaining that God is "a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger." Nahum quotes the second part, that God "will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." Put the two books side by side, and you get the whole picture. God really is slow to anger. He gave Nineveh more than a century. But slow to anger doesn't mean never angry. God's patience is meant to lead people to repentance, not to give them permission to keep doing evil.

REAL TALK **Patient, Not Passive**

Have you ever wondered why God doesn't stop evil right now? Why bullies, abusers, and cruel people seem to get away with things? Peter wrote that God is patient because He doesn't want anyone to perish, but wants everyone to come to repentance. God's patience is a gift, a chance for people to turn around. But patience is not the same as being passive. God sees every wrong.

He keeps track. And one day, He will set everything right. If you've been hurt, that means your pain is not invisible to God.

Then Nahum describes God's power like a storm. "The LORD has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." The clouds are just the dust kicked up as God walks. He rebukes the sea and dries up rivers. The mountains quake. The hills melt. The whole earth trembles at His presence.

Then Nahum asks, "Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the fierceness of his anger?" The answer is no one. Not even mighty Nineveh.

BACKGROUND CHECK **An Alphabet Poem**

In Hebrew, the first part of Nahum 1, roughly verses 2-8, is a partial acrostic. That means many of the lines begin with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order, from the first letter, aleph, to about halfway through. Scholars debate how complete the pattern is and why it stops partway. Some think Nahum adapted an older hymn. Others think the broken pattern is intentional. Either way, the poem shows careful artistry. It's like saying God's power covers everything from A to Z, even though Nahum only gets halfway before turning to Nineveh.

Then, in the middle of the storm, comes the most beautiful verse in the book. "The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knows those who take refuge in him."

The same God who shakes mountains is a safe place for people who run to Him. The storm that terrifies His enemies is the very thing that protects His people.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Stronghold**

A stronghold was a fortress, a protected place where people could run when enemies attacked. In the ancient world, villages often had a fortified tower or a walled city nearby where people could take refuge in times of war. Nahum

says God Himself is that kind of place. Proverbs says, "The LORD's name is a strong tower: the righteous run to him, and are safe." The psalmist says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Notice the last part of verse 7. "He knows those who take refuge in him." God doesn't just protect a faceless crowd. He knows you personally. He knows your name, your fears, and your situation.

REAL TALK **Your Day of Trouble**

Everyone has days of trouble. Maybe it's a fight with your parents, a friendship falling apart, a diagnosis, a breakup, anxiety that won't go away, or a situation at school that feels hopeless. Nahum 1:7 says God is good, and He is a stronghold in those days, not just the easy ones. Running to God can look like praying honestly, reading a psalm, talking with a Christian friend or trusted adult, or simply saying, God, I need You right now. He knows you, and He won't turn you away.

Then Nahum turns to Nineveh. God would make "a full end" of it with an overflowing flood. "What do you plot against the LORD?" Their plans would fail. Affliction would not rise a second time.

And then God speaks to Judah, His people who had suffered under Assyria for decades. "Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break his yoke from off you, and will burst your bonds apart."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Yoke of Assyria**

A yoke is a wooden beam placed across the necks of oxen so they can pull a plow or cart. In the Bible, it often stands for slavery or oppression. For decades, Judah had been forced to pay heavy tribute to Assyria, sending gold, silver, and goods to Nineveh. Assyrian records list King Manasseh of Judah among the kings who paid tribute. For Judah, the promise that God would break Assyria's yoke was the best news imaginable.

Then comes a burst of joy. “Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, Judah! Perform your vows, for the wicked one will no more pass through you. He is utterly cut off.”

Picture a messenger running across the mountains toward Jerusalem. The people watch from the city walls, wondering what news he’s bringing. As he gets closer, they hear him shouting: Peace! The enemy is defeated! You can celebrate again!

> **REAL TALK** **Good News on the Mountains**
>
> Isaiah uses almost the same words: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news.” Paul later quoted it to describe people who share the good news about Jesus. That means you can be a messenger of good news too. Every time you tell a friend about Jesus, encourage someone who is struggling, or remind someone that God loves them, you’re like that runner on the mountains. Your feet might not seem beautiful to you, but to God, they are.

KEY VERSE

The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knows those who take refuge in him.

Nahum 1:7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why is it important that God is both slow to anger and will not leave the guilty unpunished?
2. How is God's jealousy different from human jealousy?
3. What does it mean to you that God knows those who take refuge in Him?
4. What is your day of trouble right now? How could you run to God in it?

TRY THIS *Memorize Nahum 1:7 this week. Every time you feel stressed or worried, say it out loud or in your head, and then tell God what's bothering you.*

CHAPTER 2

The Fall of the Unstoppable City

Nahum 2

Chapter 2 reads like a movie trailer for the fall of Nineveh. It's fast, loud, and full of action.

"He who dashes in pieces has come up against you." An attacker is coming. Then Nahum mocks Nineveh's defenders with a series of urgent commands. "Keep the fortress! Watch the way! Strengthen your waist! Fortify your power mightily!" It's as if he's saying, Go ahead, do everything you can. It won't be enough.

In verse 2, Nahum explains why this is happening. "For the LORD restores the excellency of Jacob as the excellency of Israel." The fall of Nineveh was about more than politics. It was about God restoring His people.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Fall of Nineveh**
>
> In 612 BC, a coalition of Babylonians, led by King Nabopolassar, and Medes, led by King Cyaxares, attacked Nineveh. Ancient Babylonian records called the Babylonian Chronicles describe the siege, which lasted about three months, and say the city was plundered and turned into a ruin. Assyria's last king fled west and tried to hold on, but within a few years the Assyrian Empire was gone. The city that had terrorized the world for centuries fell in a single summer.

Then the camera zooms in on the attacking army. “The shield of his mighty men is made red. The valiant men are in scarlet. The chariots flash with steel in the day of his preparation.” Red shields and scarlet uniforms. Flashing chariots. Spears waving.

“The chariots rage in the streets. They rush back and forth in the wide ways. Their appearance is like torches. They run like the lightnings.”

You can almost hear the noise. The chariots race through the city like lightning, and the defenders stumble trying to reach the walls.

> **REAL TALK** **When the Bully Gets Scared**
>
> For centuries, Assyria had been the one charging into cities with chariots and terrifying people. Now the tables were turned. The bully was the one running scared. That’s a pattern in history and in life. People who rule by fear often end up afraid themselves. They can’t trust anyone, because they’ve hurt so many people. If you’ve ever been bullied, it might help to know that bullies are often much more insecure than they look. That doesn’t excuse what they do. But it does mean their power isn’t as permanent as it seems.

Then comes a short but dramatic verse. “The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved.”

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Floodgates**
>
> Nineveh sat on the Tigris River, and a smaller river called the Khosr ran right through the city. The Assyrians had built dams, canals, and sluice gates to control the water. Ancient Greek historians later reported that a flood helped bring down part of Nineveh’s walls during the siege. Scholars debate the details. Some think the attackers opened or broke the dams to flood the city. Others think heavy rains caused the rivers to overflow. Either way, Nahum had predicted an overflowing flood in chapter 1, and the gates of the rivers in chapter 2. The water that protected Nineveh became part of its downfall.

Archaeologists excavating one of Nineveh's gates, called the Halzi Gate, found the remains of people who apparently died defending it during the final attack. The city's walls show signs of a desperate attempt to narrow the gate opening, as if the defenders were trying to hold off an overwhelming army.

Then Nahum describes the scene inside. Nineveh was "like a pool of water," and the people were draining out of it, running away. Officers shouted, "Stop! Stop!" but no one looked back.

Then the looting began. "Take the plunder of silver. Take the plunder of gold, for there is no end of treasure, an abundance of every precious thing." All the treasure Assyria had stolen from other nations was now being carried away.

> **REAL TALK** **What Goes Around**
>
> Assyria had built its wealth by plundering other nations. Now its treasure was being plundered. The Bible often shows this kind of reversal. Paul wrote, "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." If you build your life on taking from others, it will eventually be taken from you. But the opposite is also true. If you build your life on giving, kindness, and generosity, those things will last. Jesus said to store up treasures in heaven, where thieves can't break in and steal.

Then comes one of the most striking images in Nahum. "Where is the den of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion and the lioness walked with the lion's cubs, and no one made them afraid?"

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Lions' Den**
>
> Lions were a favorite symbol of Assyrian kings. They staged royal lion hunts and had them carved on their palace walls. Some of the most famous carvings, now in the British Museum, show King Ashurbanipal killing lions from his chariot. Assyrian kings also compared themselves to lions in their

inscriptions. Nahum uses that image against them. Nineveh was like a lions' den, where the lion brought home prey from other nations to feed its cubs. But now the den would be empty. The hunters would be hunted.

The lion had torn prey to pieces for its cubs and filled its den with the kill. It had been a predator, feeding on other nations. And no one had made them afraid.

Then God speaks directly. "Behold, I am against you," says the LORD of Armies. He would burn Nineveh's chariots, cut off its prey, and silence its messengers. For centuries, Assyrian messengers had gone out demanding tribute and threatening nations. Now their voices would never be heard again.

REAL TALK **Nobody Is Unstoppable**

Nineveh seemed unstoppable. Its walls were massive, its army was feared, and its treasure was endless. Then it fell in a single summer. Today, people and institutions can seem unstoppable too: powerful companies, popular kids, famous celebrities, or people who seem to get away with everything. But no human power lasts forever. Only God's kingdom does. That's a warning if you're tempted to build your life on power. And it's a comfort if you're on the receiving end of someone else's power.

KEY VERSE

"Behold, I am against you," says the LORD of Armies, "and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions; and I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers will no longer be heard."

Nahum 2:13 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Nahum described Nineveh's fall like an action scene?
2. What does the image of the empty lions' den teach about power?
3. What does Nahum 2:2 say about why Nineveh fell?
4. What things in our world seem unstoppable today? How does Nahum change the way you see them?

TRY THIS *Look up pictures of the Assyrian lion hunt carvings or the ruins of Nineveh online. As you look, thank God that no power on earth is greater than Him.*

CHAPTER 3

Why Bullies Collapse

Nahum 3

Chapter 3 begins with a cry of grief and judgment. “Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery—no end to the prey.”

Nineveh is called the bloody city, or the city of blood. It was built on violence. It was full of lies, broken treaties, and robbery. And its hunger for more prey never ended.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Assyria’s Cruelty**
>
> Assyria’s own records show why Nahum called Nineveh a bloody city. Assyrian kings bragged in their inscriptions about the cruelty they inflicted on conquered peoples, and their palace walls were carved with scenes of prisoners being tortured and cities being burned. They used terror deliberately, to frighten other nations into surrendering. When Nahum describes Nineveh’s judgment in harsh terms, he’s describing a city facing the same kind of violence it had inflicted on others for centuries.

Then Nahum describes the battle again, in short, rapid images. The crack of the whip. The rattle of wheels. Galloping horses. Bounding chariots. Charging horsemen. Flashing swords. Glittering spears. And then, the terrible result: countless dead.

This is hard to read. Nahum doesn’t sugarcoat war. He shows its horror honestly.

REAL TALK **Reading Hard Passages**

Some parts of the Bible are difficult to read, especially passages about war and judgment. It's okay to feel uncomfortable. That discomfort shows that you care about human life, which is exactly how God made you. Nahum isn't celebrating violence for its own sake. He's showing that a city that lived by violence would face violence, and that God's justice against evil is real. Christians understand passages like this as God's judgment on a brutal empire at a specific time in history. They are never permission for anyone to take revenge or harm others today. Paul wrote, "Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath."

Nahum also compares Nineveh to a seductive prostitute and a witch who sold nations through her charms. Assyria lured nations into alliances and then enslaved them. It used trickery, flattery, and manipulation as well as force. God says He would expose Nineveh's shame before the nations. People who saw it would turn away and say, "Nineveh is laid waste! Who will mourn for her?"

Think about that question. When the most powerful city in the world fell, no one would grieve. It had hurt so many people that no one was sad to see it go.

REAL TALK **Who Will Mourn?**

How would people feel if you suddenly left your school, your team, or your friend group? Would they miss you, or be relieved? That's a tough question, but it's worth thinking about. People who use, manipulate, and hurt others might seem powerful for a while, but they leave behind a trail of broken relationships. People who are kind, honest, and generous leave behind love. Jesus said the greatest among us are those who serve. Live in a way that would make people miss you.

Then Nahum gives a history lesson. "Are you better than No-Amon, who was situated among the rivers, who had the waters around her, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was of the sea?"

BACKGROUND CHECK **No-Amon (Thebes)**

No-Amon was the Egyptian city of Thebes, the great southern capital of Egypt, near modern Luxor. Its name means city of Amon, after the Egyptian god Amon. Thebes was famous for its huge temples, which still stand today at Karnak and Luxor. It sat on the Nile River, protected by water and by powerful allies, including Cush, Put, and Libya. But in 663 BC, the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal conquered and looted it. Nahum's point is sharp: Assyria had destroyed a city that seemed just as secure as Nineveh. What made Nineveh think it would be any different?

Thebes had boundless strength and many helpers. Yet it was carried away into captivity. Nahum describes the terrible things that happened there, things the Assyrians had done themselves. Now the same fate was coming to Nineveh.

Then Nahum describes how quickly Nineveh would fall. "All your fortresses will be like fig trees with the first-ripe figs. If they are shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater." Early figs fall off the tree with just a little shake. Nineveh's strongholds would collapse just as easily.

Nahum even mocks the city's defense preparations. Draw water for the siege! Strengthen your walls! Make more bricks! But fire would devour them anyway.

REAL TALK **Building on the Wrong Foundation**

Nineveh tried to make itself safe with stronger walls and more bricks. But its real problem wasn't weak walls. It was a life built on cruelty. You can't fix a heart problem with a wall problem. Sometimes we try to protect ourselves with popularity, money, or a tough exterior, while ignoring what's going on inside. Jesus told a story about a wise man who built his house on the rock and a foolish man who built on sand. When the storm came, only the house on the rock stood. Build your life on Jesus.

Then Nahum compares Assyria's merchants, guards, and officials to locusts. They multiplied like grasshoppers, swarming over the land and stripping it bare. But locusts have a strange habit. On cold days, they settle on walls and fences. When the sun comes out and warms them, they fly away, and no one knows where they went. Assyria's leaders would vanish just like that.

"Your shepherds slumber, king of Assyria. Your nobles lie down. Your people are scattered on the mountains, and there is no one to gather them." The king's leaders would be dead or useless. His people would be scattered like sheep with no shepherd.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Safety: If Someone Is Bullying or Hurting You**
>
> Nahum shows that God sees when the strong crush the weak, and He takes it seriously. If you're being bullied, threatened, or hurt by someone, whether at school, online, or at home, it is not your fault, and you don't have to handle it alone. God cares, and He has put people in your life who can help. Talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, teacher, school counselor, coach, or pastor. Save screenshots of messages and report online bullying. If someone at home or another adult is hurting you, call or text Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453. If you're thinking about hurting yourself, call or text 988. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

And then comes the final verse, a question. "There is no healing your wound, for your injury is fatal. All who hear the report of you clap their hands over you, for who hasn't felt your endless cruelty?"

Assyria's wound was fatal. When the nations heard the news, they clapped their hands. Why? Because every one of them had felt Assyria's endless cruelty. Nobody had escaped it.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **A City That Disappeared**
>
> Nineveh was so completely destroyed that it faded from memory. About two hundred years later, a Greek soldier and writer named Xenophon marched

past its ruins and didn't even recognize it as Nineveh. For centuries, its location was buried under mounds of earth. Not until the 1800s did archaeologists dig up its palaces, carvings, and Ashurbanipal's library of clay tablets. The city that thought it would rule forever had been lost to history.

REAL TALK **Why Bullies Collapse**

Nahum shows us why bullies collapse. Cruelty isolates people. It creates enemies instead of friends. It depends on fear, and fear never builds lasting loyalty. And most importantly, God is not indifferent to cruelty. He may be slow to anger, but He sees every wrong. That's a warning for anyone tempted to use power to hurt others. And it's a comfort for anyone who has been hurt. The bully's power is temporary. God's goodness is forever.

Jonah ended with God asking whether He should be concerned for Nineveh. Nahum ends with the nations asking who hasn't felt Nineveh's cruelty. Mercy had been offered. Nineveh had received it once. But the next generations chose cruelty. Both books show the same God: one who longs to forgive, and one who will not let evil win.

KEY VERSE

There is no healing your wound, for your injury is fatal. All who hear the report of you clap their hands over you, for who hasn't felt your endless cruelty?

Nahum 3:19 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think no one would mourn for Nineveh?
2. What point was Nahum making by comparing Nineveh to Thebes?
3. How is God's justice different from personal revenge?
4. How do the endings of Jonah and Nahum fit together?

TRY THIS *Think of someone who has been hurt by a bully or by unfair treatment. This week, do something kind for them, or stand up for them, and pray that God would be their stronghold.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Nahum announced good news to people crushed by Assyria: "Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace!" Jewish readers have long found comfort in Nahum's promise that God will not let cruelty win. Christians believe the greatest fulfillment of that good news came in Jesus.

Paul quoted this kind of verse when he wrote about telling people about Jesus: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" Nineveh's fall was good news for Judah, but it didn't end evil forever. Another empire, Babylon, soon took Assyria's place. The deepest bully in the world isn't a nation. It's sin, death, and the devil. Jesus came to defeat them. When He began His ministry, He announced that He had come "to proclaim release to the captives" and "to deliver those who are crushed." At the cross, God dealt with evil fully. The Bible says that Jesus, through His death, would "bring to nothing him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." Nahum promised, "Now I will break his yoke from off you, and will burst your bonds apart." Jesus breaks the yoke of sin and guilt now, and when He returns, He will end all cruelty forever. Until then, He is what Nahum promised: good, "a stronghold in the day of trouble," knowing everyone who takes refuge in Him.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He sees every injustice done to you.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Nahum shows how seriously God takes cruelty and pride. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the good news.

Jesus died for our sins and rose again, breaking the yoke of sin and death so we can be free.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Take refuge in Him.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Nahum says the LORD knows those who take refuge in Him. You can run to Him today. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've gone my own way. I need You to forgive me and to be my stronghold. I can't fix my sin myself. Thank You that Jesus died for my sins, rose again, and broke the yoke of sin and death. Forgive me, and make me Yours. When I'm in trouble, help me run to You. Help me trust You with justice instead of seeking revenge. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Nahum 1, then Romans 10:9-15 and Matthew 11:28-30.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Share the good news. Think of one friend who needs to hear about Jesus, and pray for a chance to tell them.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Nahum raises hard questions about God's justice. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Nahum is right, no bully lasts forever, and the LORD is a stronghold for everyone who runs to Him.

The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knows those who take refuge in him.

Nahum 1:7 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

The King Who Hears Our Questions

Habakkuk, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Hears Our Questions: The Book of Habakkuk, Unfiltered

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Have you ever looked at the world and wondered, God, why aren't You doing anything? Why do cheaters win? Why do good people suffer? Why does it feel like my prayers bounce off the ceiling?

If you've ever asked questions like that, you're in good company. There's a whole book of the Bible written by a prophet who asked them out loud. His name was Habakkuk. He looked at the violence and injustice around him and basically said, God, how long are You going to let this go on? And then, when God answered, Habakkuk liked the answer even less and asked another question.

Habakkuk is different from every other prophet. He never preaches to the people. The whole book is a conversation between a hurting man and God. And by the end, his circumstances haven't changed at all, but he has. He goes from complaining to singing. If you've ever wondered whether it's okay to bring your doubts and hard questions to God, this book says yes. Honest questions brought to God aren't the enemy of faith. They can be the road to a deeper one.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Habakkuk in three chapters, one for each chapter of the Bible book: why aren't You doing anything? (Habakkuk 1), climbing the watchtower (Habakkuk 2), and even if the fig tree doesn't bloom (Habakkuk 3).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Habakkuk was, when he lived, and what was about to happen to his nation. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as why God allows suffering, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Habakkuk in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-fifth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Habakkuk is unique among the prophets: he never preaches to Israel. His book is an honest dialogue with God, written around 605 BC, just before Babylon invaded Judah. This book presents Habakkuk as a model for bringing hard questions and doubts directly to God, showing that honest questions are not the enemy of faith.

It covers Habakkuk's two complaints and God's answers, the watchtower and the written vision, Habakkuk 2:4 and its central role in the New Testament (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38), the five woes against Babylon, and the closing prayer-song of chapter 3 with its musical notes. Where Christians hold different views on why God allows suffering, the book presents the main ideas fairly without claiming to answer every question.

Real Talk boxes address doubt, unanswered prayer, injustice, waiting, greed and pride, worship in hard times, and choosing joy when circumstances don't change. One box gently encourages teens

who are struggling with discouragement or despair to talk with a trusted adult and lists 988 and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament builds on Habakkuk 2:4 and how Jesus stepped directly into injustice at the cross so that God's glory will one day fill the earth. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will learn to bring every question to God, and to trust Him even when the fig tree doesn't bloom.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

A Prophet Who Talks to God

Most prophets spoke for God to the people. Habakkuk spoke to God for the people. His book contains no sermons to Judah, no calls to repent, and no messages for kings. Instead, it records his prayers, his complaints, God's answers, and his final song. It's as if we're reading a page from a prophet's private journal. That makes Habakkuk especially helpful for anyone who wrestles with God.

What's in a Name?

We know almost nothing about Habakkuk's life. The book simply calls him Habakkuk the prophet. His name probably comes from a Hebrew word meaning to embrace or to cling. Some connect it with an Akkadian word for a garden plant. The reformer Martin Luther liked to point out that Habakkuk's name fits his book. He embraces his people in prayer, and he wrestles with God, holding on until he receives an answer. Chapter 3 includes musical notes, so some scholars think he may have served as a musician connected with the temple.

When Did He Live?

Habakkuk describes God raising up the Chaldeans, another name for the Babylonians. Most scholars date the book around 609-605 BC, during the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah. In 612 BC, Babylon had helped destroy Nineveh. In 605 BC, Babylon defeated Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish and became the new superpower. That

same year, Babylon's crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, took the first captives from Jerusalem, including a teenager named Daniel. Within twenty years, Babylon would destroy Jerusalem completely.

A Nation Falling Apart

Inside Judah, things were bad. King Josiah, a good king who had led a great revival, had been killed in battle in 609 BC. His son Jehoiakim was greedy and cruel. He forced workers to build him a luxurious palace without paying them, and he persecuted prophets like Jeremiah. Violence, corruption, and injustice were everywhere. That's what Habakkuk saw when he looked around, and that's why he cried out to God.

A Famous Scroll

One of the most famous Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, is a commentary on Habakkuk. Written by a Jewish community more than a century before Jesus, it explains the first two chapters of Habakkuk line by line, applying them to the writers' own time. It shows how much ancient readers treasured this little book.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Habakkuk 1): Why aren't You doing anything?

Chapter 2 (Habakkuk 2): Climbing the watchtower.

Chapter 3 (Habakkuk 3): Even if the fig tree doesn't bloom.

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CHAPTER 1

Why Aren't You Doing Anything?

Habakkuk 1

The book begins simply. "The revelation which Habakkuk the prophet saw." Then, right away, Habakkuk starts complaining. Not to people. To God.

"LORD, how long will I cry, and you will not hear? I cry out to you Violence! and will you not save?"

That's a bold way to start a prayer. Habakkuk doesn't open with polite words or fancy phrases. He basically says, God, I've been praying and praying, and You're not listening. I keep telling You about the violence, and You're not doing anything.

> **REAL TALK** **Is It Okay to Complain to God?**
>
> Some people think it's disrespectful or faithless to question God. But the Bible is full of people who did exactly that. David asked, "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?" Job demanded answers. Jeremiah accused God of deceiving him. Even Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The key difference is where you take your questions. Complaining about God to others can push you away from Him. Bringing your complaints to God keeps you talking with Him. Habakkuk shows us that honest prayer is a form of faith. You only argue with someone you believe is really there.

Habakkuk keeps going. “Why do you show me iniquity, and look at perversity? For destruction and violence are before me. There is strife, and contention rises up.”

Everywhere he looked, he saw violence, arguments, and injustice. The courts didn’t work. “Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails; for the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted.”

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Judah Under Jehoiakim**
>
> Habakkuk was probably describing Judah under King Jehoiakim, who ruled from 609 to 598 BC. Jeremiah describes how Jehoiakim built himself a luxurious palace using unpaid workers, shed innocent blood, and oppressed the poor. When the prophet Uriah spoke against him, Jehoiakim had him hunted down in Egypt and executed. When Jeremiah sent him a scroll of God’s warnings, Jehoiakim cut it up piece by piece and burned it in a fire. This was the kind of leadership Habakkuk saw. The law was paralyzed because the people at the top didn’t care about it.
>
> **REAL TALK** **When the System Is Broken**
>
> It can be really discouraging when the people and systems that are supposed to protect justice don’t work. Maybe you’ve seen a teacher ignore bullying, a coach play favorites, or news stories about corruption. It’s normal to feel frustrated, angry, or hopeless. Habakkuk felt that way too. But notice what he did with those feelings. He didn’t give up or become cynical. He took them to God. When you see injustice, it’s okay to be upset. Pray about it, talk to someone you trust, and look for ways you can make a difference.

Then God answered. But it wasn’t the answer Habakkuk expected.

“Look among the nations, watch, and wonder marvelously; for I am working a work in your days which you will not believe though it is told you.”

God was saying, You think I'm not doing anything? I'm doing something so big you won't believe it.

And then came the shock. "For, behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation who march through the width of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Chaldeans**
>
> The Chaldeans were a people from southern Mesopotamia who rose to rule Babylon. Their king Nabopolassar founded what historians call the Neo-Babylonian Empire. His son Nebuchadnezzar became one of the most powerful kings in ancient history. Within a few years of Habakkuk's prophecy, the Babylonians defeated Assyria and Egypt and took control of the entire region. Babylon would later destroy Jerusalem and its temple in 586 BC and carry many of Judah's people into exile.

God described the Babylonians in terrifying detail. They were feared and dreaded. They made their own rules. Their horses were faster than leopards and fiercer than wolves at evening. Their cavalry swooped down like eagles. They gathered prisoners like sand. They laughed at kings and mocked fortresses, building dirt ramps to climb over the walls. And they worshiped their own strength.

> **REAL TALK** **When God's Answer Isn't What You Wanted**
>
> Habakkuk asked God to deal with injustice. God said yes, but the way He planned to do it was terrifying. Sometimes God's answers aren't what we expect. You might pray for a problem to go away, and instead God lets you go through it. You might pray for patience, and God gives you situations that require it. That doesn't mean God isn't listening. It means His plans are bigger than ours. It's okay to tell God you're confused or upset by His answer. Habakkuk did.

That was too much for Habakkuk. So he asked a second question.

First, he reminded himself who God is. "Aren't you from everlasting, LORD my God, my Holy One? We will not die." God was eternal, holy, and faithful. He wouldn't completely destroy His people.

Then he got to the problem. "You who have purer eyes than to see evil, and who cannot look on perversity, why do you tolerate those who deal treacherously and keep silent when the wicked swallows up the man who is more righteous than he?"

In other words, God, I know Judah is sinful. But the Babylonians are worse! How can a holy God use people who are even more evil to punish His own people?

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why Would God Use Babylon?**
>
> Habakkuk's second question is one of the hardest in the Bible. Christians have thought carefully about it. Many point out that, throughout the Old Testament, God uses nations to accomplish His purposes without approving of their evil. He used Assyria and Babylon to discipline Israel and Judah, but He also held those nations responsible for their own cruelty and pride, as Habakkuk 2 shows. God can bring good out of evil without ever being the author of evil. That doesn't answer every question, but it shows that God remains just even when His ways are hard to understand.

Habakkuk then compared people to fish. The Babylonians caught nations with hooks and nets like a fisherman hauling in his catch. And then they worshiped their nets. They burned incense to their fishing gear because it made them rich. Their military power had become their god.

Habakkuk ended chapter 1 with one more question. "Will he therefore continually empty his net, and kill the nations without mercy?" Is this going to go on forever?

REAL TALK **Worshiping Your Net**

The Babylonians worshiped the tools that made them successful. People still do that today. We can make an idol out of the things that bring us money, success, or status, like a talent, a skill, a phone, a social media account, or even a friend group. When the thing that helps you succeed becomes the thing you trust most, it has become your net. Thank God for your gifts, but don't worship them. Remember who gave them to you.

REAL TALK **Doubts and Faith**

Some teens worry that having doubts means they're not real Christians. But doubt and faith aren't opposites. The opposite of faith is turning away from God. Doubt can actually be part of growing faith, if you bring it to God and keep searching. Habakkuk had serious doubts about what God was doing. But he never stopped talking to God. If you have questions about God, the Bible, or suffering, talk to a pastor, youth leader, or Christian adult you trust. Read books by thoughtful Christians. And keep praying. God isn't afraid of your questions.

KEY VERSE

LORD, how long will I cry, and you will not hear? I cry out to you "Violence!" and will you not save?

Habakkuk 1:2 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What did Habakkuk complain about in his first prayer?
2. Why was God's answer so shocking to Habakkuk?
3. Have you ever felt like God wasn't listening? What did you do?
4. Is there a question you've been afraid to ask God? What is it?

TRY THIS *Write your own honest prayer to God this week, like Habakkuk did. Tell Him what's bothering you, what you don't understand, and what you wish He would do.*

CHAPTER 2

Climbing the Watchtower

Habakkuk 2

After asking his second question, Habakkuk did something important. He waited.

"I will stand at my watch and set myself on the ramparts, and will look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint."

Habakkuk pictured himself as a watchman standing on a city wall, scanning the horizon. He had asked his question. Now he was going to stay put and watch for God's answer.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Watchmen on the Wall**

Ancient cities had watchmen who stood on towers or walls, looking out for approaching messengers or enemy armies. They had to stay alert, sometimes all night. When they saw something, they called out a warning or announced good news. The prophets often described themselves as watchmen. Ezekiel was called a watchman for Israel. Habakkuk's picture shows a prophet who was alert, patient, and determined to hear from God.

REAL TALK **Waiting for an Answer**

We're used to instant answers. We search for something online and get results in seconds. But God doesn't always answer prayers instantly. Sometimes He makes us wait. Habakkuk shows what to do while you wait: stay in position. Keep praying. Keep reading Scripture. Keep showing up at church. Keep

watching for what God might be saying. Don't walk away just because the answer hasn't come yet.

Then God answered. "Write the vision, and make it plain on tablets, that he who runs may read it."

God wanted His answer written down in large, clear letters, like a billboard, so that anyone running by could read it. Or so that a messenger could run and carry it to others.

Then God added a promise about timing. "For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hurries toward the end, and won't prove false. Though it takes time, wait for it, because it will surely come. It won't delay."

That sounds like a contradiction. Though it takes time... it won't delay. But God's point is that His plans are always on time, even when they feel slow to us. It won't be late by His schedule.

REAL TALK **God's Timing**

Have you ever waited for something that felt like it would never come? Maybe you've been waiting for a family situation to change, for a friend to come to faith, or for an answer about your future. God's promise to Habakkuk is for you too. God's timing isn't our timing, but He is never late. Waiting is hard, but it's not wasted. While you wait, God is working, both in your situation and in you.

Then comes the most important verse in the book. "Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright in him, but the righteous will live by his faith."

God contrasts two kinds of people. The first is puffed up with pride. That describes the Babylonians, and anyone who trusts in their own strength. The second is the righteous person, who lives by faith, trusting God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Faith and Faithfulness**

The Hebrew word translated faith in Habakkuk 2:4 is emunah. It can mean faith, trust, faithfulness, or steadiness. It's related to the word amen. In Habakkuk, it describes a person who keeps trusting God and staying loyal to Him, even when life is hard and answers are slow. The New Testament writers saw in this verse a powerful truth: we are made right with God by trusting Him, not by our own goodness. True faith also produces faithfulness, a life of steady loyalty to God.

The rest of chapter 2 is a series of five woes against Babylon. A woe was a cry of grief and warning, like saying, How terrible it will be for… God put these words in the mouths of the nations Babylon had conquered. They would one day taunt Babylon.

The first woe was against greed. "Woe to him who increases that which is not his, and who enriches himself by extortion!" Babylon had plundered nations. One day the nations would plunder Babylon.

The second woe was against selfish security. "Woe to him who gets an evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high." Babylon tried to make itself safe by building with stolen wealth. But even the stones in the walls would cry out against it.

The third woe was against violence. "Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and establishes a city by iniquity!" Babylon was built on violence, and all its work would go up in flames.

REAL TALK **Built on the Wrong Things**

The first three woes describe people who get ahead by taking from others: stealing, cheating, and hurting people. It's easy to think that kind of success will last. But God says it won't. You might know people who get ahead by lying, cheating, or stepping on others. It might even seem like they're winning. But a life built on taking from others is like a house built with

cracked bricks. Eventually, it falls. Build your life on honesty, kindness, and faith instead.

Then, right in the middle of the woes, comes a burst of hope. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's glory, as the waters cover the sea."

Think about how completely water covers the ocean floor. There isn't a spot that isn't covered. That's how fully God's glory would one day fill the earth. Babylon's glory would fade, but God's glory would cover everything.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Like the Waters Cover the Sea**

Habakkuk 2:14 echoes Isaiah 11:9, which says, "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." In Isaiah, that promise comes in a passage about the Messiah, a descendant of David who would bring peace and justice. Habakkuk adds the word glory. The promise looks forward to a day when everyone on earth will know God and see His greatness. Christians believe that day began with Jesus and will be completed when He returns.

The fourth woe was against exploitation. Babylon was like someone who gets their neighbor drunk to take advantage of them and humiliate them. Babylon had done that to whole nations. Now Babylon would drink from the cup of God's judgment.

REAL TALK **Taking Advantage of People**

The fourth woe describes someone who gets another person drunk to take advantage of them. Sadly, that still happens. If you're ever at a party where someone is pressuring others to drink or trying to take advantage of someone who has been drinking, that's wrong, and it's serious. Get help from a trusted adult right away. If someone has taken advantage of you, it's not your fault. Please talk to a trusted adult, counselor, or call 911 if you're in danger.

The fifth woe was against idols. "What value does the engraved image have?" People carved idols out of wood and stone, covered them with gold and silver, and then asked them for advice. But there was no breath in them. They couldn't speak, hear, or help.

And then, after all the woes, the chapter ends with one of the most powerful verses in the Bible. "But the LORD is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before him!"

> **REAL TALK** **Holy Silence**
>
> After all the noise of greed, violence, and idol worship, God says, Be silent. Not because He doesn't want to hear from us, but because He is God, and some moments call for awe. We live in a noisy world full of notifications, music, videos, and opinions. It's hard to be still. But some of the most important moments with God happen in silence. Try putting away your phone for a few minutes, sitting quietly, and remembering that God is in His holy temple. He's in control. You don't have to fill the silence with words.

KEY VERSE

Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright in him, but the righteous will live by his faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What did Habakkuk do after asking his second question? Why is that important?
2. What does it mean that the righteous will live by faith?
3. Which of the five woes do you think is most common today?
4. Why do you think God ended chapter 2 by calling for silence?

TRY THIS *Spend five minutes in complete silence each day this week. No phone, no music. Begin by reading Habakkuk 2:20, and then just sit quietly with God.*

CHAPTER 3

Even If the Fig Tree Doesn't Bloom

Habakkuk 3

Chapter 3 is different from the rest of the book. It's a song. "A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, set to victorious music."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Musical Notes**
>
> Habakkuk 3 has the kind of musical notes found in the book of Psalms. The heading uses a Hebrew word, shigionoth, which may refer to a type of song or musical style. Scholars aren't sure exactly what it means. Some think it describes an emotional, passionate song. The word Selah appears three times in the chapter. It's also found more than seventy times in the Psalms. No one knows for sure what Selah means, but it may mark a pause, a musical interlude, or a moment to reflect. The chapter also ends with a note for the music director about stringed instruments. Habakkuk's prayer was meant to be sung in worship.

The song starts with a prayer. "LORD, I have heard of your fame. I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Renew your work in the middle of the years. In the middle of the years make it known. In wrath, you remember mercy."

Habakkuk had heard the stories of what God had done in the past. Now he asked God to do it again. And he asked for mercy. He knew

judgment was coming. But he asked God to remember mercy, even in His wrath.

> **REAL TALK** **In Wrath, Remember Mercy**
>
> Habakkuk knew that hard times were coming. Babylon would invade, and he couldn't stop it. But he still prayed. He didn't ask God to stop all the hard things. He asked God to show mercy in the middle of them. That's a good prayer for hard seasons. Maybe your family is going through a divorce, a move, a loss, or financial stress. You might not be able to change what's happening. But you can ask God to show His mercy in it. And He will.

Then Habakkuk describes a vision of God coming in power. It's full of images from Israel's history. God came from Teman and Mount Paran, places in the south near Sinai, where God had appeared to Moses. "His glory covered the heavens, and his praise filled the earth. His splendor is like the sunrise."

Habakkuk describes God marching like a warrior. The earth shook. The nations trembled. Ancient mountains crumbled. Rivers and seas stood still. The sun and moon stood still in the sky.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Remembering God's Rescues**
>
> Habakkuk 3 is packed with images from Israel's past. The shaking mountains recall God's appearance at Mount Sinai. The splitting of rivers and seas recalls the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River. The sun and moon standing still recall Joshua's battle at Gibeon. By remembering these events, Habakkuk was reminding himself that God had rescued His people before, and He could do it again.

"You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed." God always came to rescue His people. That's why He fought.

REAL TALK **Remember What God Has Done**

When life is hard, it's easy to forget what God has done in the past. That's why it helps to remember. Habakkuk remembered how God rescued His people at the Red Sea and in the promised land. You can do the same. Think back on times when God answered a prayer, helped you through something hard, or showed you His love. Write them down. The psalmist wrote, "I will remember the LORD's deeds; for I will remember your wonders of old." Remembering God's faithfulness in the past builds faith for the future.

Then Habakkuk admits how he felt. "I heard, and my body trembled. My lips quivered at the voice. Rottenness enters into my bones, and I tremble in my place because I must wait quietly for the day of trouble, for the coming up of the people who invade us."

Habakkuk was terrified. His body shook. His legs felt weak. He knew Babylon was coming, and he knew it would be terrible. But he decided to wait quietly and trust God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety: When You Feel Hopeless**

Habakkuk was so overwhelmed that his whole body trembled. If you've ever felt that kind of fear, sadness, or hopelessness, you're not alone, and you don't have to carry it by yourself. God cares about how you feel, and He has put people in your life to help. Talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, school counselor, teacher, or pastor. If you're struggling with thoughts of hurting yourself, call or text 988 any time, day or night. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

And then comes one of the most famous passages in the Bible.

"For even though the fig tree doesn't flourish, nor fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive fails, the fields yield no food, the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!"

BACKGROUND CHECK **An Agricultural Disaster**

For people in Habakkuk's time, figs, grapes, olives, grain, sheep, and cattle weren't just food. They were everything. They were the economy, the grocery store, and the bank. If all of them failed at once, it meant total disaster: no food, no income, and no future. When an invading army came, it often destroyed crops and stole livestock. Habakkuk was imagining losing everything. And he said he would still rejoice in God.

Notice the word yet. Habakkuk's situation hadn't changed. Babylon was still coming. The crops might still fail. But Habakkuk had changed. He went from asking, Why aren't You doing anything? to saying, Even if everything falls apart, I will rejoice in You.

That's not pretending to be happy. It's choosing to trust God and find joy in Him, even when circumstances are terrible. His joy wasn't based on what he had. It was based on who God is.

REAL TALK **Your Fig Tree**

What's your fig tree? What are the things you count on to feel happy, secure, or okay? Maybe it's your grades, your friends, your health, your family, your sport, or your plans for the future. Habakkuk's song asks a hard question: if those things failed, would you still trust God? That doesn't mean God will take them away. But it reminds us that our deepest joy should rest on God, who never fails. Paul wrote, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content in it." Contentment and joy are possible, even in hard times, because God is with us.

Then Habakkuk ends with this. "GOD, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like deer's feet, and enables me to go in high places."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Deer's Feet**

The deer in this verse is probably a mountain deer or wild goat, like the ibex that still lives in the rocky cliffs near the Dead Sea. These animals can leap across steep, rocky slopes without falling. They seem to dance on places where people would stumble. David used the same picture in Psalm 18.

> Habakkuk is saying that God would give him the strength and balance to walk through dangerous, difficult places without falling.

Habakkuk started his book by asking why God wasn't doing anything. He ended it standing on the heights, singing. God didn't change his circumstances. He changed his heart. He gave him strength to stand.

> **REAL TALK** **From Complaint to Song**
>
> The book of Habakkuk shows a journey that many people take with God. It starts with confusion and complaint. It moves to waiting and listening. And it ends with worship and trust. You might be at the beginning of that journey right now, full of questions. That's okay. Keep bringing your questions to God. Keep waiting on Him. And trust that, in time, He can turn your complaint into a song.

KEY VERSE

For even though the fig tree doesn't flourish, nor fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive fails, the fields yield no food, the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! GOD, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like deer's feet, and enables me to go in high places. For the music director, on my stringed instruments.

Habakkuk 3:17–19 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Habakkuk ended his book with a song?
2. How did remembering God's past rescues help Habakkuk?
3. What changed between the beginning and the end of the book?
4. What is your fig tree? Could you still rejoice in God if it failed?

TRY THIS *Write your own version of Habakkuk 3:17-18. Fill in the blanks with things that matter to you: Even though ____, and even if ____, yet I will rejoice in the LORD.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

In the middle of Habakkuk's questions, God gave him a short sentence that would echo for centuries: "the righteous will live by his faith." Jewish readers have long treasured Habakkuk 2:4 as a call to steady faithfulness in hard times. Christians believe it became the heart of the gospel.

The New Testament quotes this verse three times. Paul wrote, "For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith." He wrote again, "no man is justified by the law before God." And Hebrews says, "But the righteous one will live by faith." In other words, we are made right with God not by being good enough, but by trusting Him. Fifteen hundred years later, Martin Luther read Romans 1:17 and said it felt like the gates of heaven opened. Habakkuk asked why God didn't step in against injustice. At the cross, God answered in the most surprising way. He stepped straight into injustice Himself. Jesus, the only truly innocent person who ever lived, was arrested on false charges, beaten, mocked, and crucified. He even cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He took the full weight of human evil and God's judgment on sin, so that people who trust Him could be forgiven. Then He rose again. And because of Him, Habakkuk's promise will come true: "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's glory, as the waters cover the sea."

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He welcomes your honest questions.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Habakkuk saw injustice around him, but all of us add to the world's brokenness. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus stepped into injustice.

Jesus, the innocent One, took on the worst injustice at the cross, died for our sins, and rose again.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

The righteous live by faith. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Live by faith.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Like Habakkuk, you can bring God all your questions and choose to trust Him. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I don't understand everything. Sometimes I'm confused, hurt, or angry about what happens in the world and in my life. Thank You that I can bring my questions to You. I've gone my own way, and I can't fix my sin myself. Thank You that Jesus stepped into injustice, died for my sins, and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me live by faith, and rejoice in You even when life is hard. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read all of Habakkuk, then Romans 1:16-17 and Romans 5:1-5.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Keep a question journal. Write down your honest questions for God, and keep a record of how He answers over time.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Habakkuk asked some of the hardest questions in the Bible, and God didn't turn him away. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Habakkuk is right, God welcomes your questions, and He is worth trusting even when you don't have all the answers.

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's glory, as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 2:14 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

The King Who Sings Over You

Zephaniah, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

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THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Sings Over You: The Book of Zephaniah, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Here's a question most people never ask out loud: Does God actually like me? Not just put up with me. Not just love me because He has to. Actually like me, enjoy me, delight in me?

Zephaniah answers that question in one of the most surprising verses in the Bible. But he takes a long road to get there. His book starts with fire. It describes God's judgment sweeping across the whole earth, calling out people who had become so comfortable and apathetic that they'd stopped believing God would do anything at all. It's one of the darkest openings of any book in the Bible.

And then, by the end, it turns into a song. Not a song people sing to God, but a song God sings over His people. Zephaniah moves from fire to singing, from judgment to joy. If you've ever wondered whether God just tolerates you, or whether He actually delights in you, keep reading.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Zephaniah in three chapters, one for each chapter of the Bible book: reverse-Genesis and spiritual apathy (Zephaniah 1), seek Him while there's time (Zephaniah 2), and the God who sings over you (Zephaniah 3).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Zephaniah was, when he lived, and what was happening in Judah. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how the Day of the LORD will unfold in the future, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Zephaniah in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-sixth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Zephaniah was a prophet with royal roots, tracing his family back four generations to a man named Hezekiah, most likely the famous king. He prophesied during the reign of young King Josiah, around 640-622 BC, and his preaching may have helped spark Josiah's great reform. This book explains the book's movement from judgment to joy, its reverse-creation language in chapter 1, the Day of the LORD, and the medieval hymn Dies Irae inspired by Zephaniah 1:15.

Real Talk boxes address spiritual apathy and practical atheism, seeking God while there's time, humility, pride, the unity of people from every nation, shame, and the truth that God delights in His people. Where Christians differ on how the Day of the LORD will unfold, the book presents the main views fairly. One box gently encourages teens who are struggling with shame or self-worth to talk with a trusted adult and lists 988 and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows Jesus as God among us (Zephaniah 3:15, 17; Matthew 1:23), who bore the Day of the LORD at the cross to remove our shame, unites people from every nation,

and rejoices over His people. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will know, deep down, that God rejoices over them with singing.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

A Prophet with Royal Roots

Zephaniah is the only prophet whose family tree goes back four generations. The book opens by calling him the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah. Most scholars think this Hezekiah was the famous King Hezekiah of Judah, who ruled about a century earlier. If so, Zephaniah was a distant relative of the royal family. That may explain why he knew so much about life in Jerusalem's palace and why he could speak so directly to its leaders.

What's in a Name?

Zephaniah's name means the LORD hides or the LORD treasures. It describes something you hide away because it's precious, like a treasure kept safe. His name may reflect his family's faith during the terrible reign of King Manasseh, when many faithful people were killed. His parents may have been saying, God has hidden and protected this child. The theme of being hidden shows up in his book too, when he invites people to seek the LORD so that they may be hidden in the day of His anger.

When Did He Live?

Zephaniah prophesied "in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah." Josiah became king when he was only eight years old, after his father was assassinated. His grandfather Manasseh had filled Judah with idol worship for over fifty years. As a teenager,

Josiah began to seek God. In his twenties, he led a massive reform, tearing down idols and restoring temple worship. Zephaniah's descriptions of idolatry suggest he preached before or early in that reform, around 640-622 BC. Many scholars think his preaching helped inspire it.

A Teenage King

The Bible says that "in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father." That means Josiah was about sixteen when he started seeking God seriously. By about twenty, he was tearing down idols. When workers found a scroll of God's law in the temple, Josiah was so moved that he tore his clothes. The Bible says there was no king like him, "who turned to the LORD with all his heart." Prophets like Zephaniah and Jeremiah were part of that story.

From Fire to Song

Zephaniah is a short book of only three chapters, but it moves dramatically. It begins with judgment on the whole earth, then focuses on Judah, then sweeps across the surrounding nations, and then returns to Jerusalem. Then, suddenly, it ends with one of the most joyful passages in the Old Testament. It's a journey from fire to song, showing that God's judgment is never His last word for those who seek Him.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Zephaniah 1): Reverse-Genesis and spiritual apathy.

Chapter 2 (Zephaniah 2): Seek Him while there's time.

Chapter 3 (Zephaniah 3): The God who sings over you.

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CHAPTER 1

Reverse-Genesis and Spiritual Apathy

Zephaniah 1

Zephaniah doesn't ease into his message. After introducing himself, he opens with one of the most frightening statements in the Bible. "I will utterly sweep away everything from the surface of the earth, says the LORD."

Then he gets specific. "I will sweep away man and animal. I will sweep away the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and the heaps of rubble with the wicked. I will cut off man from the surface of the earth, says the LORD."

If you know the creation story in Genesis 1, something about this list should sound familiar.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Creation in Reverse**
>
> In Genesis 1, God creates fish, then birds, then land animals, then humans. Zephaniah lists them in the opposite order: humans, animals, birds, fish. It's creation in reverse. God made the world good, and humans were given dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every living thing. But sin had spread so far that Zephaniah describes God's judgment as un-creating the world. Many scholars also hear echoes of the flood in Genesis 6-9, when God swept away life from the earth. Zephaniah uses this shocking picture to show how serious sin is.

Then the focus narrows to Judah and Jerusalem. God would stretch out His hand against them and cut off "the remnant of Baal from this place." Zephaniah lists the kinds of people God would judge.

There were people who worshiped the stars from their rooftops. There were people who worshiped the LORD but also swore by Malcam, probably a name for the god Molech. And there were people who had turned away from following the LORD, and those who never sought Him at all.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Rooftop Star Worship**

In ancient Judah, houses had flat roofs where people often worked, slept on hot nights, and sometimes worshiped. Under King Manasseh, worship of the sun, moon, and stars became widespread. People burned incense on their rooftops to the army of the sky. Archaeologists have found small incense altars and figurines from this period in Judah. Second Kings says that Josiah later tore down the altars on the roofs that the kings of Judah had made. Zephaniah's words may have helped spark that reform.

REAL TALK **Divided Loyalty**

Some people in Judah worshiped the LORD and other gods at the same time. They wanted to keep their options open. That's still a temptation. You might go to church on Sunday but check your horoscope on Monday. You might say you trust God but actually trust money, popularity, or your own plans more. Jesus said no one can serve two masters. God doesn't want to be one option among many. He wants your whole heart, because He is the only one who truly deserves it.

Then comes a dramatic command. "Be silent at the presence of the Lord GOD, for the day of the LORD is at hand." God had prepared a sacrifice and invited guests. But there was a terrible twist: the sacrifice was Judah itself, and the guests were the invaders who would come to destroy it.

God would punish the princes and the king's sons, the people who dressed in foreign clothing to show off their loyalty to foreign gods and powers, and those who filled their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

Then Zephaniah describes the cry that would go up from different parts of Jerusalem: the Fish Gate, the Second Quarter, and the hills. The merchants in the market district would wail, because all those loaded with silver would be cut off.

Then comes one of the most striking verses in the book. "It will happen at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are settled on their dregs, who say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Settled on Their Dregs**

When wine is made, solid bits called dregs or lees sink to the bottom of the jar. If winemakers left wine sitting on its dregs too long without pouring it into a new container, it became thick, syrupy, and spoiled. Jeremiah used the same picture for Moab, saying it had been at ease and had settled on its dregs, never poured from vessel to vessel. Zephaniah uses it to describe people who had become lazy, comfortable, and spiritually stagnant. They had stopped growing, stopped caring, and stopped expecting God to do anything.

Notice what these people said in their hearts. Not with their mouths. They probably still showed up at the temple. But deep down, they believed God wouldn't do anything, good or bad. He was irrelevant.

REAL TALK **Practical Atheism**

Some people say there is no God. Psalm 14 calls that foolish. But Zephaniah describes something sneakier: people who believe in God but live like He doesn't matter. They don't expect Him to answer prayer, and they don't fear His judgment. They just live their lives as if He's not there. That's sometimes called practical atheism. It's easy to slip into, especially when life is

comfortable. In Revelation, Jesus warns a church that was lukewarm, "neither hot nor cold." Ask yourself honestly: Do I live like God is real and involved in my life? Or have I settled on my dregs?

God would search Jerusalem with lamps, like someone looking into every dark corner. No one could hide. And the comfortable would lose everything. They would build houses but not live in them, and plant vineyards but not drink the wine.

REAL TALK **Comfort Can Be Dangerous**

Comfort isn't bad. God gives us good things to enjoy. But comfort can make us spiritually lazy. When everything is going well, it's easy to stop praying, stop reading the Bible, and stop thinking about God. That's why some people grow most in their faith during hard times. If life is good right now, thank God for it. And then be intentional about staying close to Him. Don't wait for a crisis to start seeking God.

Then Zephaniah describes the Day of the LORD in some of the most powerful words in the Bible. "The great day of the LORD is near. It is near and hurries greatly."

"That day is a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high battlements."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Dies Irae**

In the Latin translation of the Bible, Zephaniah 1:15 begins with the words dies irae, meaning day of wrath. In the 1200s, a Latin hymn called Dies Irae was written based on this verse. It describes the final judgment and pleads for mercy. For centuries, it was sung at funeral masses. Composers like Mozart and Verdi set it to music in their famous Requiems. Its melody has also appeared in many movie soundtracks, often to signal danger or doom.

Zephaniah's words have echoed through art and music for almost two thousand years.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Day of the LORD**

The Day of the LORD appears throughout the prophets. It describes a time when God steps into history to judge evil and rescue His people. Sometimes it referred to a near event. For Judah, Zephaniah's warning was fulfilled when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. But the prophets also looked forward to a final Day of the LORD at the end of history. Christians have different views about how that final day will unfold, but they agree that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead and make all things new.

Zephaniah ends the chapter with a reminder that money can't save anyone. "Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath." The people who trusted in their wealth would find it worthless.

REAL TALK **What Will Matter Then?**

On the Day of the LORD, silver and gold won't matter. Neither will followers, grades, trophies, or popularity. What will matter is whether you know God. That's not meant to make you anxious. It's meant to help you focus on what really counts. Jesus asked, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" Enjoy the good things in your life, but make sure your life is built on what lasts forever.

KEY VERSE

It will happen at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are settled on their dregs, who say in their heart, "The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil."

Zephaniah 1:12 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Zephaniah described judgment as creation in reverse?
2. What does it mean to be settled on your dregs?
3. Have you ever lived like God doesn't really matter? What did that look like?
4. What things do people trust in today instead of God?

TRY THIS *This week, take a spiritual temperature check. Each night, ask yourself: Did I live today like God is real and involved in my life? Write down one way you can seek Him more intentionally tomorrow.*

CHAPTER 2

Seek Him While There's Time

Zephaniah 2

After all the warnings of chapter 1, chapter 2 opens with an urgent invitation. "Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, you nation that has no shame, before the appointed time when the day passes as the chaff."

The judgment was coming. But it hadn't come yet. There was still time.

Then comes the heart of the book. "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who have kept his ordinances. Seek righteousness. Seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Hidden in the Day**
>
> Remember that Zephaniah's name means the LORD hides or the LORD treasures. In Zephaniah 2:3, he uses the same Hebrew root when he says that people who seek the LORD may be hidden in the day of His anger. It's like he's putting his own name into his message. Just as God had hidden and protected Zephaniah, God would hide and protect those who sought Him. The word paints a picture of God sheltering His people like a treasure in a safe place during a storm.

Notice the three things Zephaniah tells people to seek. Seek the LORD. Seek righteousness. Seek humility. First, seek God Himself. Then, seek to live rightly. And seek to be humble.

Notice also who he's talking to: the humble of the land, those who had already been obeying God. Even faithful people needed to keep seeking. Seeking God isn't a one-time event. It's a lifelong habit.

> **REAL TALK** **Seek**
>
> To seek something means to look for it actively, like searching for a lost phone. You don't just sit and wait for it to show up. Seeking God means making Him a priority. It can look like reading the Bible, praying, worshiping, asking questions, and spending time with other believers. Isaiah wrote, "Seek the LORD while he may be found. Call on him while he is near." Jesus said, "seek first God's Kingdom." What would it look like for you to seek God this week?
>
> **REAL TALK** **Seek Humility**
>
> Humility isn't thinking you're worthless. It's seeing yourself honestly, the way God sees you. You're valuable because God made you, and you need Him because you can't save yourself. Humble people admit when they're wrong. They're willing to learn. They don't need to be the center of attention. They celebrate other people's successes. Pride is a constant temptation, especially in a world that tells you to promote yourself. James wrote, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will exalt you."

Then Zephaniah turns to the surrounding nations. Like a compass, God's judgment would sweep in every direction.

To the west were the Philistines along the Mediterranean coast. Zephaniah names four of their cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron. They would become empty, and the coastland would become pastures for shepherds. And the remnant of Judah would one day live there.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Philistine Cities**

The Philistines were a seafaring people who settled along the southern coast of Canaan around 1200 BC. They had five main cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath. They were Israel's enemies for centuries, from the days of Samson and Goliath. In 604 BC, about twenty years after Zephaniah, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Ashkelon. Archaeologists excavating Ashkelon found dramatic evidence of that destruction, including collapsed buildings and ash layers. Zephaniah's prophecy came true.

To the east were Moab and Ammon, across the Jordan River. They had mocked and insulted God's people and bragged about their own greatness. God said they would become like Sodom and Gomorrah, wastelands of weeds and salt pits.

"This they will have for their pride." Pride was their downfall.

REAL TALK **Mocking Others**

Moab and Ammon mocked God's people. It's tempting to mock others, especially people who are different, struggling, or unpopular. Sometimes it's subtle, like laughing at a joke about someone or sharing a meme that makes fun of someone. Other times it's obvious. But God takes mocking seriously, because every person is made in His image. If you've been on the receiving end of mocking, God sees it. And if you've been the one doing it, it's not too late to stop and apologize.

Then, in the middle of all this judgment, comes a surprising promise. "The LORD will be awesome to them, for he will famish all the gods of the land. Men will worship him, everyone from his place, even all the shores of the nations."

Even the nations being judged would one day worship the true God. People from every coast and land would bow to Him. Judgment wasn't God's final word for the nations either.

To the south was Cush, the land south of Egypt, in what is now Sudan. They too would face God's judgment.

To the north was Assyria and its capital, Nineveh. At the time Zephaniah prophesied, Nineveh was still the most powerful city in the world. But Zephaniah said it would become a desolate wilderness, so empty that wild animals would live in its ruins. Pelicans and porcupines would nest in its broken pillars.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Four Directions**
>
> Zephaniah's judgment sweeps across the map: west to Philistia, east to Moab and Ammon, south to Cush, and north to Assyria. It's a way of saying that no nation was beyond God's reach. Interestingly, Zephaniah's father was named Cushi, which may mean Cushite. Some scholars wonder whether Zephaniah had African ancestry. Later in the book, Zephaniah promises that worshipers would come from beyond the rivers of Cush. God's judgment and His mercy both reach every direction.

Zephaniah describes Nineveh as "the joyous city that lived carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is no one besides me."

That's the ultimate statement of pride. Nineveh thought it was the center of the universe, with no rival and no equal. It was claiming something only God can say. And in 612 BC, Nineveh fell, just as Zephaniah predicted.

> **REAL TALK** **I Am, and There Is No One Besides Me**
>
> Nineveh's motto sounds a lot like some messages we hear today: You're the most important person in the world. Live your truth. Nobody can tell you what to do. Put yourself first. It's good to know that you matter. But when we make ourselves the center of everything, we're claiming a place that belongs only to God. Real freedom comes from knowing that God is God, and we're

not. That frees us to love Him and others without having to be the center of everything.

KEY VERSE

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who have kept his ordinances. Seek righteousness. Seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger.

Zephaniah 2:3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think even faithful people needed to keep seeking God?
2. What does it mean to seek righteousness and seek humility?
3. Why do you think pride shows up so often in Zephaniah's judgments?
4. What would it look like for you to seek God this week?

TRY THIS *Choose one practical way to seek God every day this week, like reading a psalm, praying for five minutes, or listening to worship music. Do it at the same time each day.*

CHAPTER 3

The God Who Sings Over You

Zephaniah 3

Chapter 3 starts with one more woe. But this time, it's aimed at Jerusalem. "Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, the oppressing city!"

Zephaniah lists four things Jerusalem had failed to do. "She didn't obey the voice. She didn't receive correction. She didn't trust in the LORD. She didn't draw near to her God."

Then he calls out Jerusalem's leaders. The princes were like roaring lions. The judges were like wolves that devoured everything by morning. The prophets were arrogant and treacherous. The priests had profaned the sanctuary and twisted God's law.

> REAL TALK **Four Ways to Drift**
>
> Jerusalem's four failures are a good checklist for anyone. Did I listen to God? Did I accept correction? Did I trust Him? Did I draw near to Him? Notice that receiving correction is on the list. Nobody likes being corrected, whether by parents, teachers, coaches, or friends. But being willing to hear correction is a sign of wisdom. Proverbs says that whoever hates correction is foolish. When someone corrects you, try to listen before you get defensive.

But in the middle of the corruption, there was one who remained faithful. "The LORD, within her, is righteous. He will do no wrong.

Every morning he brings his justice to light." God was still in the city, still faithful, still just, every single morning.

God had warned Jerusalem again and again. He had judged other nations as an example. He said, "Just fear me. Receive correction." But they rose early and found new ways to do wrong.

Then comes a turning point. God says He will gather the nations and pour out His judgment. And then, after the fire, something new happens.

"For then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that they may all call on the LORD's name, to serve him shoulder to shoulder."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Reversing Babel**
>
> In Genesis 11, people built the Tower of Babel to make a name for themselves. God confused their languages and scattered them across the earth. Zephaniah 3:9 promises a reversal. God would purify the lips of the peoples so they could all call on His name together. Many Christians see a preview of this at Pentecost in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came and people from many nations heard the apostles speaking God's mighty works in their own languages. Babel divided humanity. God's salvation unites it.

The phrase shoulder to shoulder pictures people from different nations working side by side, like oxen pulling the same plow. Worshipers would come from as far as the rivers of Cush, far to the south of Egypt, bringing offerings to God.

> **REAL TALK** **Shoulder to Shoulder**
>
> God's plan has always been to bring people from every nation together. Revelation describes a great multitude "out of every nation and of all tribes, peoples, and languages, standing before the throne." That means racism, prejudice, and division have no place among God's people. If you're part of a church, look for ways to welcome people who are different from you. Sit with

someone new. Learn about believers in other countries. The church is meant to be a preview of heaven, where everyone serves God shoulder to shoulder.

Then God describes what would happen to His people. "In that day you will not be disappointed for all your doings in which you have transgressed against me." The word disappointed can also mean ashamed. God would take away their shame. He would remove the proud and leave behind "an afflicted and poor people, and they will take refuge in the LORD's name."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Humble Remnant**

The remnant is the small group of faithful people God preserves through judgment. In Zephaniah, they are described as afflicted, poor, and humble. They aren't the powerful or the proud. They're people who know they need God and take refuge in Him. They wouldn't do wrong or tell lies. And they would rest in peace, with no one to make them afraid. Jesus echoed this when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

And then, suddenly, the book bursts into song. "Sing, daughter of Zion! Shout, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem."

Why? "The LORD has taken away your judgments. He has thrown out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is among you. You will not be afraid of evil any more."

The judgment was gone. The enemy was defeated. And God Himself was with them.

Then comes the most beautiful verse in the book. "The LORD, your God, is among you, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with joy. He will calm you in his love. He will rejoice over you with singing."

BACKGROUND CHECK **God Sings**

Throughout the Bible, people sing to God. But Zephaniah 3:17 is one of the only places where God sings over His people. The Hebrew word for singing here describes a loud, joyful shout or song of celebration. The picture is of God so happy with His people that He bursts into song, like a parent singing over a newborn baby, or a bridegroom celebrating his bride. Isaiah used a similar picture: "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you."

Read that verse again slowly. God is among you. He is mighty. He will save. He rejoices over you with joy. He calms you with His love. He rejoices over you with singing.

God doesn't just tolerate His people. He doesn't just put up with them. He delights in them. He enjoys them. He sings over them.

REAL TALK **God Delights in You**

Many teens struggle to believe that God actually likes them. They might believe God loves them in a general way, because He's supposed to. But Zephaniah 3:17 says more than that. God rejoices over His people. If you trust in Jesus, God isn't disappointed in you or barely tolerating you. He delights in you. He's not waiting for you to get your act together before He sings. That doesn't mean sin doesn't matter. It means God's love is bigger than your failures. Try reading this verse out loud with your name in it.

The phrase He will calm you in his love can also be translated He will be quiet in His love. Some think it means God's love is so deep it goes beyond words. Others think it describes God quieting His people's fears, like a parent soothing a crying child. Both are beautiful.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety: When You Struggle with Shame**

Zephaniah says God will take away the shame of His people. Some teens carry deep shame, about their bodies, their past, their families, or things they've

done or that were done to them. Shame can make you feel worthless or like you want to disappear. If you're struggling with shame, please don't carry it alone. Talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, school counselor, teacher, or pastor. If something was done to you, it's not your fault. If you're having thoughts of hurting yourself, call or text 988 any time. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

The book ends with God's promises. He would deal with those who oppressed His people. He would save the lame and gather the outcasts. He would turn their shame into praise and honor. "At that time I will bring you in, and at that time I will gather you; for I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD."

REAL TALK **From Fire to Song**

Zephaniah started with fire and ended with singing. That's the shape of the whole Bible. God takes sin seriously, and judgment is real. But for those who seek Him, judgment is never the last word. The last word is joy. God gathers the lame, removes shame, brings people from every nation together, and sings over them. Wherever you are right now, whether you feel like you're in the fire or in the song, God's story for you isn't over.

KEY VERSE

The LORD, your God, is among you, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with joy. He will calm you in his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What were Jerusalem's four failures in Zephaniah 3:2? Which one is most tempting for you?
2. How does Zephaniah 3:9 reverse what happened at Babel?
3. What does it mean to you that God rejoices over His people with singing?
4. Is it hard for you to believe that God delights in you? Why or why not?

TRY THIS *Write Zephaniah 3:17 on a card, replacing you with your own name. Read it out loud every morning this week.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Zephaniah ends with a promise: "The LORD, your God, is among you, a mighty one who will save." Jewish readers have long treasured this promise of God's presence and joy over His people. Christians believe it came true in a way no one expected, in Jesus.

When Jesus was born, an angel told Joseph that He would be called Immanuel, "which is, being interpreted, God with us." Zephaniah said the King of Israel, the LORD, would be among His people. In Jesus, God literally came to live among us. "The Word became flesh and lived among us." But to save us, Jesus had to face the Day of the LORD Himself. On the cross, darkness covered the land, just as Zephaniah described the day of wrath as a day of darkness and gloom. Jesus took the judgment our sin deserved, so that "we will be saved from God's wrath through him." He bore our shame, "despising its shame," so that we would "not be disappointed" for all our wrongs. He rose again and sent His Spirit, and on the day of Pentecost people from many nations heard God's mighty works in their own languages, a preview of Zephaniah's promise that God would purify the lips of the peoples so they could call on His name together. And Jesus said there is joy in heaven "over one sinner who repents." Because of Him, God doesn't just tolerate His people. He rejoices over them with singing.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He does not just tolerate you. He delights in you.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Zephaniah shows that pride, idols, and apathy are everywhere. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus bore the Day of the LORD.

Jesus, God among us, took the judgment we deserved on the cross, carried our shame, and rose again.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Seek Him today.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Zephaniah says, Seek the LORD. You can seek Him today. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've gone my own way. Sometimes I've been proud, and sometimes I've just stopped caring about You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus came to be God with us, took the judgment I deserved, carried my shame, and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me believe that You really do rejoice over me. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Zephaniah 3, then Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 15.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Remember His song. Write Zephaniah 3:17 somewhere you will see it every morning.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Zephaniah has hard words and beautiful ones. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Zephaniah is right, the God of the universe rejoices over His people with singing, and He invites you to seek Him while there's time.

The LORD, your God, is among you, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with joy. He will calm you in his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

The King with the Signet Ring

Haggai, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King with the Signet Ring: The Book of Haggai, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Be honest. Is there something you know you should do, but you keep putting it off? Homework, a hard conversation, cleaning your room, reading your Bible, apologizing to someone. You tell yourself, I'll get to it later. The time isn't right yet.

That's exactly what was happening in Jerusalem about 520 years before Jesus. God's people had come home from exile in Babylon with a mission: rebuild God's temple. They started strong. Then they got discouraged, distracted, and busy with their own lives. For sixteen years, the temple sat unfinished while they built nice houses for themselves.

Then a prophet named Haggai showed up with a simple message: Consider your ways. And here's the amazing part. Unlike almost every other prophet in the Bible, people actually listened. Within twenty-three days, they were back at work. Haggai is short, practical, and surprisingly relevant for anyone who has ever procrastinated, felt like their best wasn't good enough, or wondered whether God was really with them.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Haggai in three chapters: paneled houses and pockets with holes (Haggai 1), when your best looks too small (Haggai 2:1-9), and clean hands and the signet ring (Haggai 2:10-23).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what happened after the exile, why the temple rebuilding stalled, and how Haggai's dated sermons fit together. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how some of Haggai's promises are fulfilled, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Haggai in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-seventh book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Haggai is the first of the three prophets who spoke after the exile. In 520 BC, the second year of King Darius of Persia, he delivered four precisely dated messages within less than four months, urging the returned exiles to finish rebuilding the temple. This book connects Haggai with the history in Ezra 4-6, and highlights that the people responded and resumed work within twenty-three days.

It covers procrastination and priorities (Haggai 1), discouragement when our best seems small (Haggai 2:1-9), and the lesson that holiness is not contagious but defilement is, along with God's promise to Zerubbabel, the signet ring (Haggai 2:10-23). It explains how that promise reverses the curse on King Jehoiachin in Jeremiah 22:24 and keeps David's royal line alive, and it presents fairly the different ways Christians understand Jesus' genealogies.

Real Talk boxes address procrastination, money and contentment, discouragement and comparison, courage, holiness, and God's presence. One box gently encourages teens who are struggling with discouragement to talk with a trusted adult and lists 988 and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows Jesus walking into the rebuilt temple, Jesus as the true temple (John 2:19-21), Jesus touching the unclean and making them clean, and Zerubbabel in Jesus' family tree (Matthew 1:12, Luke 3:27). Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will put God first, be strong and do the work in front of them, and know that He is with them.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

Home from Exile

In 586 BC, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's temple and carried many of Judah's people into exile. Then, in 539 BC, Persia conquered Babylon. The next year, King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree allowing the Jews to return home and rebuild the temple. About fifty thousand people made the long journey back, led by Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David, and Joshua, the high priest.

A Strong Start

At first, everything went well. The people rebuilt the altar and started offering sacrifices again. Around 536 BC, they laid the foundation of the new temple. There was a huge celebration. The priests blew trumpets, the Levites played cymbals, and the people sang, "For he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever toward Israel." But not everyone was cheering. The old men who had seen Solomon's temple wept loudly, because the new foundation looked so small.

The Project Stalls

Then the trouble began. Neighboring peoples opposed the rebuilding, discouraging the builders, hiring officials to work against them, and writing letters to the Persian king. Ezra 4 describes how the project ground to a halt. "Then work stopped on God's house which is at Jerusalem. It stopped until the second year

of the reign of Darius king of Persia." For about sixteen years, the temple sat unfinished. The people got used to it. They focused on their own homes, farms, and lives.

Enter Haggai

In 520 BC, the second year of King Darius, God sent two prophets: Haggai and Zechariah. We know almost nothing about Haggai personally. His name probably comes from the Hebrew word for festival, so he may have been born on a feast day. Some think he was an old man who had seen Solomon's temple as a child. Ezra says that through the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the people started building again. They finished the temple in 515 BC.

Four Dated Messages

Haggai is one of the most precisely dated books in the Bible. It contains four messages, each with an exact date. Using ancient calendars, scholars can match them to our calendar. The first came on the first day of the sixth month, around late August 520 BC. The second came about seven weeks later, during the Feast of Tabernacles. The third and fourth came on the same day in the ninth month, around mid-December. All four messages were given in less than four months. And the people started working just twenty-three days after the first one.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Haggai 1): Paneled houses and pockets with holes.

Chapter 2 (Haggai 2:1-9): When your best looks too small.

Chapter 3 (Haggai 2:10-23): Clean hands and the signet ring.

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CHAPTER 1

Paneled Houses and Pockets with Holes

Haggai 1

Haggai's book opens like a news report, with a date. "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, the LORD's word came by Haggai the prophet, to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest."

That date was probably August 29, 520 BC. The first day of the month was a new moon festival, when people gathered for worship. Haggai picked the perfect moment to speak.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Zerubbabel and Joshua**
>
> Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah, appointed by the Persian king. He was also a grandson of King Jehoiachin, one of the last kings of Judah, which made him a descendant of King David. Joshua was the high priest, a descendant of the priests who had served in Solomon's temple. Together, they represented the two most important offices in Israel: the royal line of David and the priesthood. In Ezra, Joshua's name appears in its later form, Jeshua. Haggai spoke directly to both leaders, and to all the people.

Haggai began by quoting what the people were saying. "These people say, The time hasn't yet come, the time for the LORD's house to be built."

That's procrastination in a sentence. The people weren't saying they would never build the temple. They were just saying, Not yet. Maybe the economy was bad. Maybe there was opposition. Maybe they were waiting for a better moment. Whatever the reason, sixteen years had gone by.

> **REAL TALK** **Not Yet**
>
> Procrastination is one of the most common struggles for students. We put off homework, studying, chores, applications, and hard conversations. Sometimes we put off God too. I'll start reading my Bible when life calms down. I'll get serious about my faith in college. I'll apologize when the time is right. But not yet often turns into never. Proverbs says, "How long will you sleep, sluggard? When will you arise out of your sleep?" What have you been putting off? The best time to start is usually now.

Then God asked a pointed question. "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies waste?"

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Paneled Houses**
>
> Paneled houses were homes with wooden paneling on the walls or ceilings. In the ancient Middle East, wood was expensive, especially fine cedar. Paneling was a luxury, the kind of thing you'd find in palaces and temples. Solomon had paneled the first temple with cedar. Now the people were paneling their own homes while God's house lay in ruins. They had time and money for their own comfort, but not for God's work.

The people's problem wasn't that they didn't have time or money. It was that they had the wrong priorities.

Then came the key phrase of the book. "Now therefore this is what the LORD of Armies says: Consider your ways."

In other words, Stop and think. Look at your life. What's really going on?

God pointed out that nothing seemed to be working for them. "You have sown much, and bring in little. You eat, but you don't have enough. You drink, but you aren't filled with drink. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes in it."

REAL TALK **Pockets with Holes**

Have you ever felt like no matter how much you have, it's never enough? You get the new phone, the new shoes, or the new game, and a few weeks later, you want something else. You earn money from a job, and it disappears before you know where it went. Haggai describes that feeling perfectly: putting wages into a bag with holes. When we live for ourselves, nothing ever truly satisfies. Jesus said, "seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well." When God is first, everything else falls into its proper place.

REAL TALK **Money and Priorities**

Haggai's message isn't that having a nice house is wrong. It's about priorities. Where does your money go? Where does your time go? It's worth looking at honestly. If you have a job or an allowance, think about setting aside part of it to give to your church or to help people in need. Giving isn't about earning God's favor. It's about saying, God, You come first. Many Christians find that when they start giving, they actually feel freer, not poorer.

God said it again. "Consider your ways." Then He gave the solution. "Go up to the mountain, bring wood, and build the house. I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified."

Simple. Stop waiting. Start building.

Then God explained why things had been going so badly. "Because of my house that lies waste, while each of you is busy with his own

house." That's why the rain hadn't come and the crops had failed. God had sent a drought to get their attention.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Blessings and Curses**
>
> In the law of Moses, God promised that if Israel obeyed Him, He would bless their land with rain and good harvests. If they turned away, they would experience drought and crop failure. These weren't random punishments. They were warning lights on the dashboard, meant to get the people's attention so they would turn back to God. Not every hard time in life is a punishment, and Jesus warned against assuming that. But in Haggai's day, God made it clear that the drought was connected to their neglect of His house.

Then something remarkable happened. The people listened.

"Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the LORD their God's voice, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the LORD."

That almost never happens in the Bible. Most prophets were ignored, mocked, or persecuted. Jeremiah was thrown into a pit. Amos was told to go home. But Haggai's audience actually obeyed.

> **REAL TALK** **Actually Listening**
>
> It's one thing to hear a message. It's another to act on it. Haggai's audience didn't just nod along. They changed what they were doing. James wrote, "be doers of the word, and not only hearers." Maybe you've heard a great sermon, read a challenging verse, or gotten good advice from a parent or friend. What did you do with it? The people in Haggai's day show that it's possible to hear God's voice and respond right away.

And then God gave them the best news possible. "I am with you," says the LORD.

That's it. Four words. No long speech. Just a promise. When the people turned back to God, the first thing He told them was that He was with them.

Then "the LORD stirred up the spirit" of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD. When did they start? "In the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king." Just twenty-three days after Haggai's first sermon.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Twenty-Three Days?**

Why did it take twenty-three days for the people to start working, instead of the next day? The answer is probably practical. They needed to clear rubble from the site, gather tools, cut timber in the mountains, organize workers, and finish harvesting their crops, since the sixth month was harvest season for figs and grapes. Twenty-three days to get a major construction project started is actually very fast. They didn't just feel inspired. They got organized and got to work.

KEY VERSE

Now therefore this is what the LORD of Armies says:
Consider your ways.

Haggai 1:5 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What excuse did the people use for not building the temple?
2. What does it mean to put your wages into a bag with holes?
3. What have you been putting off that you know God wants you to do?
4. Why do you think the first thing God said after they obeyed was I am with you?

TRY THIS *Consider your ways this week. Write down how you spend your time and money for three days. Then ask: What does this say about my priorities? Make one change to put God first.*

CHAPTER 2

When Your Best Looks Too Small

Haggai 2:1–9

Haggai's second message came "In the seventh month, in the twenty-first day of the month." That was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a week-long celebration of the harvest and of God's care for Israel in the wilderness. It was probably around October 17, 520 BC.

The people had been working for about a month. And they were getting discouraged.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Feast of Tabernacles**
>
> The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths or Sukkot, was one of Israel's three great annual festivals. For a week, people lived in temporary shelters made of branches, remembering how God cared for their ancestors in the wilderness. It was a joyful harvest festival. It was also the festival when Solomon had dedicated the first temple centuries earlier. So as the people celebrated, they would have been remembering Solomon's glorious temple. And their own building project looked pitiful in comparison. To make things worse, the harvest that year had been poor.

God knew exactly how they felt. He told Haggai to ask, "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Isn't it in your eyes as nothing?"

Some of the older people had seen Solomon's temple before Babylon destroyed it, sixty-six years earlier. They remembered its gold, its cedar, its massive stones, and its beauty. Compared to that, the new temple looked like nothing.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Solomon's Temple**

Solomon's temple was one of the most magnificent buildings in the ancient world. It took seven years to build. It was decorated with cedar from Lebanon, carved cherubim, and huge amounts of gold. Even the floor was overlaid with gold. Thousands of workers helped build it. The new temple had none of that. The returned exiles were a small, poor community under Persian rule. Their temple was built with limited resources and probably looked plain. And it didn't have the ark of the covenant, which had been lost when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem.

REAL TALK **Comparison**

Comparison can steal your joy fast. You compare your body, your grades, your family, your house, your clothes, or your talents with someone else's, and suddenly what you have looks like nothing. Social media makes it even worse, because you're comparing your real life with everyone else's highlight reel. The older people in Haggai's day compared the new temple with the old one, and it made everyone discouraged. God's answer wasn't to pretend the new temple was more impressive. It was to remind them that He was with them, and that was what mattered most.

Then God gave them one of the most encouraging messages in the Bible. "Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel, says the LORD. Be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, says the LORD, and work, for I am with you, says the LORD of Armies."

Three times, God said, Be strong. Then He said, Work. And then He gave the reason: I am with you.

REAL TALK **Be Strong and Work**

Notice that God didn't say, Feel strong. He said, Be strong. Strength in the Bible isn't a feeling. It's a choice to keep going, trusting God. And notice that He said, Work. God's presence doesn't mean we sit around and wait. It gives us the courage to do the work in front of us, even when it looks small. Whatever you're facing right now, like schoolwork, a job, a hard situation at home, or serving at church, God says the same thing to you: Be strong. Do the work. I am with you.

Then God reminded them of His promise from long ago. "This is the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit lived among you. Don't be afraid."

Then God made a huge promise. "For this is what the LORD of Armies says: Yet once more, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations. The treasure of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Treasure of All Nations**

The phrase the treasure of all nations has been translated in different ways. Some older translations say the desire of all nations, and many Christians have understood it as a reference to the Messiah, the one all nations long for. Others translate it as the treasures or wealth of all nations, meaning that nations would bring their riches to God's house. Both views point to the same idea: God would fill His house with glory greater than anyone expected. The book of Hebrews quotes Haggai's promise to shake the heavens and earth and connects it to God's unshakable kingdom.

The people were worried that they didn't have enough gold and silver to make the temple beautiful. So God said, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of Armies."

REAL TALK **It's All His**

"The earth is the LORD's, with its fullness." Everything belongs to God, including all the money in the world. That changes how we think about what we have. If everything belongs to God, then we're not really owners. We're managers. That can take pressure off you if you feel like you don't have enough. God isn't limited by your bank account. And it can challenge you if you have a lot, because God might want you to share it. Either way, you can trust Him to provide what you need for what He's called you to do.

Then came the climax. "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, says the LORD of Armies; and in this place I will give peace, says the LORD of Armies."

How could a plain, small temple ever have more glory than Solomon's? It didn't seem possible. But God had something in mind that no one could imagine yet.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Herod's Temple**

About five hundred years after Haggai, King Herod the Great began a massive expansion of the temple. He enlarged the temple platform, rebuilt the structure, and covered it with white stone and gold. It took decades. In John 2, people told Jesus that the work had been going on for forty-six years. Some people think that's how Haggai's prophecy was fulfilled. But most Christians believe the greater glory came from something far more important than gold. It came when Jesus walked into that temple.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety: When You Feel Like Giving Up**

The people in Haggai's day were so discouraged they were ready to quit. Maybe you know that feeling. Maybe you feel like your best is never good enough, or that nothing you do matters. God's message to you is the same: Be strong. I am with you. Don't be afraid. And He has also given you people to help. If you're feeling really discouraged or hopeless, please talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, school counselor, teacher, or pastor. If you're having

> thoughts of hurting yourself, call or text 988 any time. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

KEY VERSE

Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD. 'Be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work, for I am with you,' says the LORD of Armies.

Haggai 2:4 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why were the people discouraged in Haggai 2?
2. When do you compare yourself to others? How does it make you feel?
3. What does it mean to be strong and work because God is with you?
4. How do you think the latter glory of the temple was greater than the former?

TRY THIS *Write down one thing you're working on that feels small or discouraging. Next to it, write Haggai 2:4. Each day this week, take one step on it, and remind yourself that God is with you.*

CHAPTER 3

Clean Hands and the Signet Ring

Haggai 2:10–23

Haggai's third and fourth messages both came on the same day. "In the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius." That was probably December 18, 520 BC, three months after the building started.

For the third message, God told Haggai to ask the priests a question about the law. Think of it as a pop quiz.

First question: If someone carries holy meat, from a sacrifice, in the fold of his garment, and the garment touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or other food, does that food become holy? The priests answered, "No."

Second question: "If one who is unclean by reason of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?" The priests answered, "It will be unclean."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Clean and Unclean**
>
> In the law of Moses, things could be holy, meaning set apart for God, or common. And people or things could be clean or unclean. Being unclean wasn't always about sin. Touching a dead body, having certain skin diseases, or other situations made a person ceremonially unclean for a time, so they couldn't take part in temple worship until they went through purification. Haggai's questions point to a key principle in the law: holiness doesn't spread by touch, but uncleanness does.

Then Haggai made his point. "So is this people, and so is this nation before me, says the LORD; and so is every work of their hands. That which they offer there is unclean."

In other words, the people couldn't make themselves holy just by working on a holy building. Being near holy things didn't make them holy. But their sin and disobedience did spread, affecting everything they did.

> **REAL TALK** **Holiness Isn't Contagious**
>
> You can't become holy just by being around holy things. Going to church, wearing a cross necklace, having Christian friends, or listening to worship music are all good. But they don't automatically make you right with God. On the other hand, bad influences spread easily. A bad attitude, a habit of gossip, or a toxic friendship can affect everything in your life. Paul wrote, "Evil companionships corrupt good morals." That's why it matters who you spend time with and what you let into your life. Real holiness comes from God, not from being near religious things.

Then God reminded them of how things had been before they started building. They would come to a heap of grain expecting twenty measures and find only ten. They would go to the wine vat expecting fifty measures and find only twenty. God had struck their crops with blight, mildew, and hail. "Yet you didn't turn to me."

But now things were different. They had laid the foundation of the temple. They had turned back to God. "Is the seed yet in the barn? Yes, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree haven't produced. From today I will bless you."

> **REAL TALK** **From Today**
>
> It was the middle of winter. The seed was still in the barn, not yet planted. The trees hadn't produced fruit yet. Nothing looked different. But God said, From today I will bless you. The people had to trust God's promise before they saw

the results. That's what faith looks like. Maybe you've recently made a decision to follow God more closely, and nothing seems different yet. Keep going. God's blessing often starts before we can see it.

Then came Haggai's fourth and final message, delivered on the same day. This one was just for Zerubbabel.

"I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations." All the world's powers would be overthrown. Chariots and horses would be thrown down.

Then God made a promise to Zerubbabel. "In that day, says the LORD of Armies, I will take you, Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, says the LORD, and will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, says the LORD of Armies."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Signet Ring**

A signet ring was a ring with a personal seal engraved on it. Kings and officials pressed it into clay or wax to sign official documents. It was like a signature, a password, and an ID card all in one. Whoever had the king's signet ring had the king's authority. It was so valuable that the owner kept it on his hand at all times. For God to call Zerubbabel His signet ring meant that God had chosen him, valued him, and would act through him.

This promise was huge, because of something that had happened about eighty years earlier.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Reversing a Curse**

Zerubbabel's grandfather was King Jehoiachin, also called Coniah or Jechoniah. He was one of the last kings of Judah before the exile. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God had pronounced a severe judgment on him. "As I live," says the LORD, "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet on my right hand, I would still pluck you from there." Jeremiah also said that none of his descendants would prosper sitting on David's throne. It

looked like David's royal line had been cut off. But in Haggai 2:23, God used the exact same image. He took Zerubbabel, Jehoiachin's grandson, and said, I will make you like a signet ring. God reversed the curse and showed that David's family line was still part of His plan.

Zerubbabel never became a king. Judah was still under Persian rule. So how was the promise fulfilled? Many Christians believe it pointed beyond Zerubbabel to one of his descendants: Jesus, the Son of David, who would be the true King.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Zerubbabel in Jesus' Family Tree**

Zerubbabel appears in both genealogies of Jesus in the New Testament. Matthew says, "After the exile to Babylon, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel." Luke also lists "the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel." Matthew and Luke trace Jesus' family through different sons of David, and Christians have explained the differences in several ways. Many believe Matthew traces Joseph's legal royal line, while Luke may trace Mary's family or Joseph's biological line. Either way, both include Zerubbabel. God's signet ring was part of the family that led to Jesus.

REAL TALK **Chosen**

God told Zerubbabel, I have chosen you. Zerubbabel came from a family with a broken history. His grandfather had been judged by God. But God still chose him. Maybe you come from a family with a messy past. Maybe you've made mistakes yourself. God's choice isn't based on your family history or your performance. If you belong to Jesus, God has chosen you too. Paul wrote that God chose His people in Christ before the foundation of the world. You are valuable to Him, like a signet ring on His hand.

The book of Haggai ends there. Four short messages, less than four months, and a whole community changed. And about five years later, in 515 BC, the temple was finished.

KEY VERSE

In that day, says the LORD of Armies, I will take you, Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel,' says the LORD, 'and will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,' says the LORD of Armies."

Haggai 2:23 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What did Haggai's questions to the priests teach about holiness and uncleanness?
2. Why do you think God said From today I will bless you before the people saw any results?
3. Why was it so significant that God called Zerubbabel His signet ring?
4. How does it feel to know that God chooses people from broken families and messy pasts?

TRY THIS *Think about the influences in your life, like friends, media, and habits. Choose one that's pulling you away from God and make a change this week. Then choose one good influence to spend more time with.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Haggai promised that "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former." Jewish readers have long treasured this promise of God's glory returning to His house. Christians believe it came true in a surprising way: in Jesus.

The temple that Zerubbabel built was later expanded by King Herod, but it was the same temple, the second temple. And into that temple walked Jesus. As a baby, He was presented there, and old Simeon called Him "a light for revelation to the nations, and the glory of your people Israel." As an adult, He taught there and healed there. The glory of God Himself was walking through its courts. That's why its latter glory was greater than Solomon's. But Jesus went further. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John explains, "But he spoke of the temple of his body." Jesus is the true temple, the place where God meets us. Haggai taught that holiness isn't contagious, but uncleanness is. When an unclean person touched something, it became unclean. But Jesus reversed that. When He touched a man with leprosy, the leprosy didn't spread to Jesus. Instead, Jesus said, "I want to. Be made clean." His holiness spread to the man. And Zerubbabel, God's signet ring, appears in Jesus' family tree. "Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel." God kept His promise to David alive, all the way to Jesus, the King whose kingdom will never be shaken.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He promises to be with you.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Haggai shows that uncleanness spreads and we cannot make ourselves holy. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus makes the unclean clean.

Jesus, the true temple, touched the unclean and made them clean. He died for our sins and rose again.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Put Him first.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Haggai says, Consider your ways. You can put God first today. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've gone my own way. I've put my own plans first and put You off until later. I can't make myself clean. Thank You that Jesus, the true temple, touches the unclean and makes them clean, that He died for my sins and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me put You first, be strong, and do the work You give me, knowing You are with me. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read all of Haggai, then Ezra 5-6 and John 2:13-22.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Stop putting it off. Name one thing God has been asking you to do, and take the first step this week.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Haggai asked his listeners to consider their ways, and that takes time. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Haggai is right, God is with His people, and He is still building something glorious.

'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of Armies; 'and in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of Armies.

Haggai 2:9 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

The King Who Rides a Donkey

Zechariah, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Rides a Donkey: The Book of Zechariah, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Imagine reading a book written five hundred years before you were born, and finding your own week described in it. Not vaguely, but in detail: how you'd arrive in town, what you'd ride, how much someone would be paid to betray you, what would happen to your friends, and what would happen to your body.

That's what reading Zechariah is like for anyone who knows the story of Jesus' last week. Zechariah lived about five hundred years before Jesus, yet his book contains more prophecies about the final days of Jesus' life than almost any other book of the Old Testament. A humble King riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Thirty pieces of silver thrown to a potter. A shepherd struck down and sheep scattered. A pierced one, mourned like an only son. A fountain opened to wash away sin.

But Zechariah isn't only about the future. It's also full of strange night visions, flying scrolls, horses, lampstands, and a high priest in dirty clothes being accused by Satan. And it's full of hope for a small group of discouraged people trying to rebuild their lives after disaster. Zechariah's name means the LORD remembers. His message is that God hasn't forgotten His people, and He hasn't forgotten you.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Zechariah in six chapters: night visions and clean clothes (Zechariah 1-3), not by might, nor by power (4-6), fast days turned to feasts (7-8), the King on a donkey (9-10), thirty pieces of silver and the pierced one (11-13), and everyday life made holy (14).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Zechariah was, when he lived, and how his book is organized. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how to understand the end-times visions in Zechariah 12-14, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Zechariah in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-eighth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Zechariah, whose name means the LORD remembers, was a younger partner of Haggai who began prophesying in 520 BC to the Jews who had returned from exile. This book explains his night visions, his call to genuine justice and mercy, and his many prophecies that the New Testament connects with Jesus' final week: the King on a donkey (9:9), thirty pieces of silver (11:12-13), the pierced one (12:10), the cleansing fountain (13:1), and the struck shepherd (13:7).

It notes fairly that some scholars think chapters 9-14 come from a later time or author, while others hold that Zechariah wrote the whole book. On the end-times visions of chapter 14, it presents the main Christian views without pushing one timeline. It handles the harsh war imagery of chapters 12-14 honestly but without graphic detail.

Real Talk boxes address returning to God, guilt and accusation, small beginnings, relying on God's Spirit rather than our own strength, empty religion, safety for children and the elderly,

humility, hope, betrayal, grief, and seeing everyday life as holy. A brief safety box encourages teens dealing with betrayal or abuse to talk with a trusted adult and lists Childhelp (1-800-422-4453), 988, and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows Zechariah as a blueprint of Passion Week, from Palm Sunday to Jesus' eternal reign. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will welcome the humble King who rides a donkey, and find in Him the fountain that washes away sin.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

The LORD Remembers

Zechariah's name means the LORD remembers. It's a perfect name for his message. The people of Judah had been through disaster: their city destroyed, their temple burned, and their families carried off to Babylon for seventy years. Some wondered whether God had forgotten them. Zechariah's whole book answers that question. God remembered His promises, His people, and His plans.

A Priest and a Prophet

Zechariah was the son of Berechiah and the grandson of Iddo. Nehemiah lists Iddo as the head of a priestly family that returned from Babylon, so Zechariah was probably both a priest and a prophet. In one vision, an angel calls him a young man, so he may have been fairly young when he began. Ezra mentions him alongside Haggai as one of the two prophets who encouraged the people to rebuild the temple.

Haggai's Partner

Zechariah began prophesying in the eighth month of the second year of King Darius, around October or November 520 BC, just two months after Haggai's first message. Haggai was blunt and practical: get back to work. Zechariah was visionary and hopeful: here's what God is going to do. Together, they got the temple built. It was finished in 515 BC.

How the Book Is Organized

Zechariah has two main parts. Chapters 1-8 are dated to the time of Darius and include eight night visions and messages about the rebuilding. Chapters 9-14 are undated and look further ahead, to a coming King, a rejected Shepherd, and the final Day of the LORD. Because the two halves feel different, some scholars think chapters 9-14 were written later, possibly by another prophet. Others believe Zechariah wrote them later in his life. Either way, both halves are part of Scripture, and the New Testament quotes both.

A Passion Week Blueprint

The New Testament quotes or alludes to Zechariah dozens of times, especially in the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' last week and in the book of Revelation. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Judas was paid thirty pieces of silver, which were used to buy a potter's field. Jesus quoted Zechariah on the night He was arrested. John saw Zechariah fulfilled when a soldier pierced Jesus' side. Few Old Testament books point to the cross so clearly.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Zechariah 1-3): Night visions and clean clothes.

Chapter 2 (Zechariah 4-6): Not by might, nor by power.

Chapter 3 (Zechariah 7-8): Fast days turned to feasts.

Chapter 4 (Zechariah 9-10): The King on a donkey.

Chapter 5 (Zechariah 11-13): Thirty pieces of silver and the pierced one.

Chapter 6 (Zechariah 14): Everyday life made holy.

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CHAPTER 1

Night Visions and Clean Clothes

Zechariah 1–3

Zechariah's first message is short and simple. God reminded the people that He had been very displeased with their ancestors. Then He gave an invitation. "Return to me, says the LORD of Armies, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Armies."

Notice who moves first. God invites the people to return. And when they do, He promises to return to them.

> **REAL TALK** **Return to Me**
>
> Maybe you've drifted from God. You stopped praying, stopped reading the Bible, or started living in a way you know isn't right. Zechariah 1:3 is an open door. God doesn't say, Clean up your life first and then maybe I'll consider taking you back. He says, Return to Me, and I will return to you. Coming back to God can start with one honest prayer: God, I've drifted. I want to come back. He's already waiting.

God reminded them of their ancestors, who ignored the earlier prophets. "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?" Both the ancestors and the prophets were gone. But God's words were still true. They had come to pass, just as He said.

Three months later, Zechariah had a series of eight visions, all in one night. It was "the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month," around February 519 BC.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Eight Night Visions**

Zechariah's eight visions in chapters 1-6 are like scenes in a dream. Each one uses strange images: horses, horns, a measuring line, a lampstand, a flying scroll, and chariots. An angel explains each vision to Zechariah, often after he asks, What are these? Scholars notice that the visions seem arranged in a pattern, with the first and last both featuring horses, and the central visions focusing on the high priest and the governor. Together, they show that God was watching over the world, protecting Jerusalem, and preparing to dwell with His people again.

In the first vision, Zechariah saw a man riding a red horse, standing among myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown, and white horses. They were God's scouts, sent to patrol the earth. Their report: "We have walked back and forth through the earth, and behold, all the earth is at rest and in peace."

That sounds like good news. But it wasn't. The nations that had crushed Jerusalem were living comfortably, while God's people were still struggling in ruins. So the angel of the LORD prayed, "O LORD of Armies, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah?"

And God answered "with kind and comforting words." He said, "I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy." He was angry with the nations who had gone too far in punishing His people. And He promised, "I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it."

REAL TALK **Kind and Comforting Words**

When you're hurting, the words people say matter a lot. Zechariah 1:13 says God answered with kind and comforting words. That tells us something about God's heart. He isn't harsh with people who are struggling. He speaks gently to the brokenhearted. If you're in a hard season, read some of God's

comforting words, like Psalm 23, Isaiah 40, or Matthew 11:28-30. And think about who in your life needs kind and comforting words from you this week.

In the second vision, Zechariah saw four horns, representing the nations that had scattered Judah. Then he saw four craftsmen, who had come to throw down those horns. No matter how powerful the enemy nations seemed, God had people ready to break their power.

In the third vision, Zechariah saw a man with a measuring line, going to measure Jerusalem. But an angel stopped him with a message: Jerusalem would someday be so full of people that it would be like a city without walls. Then God made an amazing promise. "For I, says the LORD, will be to her a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory in the middle of her."

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Wall of Fire**

In the ancient world, a city without walls was defenseless. Walls were the most important part of a city's security. When the exiles returned, Jerusalem's walls were still in ruins, and wouldn't be rebuilt until Nehemiah's time, about seventy-five years later. So God's promise was stunning. He Himself would be their wall, a wall of fire around them. And He would be the glory inside the city. God would protect them from the outside and fill them from the inside.

God also said that "he who touches you touches the apple of his eye." The apple of the eye is the pupil, the most sensitive and protected part of the eye. That's how precious God's people were to Him.

Then God promised that many nations would join themselves to Him and become His people. "Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion! For behold, I come and I will dwell within you, says the LORD."

The fourth vision is one of the most powerful scenes in the Old Testament. "He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the LORD's angel, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Satan the Accuser**

The name Satan means adversary or accuser. In the Old Testament, Satan appears as an accuser in the book of Job and here in Zechariah. He stands at Joshua's right hand, the place where an accuser stood in an ancient court, ready to point out every reason Joshua deserved to be condemned. Revelation calls Satan "the accuser of our brothers," who "accuses them before our God day and night." But in both Zechariah and Revelation, the accuser loses.

Joshua was standing there in filthy clothes. As high priest, he was supposed to wear pure, holy garments to represent the people before God. But his clothes were disgusting, a picture of his own sin and the sin of the whole nation. Satan had a strong case.

But before Satan could say a word, God spoke. "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Yes, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Isn't this a burning stick plucked out of the fire?"

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Burning Stick**

A burning stick plucked from the fire is a log pulled out of a fire just before it burns up completely. It's scorched and blackened, but saved. That's how God saw Joshua and the people of Judah. They had been through the fire of exile. They were damaged and imperfect. But God had pulled them out because He had chosen them. The prophet Amos used a similar picture of a people rescued from burning.

Then God gave an order. "Take the filthy garments off him." And He said to Joshua, "Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe you with rich clothing." Zechariah couldn't

help himself. He spoke up: "Let them set a clean turban on his head." So they did.

Joshua didn't clean his own clothes. He didn't argue with Satan. He didn't promise to do better. God removed his sin and clothed him in clean, rich garments.

REAL TALK **When You Feel Accused**

Have you ever felt like a voice inside your head keeps reminding you of everything you've done wrong? You're not good enough. God could never love you after what you did. You'll never change. That's what the accuser does. Some of what he says might even be true. Joshua's clothes really were filthy. But the accuser doesn't get the last word. God does. Paul wrote, "Who could bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies." If you belong to Jesus, God has taken your filthy clothes and given you clean ones. When the accuser speaks, you can answer with God's words.

Then God made a promise about the future. "For, behold, I will bring out my servant, the Branch." And He said, "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Branch**

The Branch was a title for the Messiah. Isaiah and Jeremiah both used it to describe a coming King from David's family line, like a new shoot growing from a tree stump that had been cut down. David's royal family had been cut down by the exile. But God promised that a new Branch would grow from it. Many Christians notice that the promise to remove the iniquity of the land in one day points to the day Jesus died on the cross.

KEY VERSE

He answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, "Take the filthy garments off him." To him he said, "Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe you with rich clothing."

Zechariah 3:4 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does Zechariah 1:3 teach about how God responds when we return to Him?
2. What does it mean that God would be a wall of fire around Jerusalem and the glory inside it?
3. How did Satan try to accuse Joshua? How did God respond?
4. What accusations do you hear in your own head? How could God's words answer them?

TRY THIS *Write down one accusation you often hear in your mind. Next to it, write a promise from God that answers it, like Romans 8:1 or Zechariah 3:4. Read it whenever the accusation comes back.*

CHAPTER 2

Not by Might, Nor by Power

Zechariah 4–6

In the fifth vision, an angel woke Zechariah "as a man who is wakened out of his sleep." Then the angel asked, "What do you see?"

Zechariah saw a golden lampstand with a bowl on top and seven lamps, each with pipes feeding it oil. Next to it were two olive trees, one on each side.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Lampstand**
>
> In the tabernacle and temple, there was a golden lampstand called a menorah, with seven branches. The priests kept it burning with olive oil day and night. It was a symbol of God's presence and light among His people. In Zechariah's vision, the lampstand didn't need priests to keep it filled. Oil flowed directly into it from the olive trees. The light would keep burning, not because of human effort, but because of God's endless supply.

Zechariah asked what it meant. And the angel gave one of the most famous answers in the Bible. "This is the LORD's word to Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Armies."

Zerubbabel was the governor leading the rebuilding of the temple. He faced huge obstacles: opposition from enemies, a lack of money, and discouraged workers. God's message was clear. This project

wouldn't succeed through military strength or human power. It would succeed through God's Spirit.

> **REAL TALK** **Not by Might**
>
> We live in a world that tells you to rely on yourself. Work harder. Be stronger. Hustle. And effort is good. But some things in life are too big for you to handle alone: changing your own heart, breaking a bad habit, healing a broken relationship, or growing in faith. Zechariah 4:6 says the most important things happen by God's Spirit, not by your strength. That doesn't mean you do nothing. It means you depend on God while you work. Before you face something big, pray: God, I can't do this by my own might. Do it by Your Spirit.

Then God said, "Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain." Whatever mountain of obstacles stood in the way would be flattened. And Zerubbabel would bring out the capstone, the final stone of the temple, with shouts of "Grace, grace, to it!"

God also promised, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house. His hands shall also finish it." And then came another famous question. "Indeed, who despises the day of small things?"

> **REAL TALK** **The Day of Small Things**
>
> The new temple looked small and unimpressive compared to Solomon's. Some people looked down on it. But God said, Don't despise small beginnings. Big things often start small. A tiny seed becomes a tree. One conversation becomes a friendship. One prayer becomes a habit. One act of courage changes a school. Jesus compared God's kingdom to a mustard seed, one of the smallest seeds, which grows into a large plant. Don't be discouraged if your faith, your efforts, or your church seem small right now. God loves to work through small things.

Zechariah then asked about the two olive trees. The angel said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the

whole earth." Most scholars believe they represent Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor, the two leaders God had chosen and anointed for this time.

In the sixth vision, Zechariah saw a flying scroll, about thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide, roughly the size of a billboard. It was a curse going out over the land against thieves and people who lied under oath. God's law would enter their homes and expose their sin.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Flying Scroll**
>
> The flying scroll in Zechariah 5 was twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide. A cubit was about eighteen inches, so it measured roughly thirty by fifteen feet. Interestingly, those are the same measurements as the porch of Solomon's temple. The scroll may represent God's law going out from His house. It names two sins in particular, stealing and swearing falsely, which may represent the two parts of the Ten Commandments: how we treat others and how we treat God's name.

In the seventh vision, Zechariah saw a woman sitting in a basket, the kind used to measure grain. The angel said, "This is Wickedness." He pushed her down into the basket and slammed a heavy lead lid on top. Then two women with wings like storks lifted the basket and carried it away to Shinar, another name for Babylon. God was removing wickedness from His people and sending it back where it belonged.

> **REAL TALK** **Getting Rid of Wickedness**
>
> In Zechariah's vision, wickedness had to be trapped and carried far away. Sometimes sin needs that kind of serious action. If there's something in your life that keeps pulling you away from God, like an app, a website, a relationship, or a habit, you might need to put a lid on it and get it out of your life. Jesus said that if something causes you to sin, get rid of it. Ask a trusted friend or adult to help you. You don't have to fight alone.

In the eighth and final vision, Zechariah saw four chariots coming out from between two bronze mountains, pulled by red, black, white, and dappled horses. They were the four winds of heaven, going out across the earth. God was in control of the whole world.

After the visions, God gave Zechariah a strange assignment. Some exiles had just arrived from Babylon with gifts of silver and gold. God told Zechariah to take that silver and gold, make a crown, and place it on the head of Joshua the high priest.

That was shocking. In Israel, priests and kings were separate. Priests came from the tribe of Levi. Kings came from the tribe of Judah. No priest was supposed to wear a royal crown.

But God explained. "Behold, the man whose name is the Branch! He will grow up out of his place; and he will build the LORD's temple." And then: "He will bear the glory, and will sit and rule on his throne. He will be a priest on his throne. The counsel of peace will be between them both."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Priest and King**
>
> Crowning Joshua was a sign pointing to the future. Joshua himself would not become king. Instead, he represented the Branch, the coming Messiah, who would be both priest and king. The book of Hebrews explains that Jesus is our great high priest, like Melchizedek, who was both "king of Salem" and "priest of God Most High." Remarkably, the name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua. A man named Joshua was crowned as a sign of a coming Priest-King, and five centuries later, a man named Joshua, Jesus, fulfilled that sign.

God also said that "those who are far off shall come and build in the LORD's temple." People from distant lands would help build God's house.

KEY VERSE

Then he answered and spoke to me, saying, "This is the LORD's word to Zerubbabel, saying, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD of Armies.

Zechariah 4:6 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does the lampstand fed directly by olive trees teach about God's Spirit?
2. Where are you tempted to rely on your own might instead of God's Spirit?
3. What small beginning in your life might God want to grow?
4. Why was crowning a priest so surprising? How does it point to Jesus?

TRY THIS *Write Zechariah 4:6 on a card. Before every big challenge this week, like a test, a game, or a hard conversation, read it and pray for God's Spirit to help you.*

CHAPTER 3

Fast Days Turned to Feasts

Zechariah 7–8

Almost two years after his night visions, around December 518 BC, Zechariah received a delegation with a question. People from the town of Bethel came to ask the priests and prophets, "Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?"

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Fasts**
>
> During the exile, the Jews began observing several fast days to mourn the destruction of Jerusalem. The fast of the fifth month remembered the burning of the temple. The fast of the seventh month remembered the murder of Gedaliah, the governor Babylon appointed after the fall of Jerusalem. Later, Zechariah also mentions fasts in the fourth month, when the city walls were breached, and the tenth month, when the siege began. Jewish communities still observe some of these days today, especially Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the fifth month, which mourns the destruction of both temples.

It was a reasonable question. The temple was being rebuilt. Did they still need to mourn its destruction?

But God answered with a question of His own. "When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month for these seventy years, did you at all fast to me, really to me?"

In other words, Who were you really fasting for? Was it for Me, or for yourselves? Were your fasts about seeking God, or were they just rituals?

> **REAL TALK** **Going Through the Motions**
>
> It's possible to do all the right religious things for the wrong reasons. You can go to church because your parents make you, sing songs without thinking about the words, pray before meals out of habit, or serve so other people will notice. God isn't against religious practices. But He cares about your heart. Before you pray, worship, or serve, try asking yourself, Am I doing this for God, really for God? Even if your answer is honest and messy, bring that honesty to Him.

Then God reminded them what He had always wanted. "Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother. Don't oppress the widow, the fatherless, the foreigner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart."

That's what God cares about: justice, kindness, compassion, and protecting the vulnerable. Their ancestors had refused to listen to these words. They made their hearts as hard as flint. And that's why the exile happened.

> **REAL TALK** **Who's Vulnerable Around You?**
>
> God named four kinds of vulnerable people: widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor. These were people without power or protection. Who are the vulnerable people around you? Maybe a kid in foster care, a classmate who just moved from another country, an elderly neighbor living alone, or a family struggling financially. God's people are called to notice them, protect them, and show them kindness. It can be as simple as a conversation, an invitation, or a helping hand.

Then, in chapter 8, God made ten beautiful promises, each starting with, This is what the LORD of Armies says. He was jealous for Zion with great love. He would return to Jerusalem and live there. The city would be called the City of Truth.

And then comes one of the sweetest pictures in the Bible. "Old men and old women will again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand because of their old age. The streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Old and Young**

In war-torn cities, the elderly and children are often the most vulnerable. They can't fight or flee easily. A city where old people can sit safely in the streets and children can play freely is a city at peace. When the exiles returned, Jerusalem was mostly ruins with few people. Zechariah's picture would have seemed almost too good to be true. God even said, If it seems impossible to you, does that mean it's impossible for Me?

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety: Everyone Deserves to Be Safe**

Zechariah's vision of children playing safely and old people resting without fear shows what God wants for His world. Every child deserves to be safe at home, at school, and online. If someone is hurting you, threatening you, or making you feel unsafe, it's not your fault, and you don't have to keep it secret. Talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, teacher, school counselor, or pastor. You can also call or text Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453 any time. If you're thinking about hurting yourself, call or text 988. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

God promised to bring His people back from east and west. He said, "Don't be afraid. Let your hands be strong." Just as He had once planned disaster for their disobedient ancestors, He now planned to do good to them.

But He also reminded them how to live. "These are the things that you shall do: speak every man the truth with his neighbor. Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates, and let none of you devise evil in your hearts against his neighbor, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the LORD."

Then God answered the original question about fasting. "The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months shall be for the house of Judah joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace."

The days of mourning would become days of celebration. Grief would be turned into joy.

> **REAL TALK** **Mourning into Dancing**
>
> Everyone goes through seasons of grief: a death in the family, a breakup, a move, a loss. Zechariah promises that God can turn fast days into feast days. That doesn't mean pretending grief isn't real or rushing through it. Jesus Himself wept. But it does mean that grief isn't the end of the story for God's people. Psalm 30 says God can turn mourning into dancing. If you're grieving right now, it's okay to be sad. And it's okay to hope.

The chapter ends with a vision of the nations coming to God. People from many cities would say to each other, "Let's go speedily to entreat the favor of the LORD." And then: "In those days, ten men out of all the languages of the nations will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Grabbing a Robe**
>
> The word translated skirt refers to the edge or corner of a robe. Jewish men wore tassels on the corners of their garments, as the law commanded, to remind them of God's commandments. Grabbing someone's robe was a way of begging, Take me with you. Zechariah pictures people from every language

desperately wanting to know the God of Israel. In the Gospels, people grabbed the edge of Jesus' robe to be healed. Christians see Zechariah's vision coming true as people from every nation come to God through Jesus, a Jewish man.

KEY VERSE

The LORD of Armies says: "In those days, ten men out of all the languages of the nations will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

Zechariah 8:23 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God asked, Did you really fast for Me?
2. What four kinds of vulnerable people did God mention? Who are the vulnerable people around you?
3. What does the picture of old people and children in the streets tell you about what God wants for the world?
4. Would people want to grab your robe because they've heard God is with you? Why or why not?

TRY THIS *Choose one vulnerable person in your life, like an elderly neighbor, a new student, or a younger kid, and do something kind for them this week.*

CHAPTER 4

The King on a Donkey

Zechariah 9–10

Chapter 9 begins the second half of Zechariah. There are no more dates, and no more night visions. Instead, the prophet looks far into the future.

It opens with judgment on the nations around Israel: Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Sidon, and the Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod. Tyre in particular had built itself a stronghold and piled up silver like dust. But God would strike her power in the sea, and she would be devoured by fire.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Alexander the Great**
>
> Many scholars notice that the route of judgment in Zechariah 9:1-8 closely matches the path of Alexander the Great's army in 332 BC. After defeating the Persians, Alexander marched south through Syria, past Damascus and Hamath, then besieged the island city of Tyre for seven months. He built a causeway through the sea to reach it and then destroyed it. Next, he conquered Gaza. Surprisingly, ancient historians report that Alexander did not destroy Jerusalem. Zechariah 9:8 promises that God would encamp around His house to protect it. Some scholars think this section was written after these events, while others see it as prophecy fulfilled.

Even in judgment, there was hope for the nations. God said that even the Philistines would one day become "a remnant for our God," like a clan in Judah.

And then comes one of the most famous prophecies in the Bible. "Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why a Donkey?**
>
> In the ancient world, conquering kings usually rode war horses or chariots into cities they had captured. A horse meant military power. But a donkey was different. Donkeys were humble work animals, used for carrying loads and for travel in peacetime. Still, donkeys had a royal history in Israel. When David made Solomon king, Solomon rode on David's own mule to his coronation. A king riding a donkey was coming in peace and humility, not in conquest.

This King would be righteous. He would bring salvation. And He would be lowly, or humble. Then Zechariah said, "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The battle bow will be cut off; and he will speak peace to the nations. His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth."

This King wouldn't need chariots, horses, or bows. He would bring peace, and His kingdom would stretch across the whole earth.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Palm Sunday**
>
> About five hundred years after Zechariah, Jesus approached Jerusalem a few days before the Passover. He sent two disciples to bring Him a donkey and its colt. Then He rode into the city while crowds spread their cloaks and palm branches on the road and shouted, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Matthew and John both quote Zechariah 9:9. John adds that the disciples didn't understand what was happening at first. Only later, after Jesus rose from the dead, did they

remember that these things had been written about Him. Christians celebrate this event on Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week.

REAL TALK **A Humble King**

Most people imagine powerful leaders as loud, flashy, and intimidating. Jesus showed a different kind of power. He came humbly, riding a donkey. He washed His disciples' feet. He welcomed children. He touched people others avoided. Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble in heart." That doesn't mean He was weak. It means He used His power to serve and save. If you want to follow Him, humility is part of the package. Real strength looks like serving others, not showing off.

Then God spoke to His people who were still scattered. "As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I have set free your prisoners from the pit in which is no water."

An empty pit, or cistern, was sometimes used as a prison. Joseph was thrown into one by his brothers. Jeremiah was lowered into one. It was a place of hopelessness. But God promised to set His people free.

Then He called them by a beautiful name. "Turn to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope! Even today I declare that I will restore double to you."

REAL TALK **Prisoners of Hope**

Prisoners of hope is one of the most beautiful phrases in the Bible. A prisoner is stuck. But a prisoner of hope is someone who can't escape hope, no matter what. Maybe you feel stuck right now, in a bad situation at home, in anxiety or depression, in a habit you can't break, or in a season that seems endless. Zechariah calls you to turn to the stronghold, to God Himself. God promises to restore double, more than was lost. Hope isn't wishful thinking. It's trust in a God who keeps His promises. If you're struggling with hopelessness, please also talk to a trusted adult, or call or text 988.

The rest of chapter 9 describes God fighting for His people like a warrior, and then caring for them like a shepherd. "The LORD their God will save them in that day as the flock of his people; for they are like the jewels of a crown." Then Zechariah exclaims, "For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!"

In chapter 10, God tells His people to ask Him for rain, not to rely on idols or fortune-tellers. "For the teraphim have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie." The people were wandering like sheep "because there is no shepherd."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Teraphim and Diviners**

Teraphim were small household idols that people used to try to get guidance or blessing. Rachel stole her father's teraphim when she left home in Genesis 31. Diviners tried to predict the future by reading signs, like the patterns in animal livers or the movements of stars. God says all of it was empty. Today, people still seek guidance from horoscopes, tarot cards, and psychics. Zechariah's message is the same: those things can't truly guide you. God can.

God promised to punish the bad shepherds and to care for His flock Himself. From Judah would come "the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler together." Many Christians see these as pictures of the Messiah: the cornerstone that holds the building together, the tent peg that keeps everything secure, and the battle bow that wins the victory.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Cornerstone**

The cornerstone was the first and most important stone laid in a building. It set the direction and alignment for everything else. Psalm 118 says, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Jesus applied that verse to Himself, and Peter and Paul both called Jesus the cornerstone of God's people. Zechariah's promise that the cornerstone would come from Judah fits with Jesus, who was from the tribe of Judah.

Then God promised to gather His scattered people from everywhere. “I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back, for I have mercy on them. They will be as though I had not cast them off.” He would whistle for them and gather them, so many that there wouldn’t be room enough for them all.

REAL TALK **As Though I Had Not Cast Them Off**

God promised to restore His people so completely that it would be as though He had never sent them away. That’s what God’s forgiveness is like. He doesn’t just tolerate us after we come back. He restores us fully. If you’ve made big mistakes, you might feel like you’ll always be a second-class Christian. But God doesn’t see you that way. When He forgives, He restores you completely, as though you had never been cast off.

KEY VERSE

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zechariah 9:9 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the King in Zechariah 9:9 rides a donkey instead of a war horse?
2. How did Jesus fulfill Zechariah 9:9 on Palm Sunday?
3. What does it mean to be a prisoner of hope?
4. Where do people look for guidance today instead of God?

TRY THIS *Read Matthew 21:1-11 and Zechariah 9:9-10 side by side. Write down every connection you notice. Then thank Jesus for coming as a humble King.*

CHAPTER 5

Thirty Pieces of Silver and the Pierced One

Zechariah 11–13

Chapter 11 is one of the most mysterious passages in Zechariah. God told the prophet to act out a drama, playing the part of a shepherd. "Feed the flock of slaughter."

The flock was God's people. They were being bought and sold by people who didn't care about them. Their own shepherds, their leaders, showed them no pity. Some even said, "Blessed be the LORD, for I am rich."

So Zechariah became their shepherd. He took two staffs. He called one "Favor" and the other "Union." He cared for the flock, especially the oppressed. He got rid of three bad shepherds in one month.

But the flock rejected him. They hated their shepherd. So he broke the staff called Favor, a sign that God's protection was being withdrawn.

Then came one of the most surprising moments in the Old Testament. Zechariah asked for his wages. "If you think it best, give me my wages; and if not, keep them. So they weighed for my wages thirty pieces of silver."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Thirty Pieces of Silver**

Thirty pieces of silver was not a lot of money. In the law of Moses, it was the amount paid when an ox gored a slave to death. It was the price of a slave. By paying the shepherd thirty pieces of silver, the people were saying he was worth no more than a slave. It was an insult. That's why God responded with sarcasm, calling it "the handsome price that I was valued at by them."

Notice that God took the insult personally. The people weren't just rejecting Zechariah. They were rejecting God.

Then God said, "Throw it to the potter." So Zechariah took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter in the LORD's house.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Judas and the Potter's Field**

Five centuries later, Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, went to the chief priests and asked what they would give him to betray Jesus. "So they weighed out for him thirty pieces of silver." After Jesus was condemned, Judas was overwhelmed with remorse. He brought the money back and threw it down in the temple. The priests wouldn't put it in the treasury, because it was blood money. So they used it to buy a potter's field, a burial place for strangers. Matthew says this fulfilled prophecy, mentioning Jeremiah. Many scholars think Matthew combined Zechariah's thirty pieces of silver with Jeremiah's prophecies about a potter and buying a field, naming the more prominent prophet.

REAL TALK **Betrayal**

Jesus was betrayed by a close friend for a small amount of money. If you've ever been betrayed, Jesus knows exactly how that feels. Betrayal can make you feel angry, hurt, embarrassed, or afraid to trust anyone again. Those feelings are real. Jesus can comfort you because He's been there. And He can help you heal, in time. If someone you trusted has hurt or abused you, please tell a trusted adult. You can call or text Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453. If you are in danger, call 911.

Then Zechariah broke the second staff, Union, a sign that the unity between Judah and Israel was being broken. After that, God warned that He would allow a worthless shepherd to rule, one who wouldn't care for the sheep but would exploit them.

In chapter 12, the scene shifts to a great battle. All the nations would gather against Jerusalem. But God would make the city like a heavy stone that injured everyone who tried to lift it. He would defend His people and strengthen even the weakest among them.

And then comes a verse that has amazed readers for centuries. "I will pour on David's house and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication. They will look to me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and will grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for his firstborn."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Me Whom They Have Pierced**
>
> Notice who is speaking in Zechariah 12:10. It's God. And He says, They will look to Me whom they have pierced. How can God be pierced? Then the verse shifts from me to him: they shall mourn for him. Jewish interpreters have understood the passage in different ways, sometimes as referring to a righteous person who suffers or to a Messiah figure. Christians believe it points to Jesus, who is both God and a man. John saw it fulfilled at the cross, when "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear." He wrote, "They will look on him whom they pierced." Revelation also says that when Jesus returns, "every eye will see him, including those who pierced him."

Zechariah says the mourning would be like the mourning for an only son or a firstborn, the deepest grief imaginable. He compared it to the mourning at Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo, which may refer to the national grief when good King Josiah was killed

there. Every family would mourn separately, each one feeling personally responsible.

> **REAL TALK** **Godly Grief**
>
> When people realize what their sin cost Jesus, it can bring deep sorrow. That's not a bad thing. Paul wrote that godly sorrow leads to repentance and salvation, without regret. Feeling sorry for your sin isn't meant to crush you. It's meant to bring you back to God, where you find forgiveness. Notice that in Zechariah 12:10, the mourning comes after God pours out a spirit of grace. Grace comes first. Then we see clearly. Then we mourn. Then we're washed clean.

And then comes the promise that follows the mourning. "In that day there will be a fountain opened to David's house and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **A Fountain for Sin**
>
> In the Old Testament, people became clean through washings and sacrifices that had to be repeated over and over. Zechariah promises something new: a fountain that would keep flowing, opened for sin and uncleanness. Christians see this fulfilled in Jesus. When His side was pierced, blood and water flowed out. First John says, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." The old hymn There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood, written by William Cowper in the 1700s, was inspired by Zechariah 13:1.

God also promised to remove idols and false prophets from the land. Then came one more prophecy that Jesus quoted. "Awake, sword, against my shepherd, and against the man who is close to me, says the LORD of Armies. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Night Jesus Was Arrested**
>
> On the night before He died, after the Last Supper, Jesus walked with His disciples to the Mount of Olives. There He said, "All of you will be made to

stumble because of me tonight, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." A few hours later, in the garden of Gethsemane, soldiers arrested Jesus, and His disciples ran away. Notice that in Zechariah, God calls this shepherd "the man who is close to me." The struck shepherd wasn't just any leader. He was God's own companion.

The chapter ends with God refining His people like silver and gold in a fire. "They will call on my name, and I will hear them. I will say, It is my people; and they will say, The LORD is my God."

KEY VERSE

I will pour on David's house and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication. They will look to me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and will grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for his firstborn.

Zechariah 12:10 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the people valued the shepherd at only thirty pieces of silver?
2. How was Zechariah 11:12-13 fulfilled in the story of Judas?
3. What is surprising about God saying They will look to Me whom they have pierced?
4. What does the fountain in Zechariah 13:1 mean for you personally?

TRY THIS *Read the Passion story in Matthew 26-27. Every time you find a connection to Zechariah 11-13, stop and thank Jesus for what He went through for you.*

CHAPTER 6

Everyday Life Made Holy

Zechariah 14

The final chapter of Zechariah is one of the most dramatic passages in the Bible. It describes a coming Day of the LORD, when all nations would gather against Jerusalem. The city would suffer terribly. But then, "the LORD will go out and fight against those nations."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Reading Zechariah 14**
>
> Christians understand Zechariah 14 in different ways. Many believe it describes literal future events connected to Jesus' return, including a final battle in Jerusalem and Jesus' physical return to the Mount of Olives, followed by His reign on earth. Others believe it uses symbolic language to describe God's final victory over evil and the coming of the new creation, with fulfillment through the church and in the new heavens and new earth. Some see partial fulfillments in history, such as Rome's destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Sincere believers hold each of these views. All agree that Jesus will return, defeat evil, and reign forever.

"His feet will stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, making a very great valley."

The Mount of Olives is a ridge just east of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley. It plays an important role in Jesus' story. He wept over Jerusalem from there. He taught His disciples about the end

times there. He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane at its foot. And He ascended to heaven from there.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Mount of Olives**

After Jesus rose from the dead, He met with His disciples for forty days. Then He was taken up into heaven while they watched. Two angels appeared and said, "This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky." Then the disciples "returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called Olivet." Many Christians connect the angels' words with Zechariah 14:4, that the LORD's feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. Today, the slopes of the Mount of Olives are covered with thousands of graves, because many people over the centuries wanted to be buried where they believed the Messiah would come.

Zechariah describes a unique day, neither day nor night, when "at evening time there will be light." And then, "It will happen in that day that living waters will go out from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea, and half of them toward the western sea. It will be so in summer and in winter."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Living Waters**

Living water meant fresh, flowing water from a spring, as opposed to stagnant water in a cistern. In a dry land, it was precious. Ezekiel saw a river flowing from the temple and bringing life wherever it went. Zechariah adds that it would flow both east, to the Dead Sea, and west, to the Mediterranean, all year long. Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!" Revelation describes "a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

REAL TALK **Living Water**

Jesus offered living water to a Samaritan woman at a well. He said that whoever drinks the water He gives "will never thirst again." Everyone is thirsty for something: love, meaning, approval, peace. We try to satisfy that thirst with relationships, success, entertainment, or popularity. But those things are

like drinking salt water. They leave us thirstier. Only Jesus can truly satisfy. If you feel empty or restless, bring that thirst to Him.

Then comes the key verse of the chapter. "The LORD will be King over all the earth. In that day the LORD will be one, and his name one."

This echoes the Shema, Israel's great confession of faith from Deuteronomy 6: Hear, Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one. In Zechariah's vision, the whole world would finally acknowledge what Israel had always confessed. There would be one God, one King, and one name above all others.

REAL TALK **King Over All**

Right now, it can feel like the world is ruled by money, power, politics, technology, or chaos. But Zechariah says that one day, the LORD will be King over all the earth. No more competing gods. No more corrupt rulers. No more injustice. That future can give you hope and perspective today. When the news is scary, when leaders fail, or when life feels out of control, remember who the real King is. Jesus taught us to pray, Let your Kingdom come. One day, that prayer will be completely answered.

Jerusalem would be lifted up and inhabited safely, and there would be "no more curse." The nations that had fought against Jerusalem would be judged. Zechariah describes that judgment in harsh terms, a plague and panic among God's enemies. This language is part of the prophets' way of showing God's final victory over evil, and Christians understand it as God's own justice, never as permission for people to harm anyone today.

Then, surprisingly, Zechariah says that survivors from the nations would come to Jerusalem every year to worship the King and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. Enemies would become worshipers.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Feast of Booths**

The Feast of Booths, also called Tabernacles, celebrated the harvest and remembered God's care for Israel in the wilderness. During the feast, people lived in temporary shelters and prayed for rain for the coming year. Zechariah pictures all nations joining in. In John 7, it was on the last day of this feast that Jesus stood up and invited anyone who was thirsty to come to Him and drink. Many Christians see the feast as a picture of the final harvest, when people from every nation will be gathered to God.

And then the book ends with one of the most surprising images in the Bible. "In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, HOLY TO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD's house will be like the bowls before the altar. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of Armies."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Holy to the LORD**

In the law of Moses, the high priest wore a gold plate on his turban engraved with the words Holy to the LORD. It was the most sacred inscription in Israel. Only the high priest wore it, and only in God's presence. Zechariah says that one day, the same words would be written on horses' bells and ordinary cooking pots. The most common, everyday objects would be as holy as the high priest's crown. The line between sacred and ordinary would disappear.

Think about that. Horse bells were like the car keys of the ancient world. Cooking pots were everyday kitchen supplies. Zechariah says that in God's kingdom, even the most ordinary things would be holy. Every part of life would belong to God.

REAL TALK **Holy to the LORD on Your Backpack**

You don't have to wait for the end of time to start living this way. Paul wrote, "Whether therefore you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." That means your homework, your chores, your sports practice, your part-time job, your texts, your meals, and your friendships can all be holy to the LORD. Imagine writing those words on your backpack, your phone case, or

your bedroom door. It's a reminder that every part of your life matters to God, not just the hour you spend at church on Sunday.

KEY VERSE

The LORD will be King over all the earth. In that day the LORD will be one, and his name one.

Zechariah 14:9 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What are the main ways Christians understand Zechariah 14?
2. Why do you think the Mount of Olives is so important in Jesus' story?
3. What does it mean that the LORD will be King over all the earth?
4. What ordinary part of your life could you dedicate to God as holy?

TRY THIS *Write HOLY TO THE LORD on a sticky note and put it on something ordinary you use every day, like your phone, backpack, or mirror. Each time you see it, ask God to help you honor Him in that part of your life.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Zechariah looked ahead to a King, a Shepherd, a Branch, and a pierced one. Jewish readers have long treasured his visions of God's coming kingdom and the gathering of the nations. Christians believe all of them meet in Jesus, and that Zechariah reads like a blueprint of Passion Week.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, and Matthew wrote, "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet." A few days later, Judas agreed to betray Him, and the priests "weighed out for him thirty pieces of silver." When Judas threw the money back, the priests used it to buy "the potter's field." That same week, on the night He was arrested in Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples, "All of you will be made to stumble because of me tonight, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." And they did scatter. On the cross, "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out." John added, "They will look on him whom they pierced." From the pierced side of Jesus flowed the cleansing Zechariah promised, a fountain "for sin and for uncleanness." Jesus is also the Branch, both Priest and King, who "will be a priest on his throne." In fact, the high priest crowned in Zechariah 6 was named Joshua, and Jesus is the Greek form of that same name. And one day, Zechariah's final vision will come true: "The LORD will be King over all the earth." Revelation says, "He will reign forever and ever!"

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. The LORD remembers you.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Like Joshua the high priest, all of us stand before God in filthy clothes. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus was pierced for you.

Jesus, the humble King, was betrayed, struck, and pierced. He died for our sins and rose again, opening a fountain that washes us clean.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Not by might, nor by power. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Welcome the King.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Zechariah says, Return to Me, and I will return to you. You can return to God today. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've gone my own way. I stand before You in dirty clothes, and I can't make myself clean. Thank You that Jesus, the humble King, was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, struck like a shepherd, and pierced for my sins, and that He rose again. Wash me in the fountain You opened. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me live every ordinary day as holy to You. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Zechariah 9-13, then Matthew 21:1-11 and John 19:31-37.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Make the ordinary holy. Choose one ordinary part of your day, like a meal or your walk to class, and dedicate it to God each day this week.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Zechariah is full of strange visions and big claims. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Zechariah is right, the LORD remembers you, and the humble King is coming to you.

The LORD will be King over all the earth. In that day the LORD will be one, and his name one.

Zechariah 14:9 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

The King Who Sends His Messenger

Malachi, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Sends His Messenger: The Book of Malachi, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Picture a youth group where everyone shows up, sings the songs, and checks the boxes, but nobody really cares anymore. Eyes roll. Phones come out. People give God whatever is left over after everything else. And when someone says God loves them, the honest reaction is, Really? Prove it.

That's the generation Malachi spoke to. They weren't wild rebels. They were bored. They had returned from exile, rebuilt the temple, and waited for God's big promises to come true. Nothing spectacular happened. So they started going through the motions, offering sick animals, breaking promises, and wondering out loud whether serving God was worth it at all.

Malachi answers them with a series of sharp debates. God makes a statement. The people talk back. God answers. It's blunt, sometimes funny, and surprisingly personal. And it ends with a promise of a messenger, a refiner's fire, and a sun rising with healing in its wings. Then the Old Testament goes quiet, and the next voice you hear is a man in the wilderness shouting, Prepare the way.

This is the last book in this series. Let's finish strong.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Malachi in four chapters, one for each chapter of Malachi: leftover worship (Malachi 1), broken promises and bored priests (2), the refiner's fire and the book of

remembrance (3), and the sun of righteousness and the bridge to the New Testament (4).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Malachi was, when he lived, and how his book is organized. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as what Jacob I loved, Esau I hated means, or how tithing applies today, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Malachi in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-ninth and final book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Malachi, whose name means my messenger, prophesied around 450-430 BC, close to the time of Nehemiah, to a generation that had grown cynical and careless about God. This book walks through his six debates with the people: about God's love, careless worship, broken covenants, God's justice, giving, and whether serving God is worth it.

It explains Jacob I loved, Esau I hated as covenant-choice language, presenting the main Christian interpretations fairly. On marriage and divorce in Malachi 2:13-16, it speaks gently to teens whose parents are divorced, makes clear that a divorce is not a child's fault, and states plainly that God never asks anyone to stay in an abusive situation. On tithing in Malachi 3:10, it presents the main Christian views fairly.

Real Talk boxes address doubting God's love, giving God our leftovers, honesty, divorce, waiting for justice, being refined, generosity, feeling unseen, and healing family relationships. A

safety box encourages any teen facing abuse at home to talk with a trusted adult and lists Childhelp (1-800-422-4453), 988, and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, serves as a bridge from the whole Old Testament into the New, showing John the Baptist as the promised messenger and Jesus as the Sun of Righteousness. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader who has been going through the motions will discover that God has loved them all along.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

My Messenger

The name Malachi means my messenger. We know almost nothing else about him: no father's name, no hometown, no king's reign to date his work. Some scholars even think Malachi may be a title rather than a personal name, since the same word appears in Malachi 3:1, where God promises to send His messenger. Either way, the point is clear. This book is a message straight from God.

When Malachi Lived

Malachi doesn't give a date, but clues help. The temple has been rebuilt, so it's after 515 BC. A Persian governor is in charge. And the problems Malachi addresses, careless priests, marriages to worshipers of other gods, and people failing to bring their tithes, are the same problems Nehemiah faced. So most scholars place Malachi around 450-430 BC, around the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

A Bored Generation

About a century had passed since the first exiles returned. Haggai and Zechariah had promised glory, but life was still hard, and Judah was still a small province of the Persian Empire. The people hadn't abandoned God completely. They still went to the temple. But their hearts weren't in it. They gave God their leftovers, broke their promises, and quietly wondered whether God even noticed.

You Say, God Answers

Malachi is structured as six debates. Each one follows a pattern. God makes a statement. The people push back, often with the words, Yet you say. Then God answers. The six debates are about God's love (1:2-5), dishonoring God (1:6-2:9), unfaithfulness (2:10-16), God's justice (2:17-3:5), robbing God (3:6-12), and whether serving God is worth it (3:13-4:3). It reads almost like a transcript of an argument.

The Last Word Before the Silence

In Christian Bibles, Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. After Malachi, no new prophetic book was written for about four hundred years. These are sometimes called the silent years. God was still at work, but no new prophet spoke until John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, announcing that the Lord was coming.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Malachi 1): Leftover worship.

Chapter 2 (Malachi 2): Broken promises and bored priests.

Chapter 3 (Malachi 3): The refiner's fire and the book of remembrance.

Chapter 4 (Malachi 4): The sun of righteousness and the bridge to the New Testament.

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CHAPTER 1

Leftover Worship

Malachi 1

Malachi's book opens with just four words from God, and they might be the most important words in it. "I have loved you, says the LORD."

You'd expect the people to respond with gratitude. Instead, they rolled their eyes. "Yet you say, How have you loved us?"

That's the first of six debates in Malachi. And it's a question many people still ask. If God loves me, why is my life so hard? Why haven't His promises come true? Why does it feel like He's not paying attention?

God's answer surprises many readers. He pointed to two brothers. "Wasn't Esau Jacob's brother? says the LORD, Yet I loved Jacob; but Esau I hated."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Jacob I Loved, Esau I Hated**
>
> Those words sound harsh, and Christians have understood them in different ways. Most scholars agree that love and hate here are covenant language, describing choosing and not choosing. In the ancient world, a king might say he loved one nation and hated another, meaning he had chosen one as his ally. Jesus used similar language when He said His followers must hate their own families, meaning love Him far more. Jacob and Esau also stand for two nations, Israel and Edom. God chose Israel to carry His promises, not because they were better, but out of grace. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9. Some

Christians read it as being mainly about God's choice of nations and their roles in history. Others read it as also being about God's choice of individuals for salvation. Either way, the point in Malachi is that God's love for Israel was a choice He made freely, not something they earned.

God reminded them of what had happened to Edom, Esau's descendants. Their land had been devastated, and it would stay that way. But Israel was still here, still God's people, still being restored. "Your eyes will see, and you will say, The LORD is great."

REAL TALK **How Have You Loved Us?**

Have you ever felt that way about God? Maybe your family is going through a hard time, or you're struggling with loneliness, anxiety, or a prayer that never seems to get answered. It's okay to ask God hard questions. But notice how God answered. He pointed back to what He had already done. When you doubt God's love, look back. Look at the ways He has carried you so far. And look at the cross, the clearest proof of all that God loves you.

Then came the second debate, aimed at the priests. "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, then where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me?"

The priests were shocked. How had they despised God's name? God's answer was specific. "You offer polluted bread on my altar."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Sacrifices Without Blemish**

The law of Moses said that animals offered to God had to be without defect. No blind, lame, or sick animals. Sacrifices were supposed to be costly, the best of the flock. A sacrifice represented giving your best to God. But in Malachi's time, people were bringing animals they didn't want anyway, the ones that were injured or sick or about to die. And the priests were accepting them.

Then God made a sarcastic challenge. "When you offer the blind for sacrifice, isn't that evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, isn't

that evil? Present it now to your governor! Will he be pleased with you?"

The governor was the Persian official in charge of the province. Nobody would dare give him a sick, limping animal as a gift. They'd bring him their best. But they were giving God their leftovers.

> **REAL TALK** **Leftover Worship**
>
> Today, most people don't bring animals to church. But we can still give God our leftovers. We give Him whatever time is left after sports, school, gaming, and social media. We pray when we're too tired to do anything else. We give whatever money is left after we've bought what we want. We serve when it's convenient. Malachi asks a hard question: would you treat someone important the way you treat God? You wouldn't show up late and distracted to meet the president or your favorite celebrity. God is greater than any of them. He deserves our first and best, not our leftovers.

God said He'd rather someone just shut the temple doors than keep offering worthless sacrifices. Fake worship was worse than no worship at all.

Then God looked beyond Israel. "For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering."

That was a stunning statement. Even while Israel's priests were bored with worship, God promised that people all over the world would one day worship Him sincerely. Christians see this fulfilled as the good news of Jesus spread to every nation, and as people from every culture now worship God around the clock somewhere on earth.

But the priests had a bad attitude. They complained about their work. "You say also, Behold, what a weariness it is! And you have sniffed at it."

REAL TALK **What a Weariness**

The priests had the greatest job imaginable, serving in God's presence. And they were bored. They rolled their eyes and sighed. Sometimes, church, youth group, or Bible reading can feel boring. Maybe you've heard it all before. That's normal, and it's worth being honest about. But boredom can also be a warning sign that we've forgotten how great God is. Try asking God to show you something new about Him. Read a part of the Bible you've never read. Serve someone. Worship God in a new way. God isn't boring. Sometimes we just stop paying attention.

God ended the chapter with a reminder. "For I am a great King, says the LORD of Armies, and my name is awesome among the nations." God deserved better than leftovers because of who He was.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Six Debates**

Malachi's debates follow a pattern you can spot easily once you know it. First, God makes a claim, such as I have loved you, or You have wearied Me. Second, the people answer with a question that sounds innocent but is really a challenge: How? Third, God gives evidence. Some scholars compare this style to a courtroom, where God is both the judge and the one bringing the charges. Others compare it to the way Jewish teachers later taught, through questions and answers. Either way, Malachi doesn't just preach at the people. He lets their own words reveal their hearts.

Notice that the people never seem to think they've done anything wrong. Every time God points out a problem, they act surprised. That's one of the dangers of going through the motions. When religion becomes routine, it's easy to stop noticing that your heart has drifted. Malachi's questions are like a mirror. They help us see what we've stopped seeing.

KEY VERSE

For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering;

Malachi 1:11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the people asked, How have You loved us?
2. What do you think Jacob I loved, Esau I hated means?
3. In what ways do people give God their leftovers today?
4. What would it look like to give God your first and best this week?

TRY THIS *Look at your schedule for this week. Choose one time slot, maybe the first fifteen minutes of your day, and give it to God first before anything else. Pray, read a psalm, or simply thank Him.*

CHAPTER 2

Broken Promises and Bored Priests

Malachi 2

Chapter 2 begins with a serious warning to the priests. “Now, you priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not listen, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to my name, says the LORD of Armies, then I will send the curse on you, and I will curse your blessings.”

The priests had been entrusted with God’s covenant with Levi, the tribe of priests. God described what a faithful priest was supposed to be. “The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many away from iniquity.”

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Covenant with Levi**
>
> In Israel, the tribe of Levi was set apart to serve God. Some Levites served as priests, offering sacrifices. Others helped in the temple and taught God’s law. Priests were supposed to be teachers, helping people understand God’s ways. Malachi says, “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of Armies.” Notice the word messenger, the same word as Malachi’s name. Priests were supposed to be God’s messengers.

But the priests had failed. “But you have turned away from the path. You have caused many to stumble in the law.” They also showed favoritism, treating rich and powerful people differently from ordinary people.

> **REAL TALK** **Leaders Who Let You Down**
>
> Maybe you’ve been disappointed by a church leader, a coach, a teacher, or a parent. Maybe someone who taught you about God didn’t live it out. That can make you question your faith. Malachi shows that God cares deeply when leaders fail. He holds them responsible. But a leader’s failure doesn’t mean God has failed. If a leader has hurt you, talk to another trusted adult. And remember that God Himself is the perfect leader, who never lets you down.

Then came the third debate, about faithfulness. “Don’t we all have one father? Hasn’t one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, profaning the covenant of our fathers?”

The people were breaking promises to one another. Malachi gave two examples. First, some men had married women who worshiped other gods. In Nehemiah’s time, this had led many people away from God. The issue wasn’t race or nationality. It was faith. Marrying someone who worshiped idols meant bringing idols into the family.

Second, some men were divorcing their wives. And still, they came to the temple weeping and wondering why God wasn’t answering their prayers. “Yet you say, Why? Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and the wife of your covenant.”

BACKGROUND CHECK **Divorce in Malachi's Day**

In the ancient world, women had very few rights. A man could often divorce his wife for almost any reason, leaving her with no income, no home, and no protection. Some men in Malachi's time seem to have been divorcing the wives they had married when they were young, possibly to marry younger or wealthier women. Malachi calls this treachery, a betrayal of a sacred covenant. God was standing up for wives who had been abandoned. Translations of Malachi 2:16 differ. Some say God hates divorce. The WEB says that one who hates and divorces covers his garment with violence. Either way, the point is that God cares deeply about faithfulness and about protecting the vulnerable.

REAL TALK **If Your Parents Are Divorced**

If your parents are divorced, reading a passage like this might hurt. Please hear this clearly: your parents' divorce is not your fault. Nothing you did caused it, and nothing you could have done would have prevented it. Malachi is not saying God rejects people who have been through divorce. God loves you and both of your parents. Many divorces happen for painful reasons, including unfaithfulness, abuse, or abandonment. God is close to the brokenhearted. If your family has been through a divorce, it's okay to grieve. Talk to a trusted adult about how you feel.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety: Abuse Is Never What God Asks**

God values faithfulness, but He never asks anyone to stay in a situation where they are being abused. Malachi 2:16 links unfaithfulness with violence, and God stands against violence. If someone in your home is hurting you or someone else, it is not your fault, and you don't have to keep it secret. Tell a trusted adult, like a teacher, school counselor, or pastor. You can call or text Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453, any time. If you're feeling hopeless, call or text 988. If anyone is in immediate danger, call 911.

God's design for marriage is faithfulness. Malachi says, "Therefore pay attention to your spirit, that you don't be unfaithful." Jesus said

the same thing. "What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart."

> **REAL TALK** **Keeping Your Word**
>
> Faithfulness starts long before marriage. It starts with keeping your word to your friends, your family, and God. Do you do what you say you'll do? Do you stay loyal to friends when it's hard? Do you keep secrets that should be kept and tell the truth when it matters? Every promise you keep now builds the kind of character that will make you a faithful friend, spouse, and person someday.

Then came the fourth debate. "You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, How have we wearied him?" God answered by quoting their complaints. They said that evil people seemed to be doing fine, as if God approved of them. And they asked, "Where is the God of justice?"

That's a question people still ask. Why do bullies get away with it? Why do cheaters win? Why do bad people prosper? Malachi's people were tired of waiting for God to make things right. The answer to their question comes in chapter 3. And it's not what they expected.

> **REAL TALK** **Where Is the God of Justice?**
>
> It's okay to be frustrated when you see injustice. God is frustrated too. But Malachi's people had turned their frustration into cynicism, deciding that God either didn't care or approved of evil. There's a difference between crying out to God about injustice and giving up on Him. The psalms are full of honest complaints that end in trust. If you're angry about something unfair, bring it to God. Then look for ways to do justice yourself: stand up for someone who's being picked on, speak the truth, and treat others fairly.

KEY VERSE

Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us?

Malachi 2:10 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What did God expect from His priests?
2. Why does God care so much about faithfulness?
3. If your family has been through divorce, what do you want to remember from this chapter?
4. When have you wondered, Where is the God of justice?

TRY THIS *Think of one promise you've made and haven't kept, to a friend, a family member, or God. This week, keep it, or apologize and make it right.*

CHAPTER 3

The Refiner's Fire and the Book of Remembrance

Malachi 3

The people had asked, "Where is the God of justice?" God's answer came right away, and it was a promise. "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me! The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple."

Notice the two figures. First, a messenger would come to prepare the way. Then the Lord Himself would come to His temple. The people wanted justice. God said, I'm coming to bring it Myself.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Preparing the Way**
>
> In the ancient world, when a king traveled, a messenger went ahead of him. The messenger announced the king's arrival and made sure the roads were cleared and repaired. Isaiah used the same picture: a voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the LORD. Malachi says God would send a messenger like that before He came. All four Gospels connect this promise with John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus. Mark's Gospel begins by quoting both Malachi and Isaiah.

The people said they wanted God to come. But Malachi warned them to be careful what they wished for. "But who can endure the

day of his coming? And who will stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like launderers' soap."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Refiner's Fire**

To purify silver, a refiner heated it in a pot over a very hot fire. As the metal melted, impurities called dross rose to the surface, and the refiner skimmed them off. The process was repeated until the silver was pure. An old story says a refiner knows the silver is ready when he can see his own reflection in it. Launderers' soap was a strong cleaning agent made from plants and ashes, used to scrub cloth until it was clean and white. Both pictures show God coming not to destroy His people, but to purify them.

Malachi said the Lord "will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver." Notice that the refiner sits. He stays close, watching carefully. He doesn't walk away while the silver is in the fire.

REAL TALK **In the Fire**

Sometimes life feels like a fire. A hard class, a broken friendship, a family crisis, an illness, or a season of loneliness. God doesn't cause every hard thing, but He can use hard things to shape us. Peter wrote that our faith is "more precious than gold that perishes, even though it is tested by fire." If you're in the fire right now, remember that the Refiner is sitting close by. He hasn't left you. He's making something beautiful. And if the fire feels like too much, please talk to a trusted adult, or call or text 988.

God also said He would come to bring justice against those who did wrong: sorcerers, adulterers, liars, and those who cheated workers out of their wages or oppressed widows, orphans, and foreigners. God sees how people treat the vulnerable. And He will make it right.

Then God said something wonderful. "For I, the LORD, don't change; therefore you, sons of Jacob, are not consumed."

REAL TALK **The God Who Doesn't Change**

Everything changes. Friendships change. Families change. Your body changes. Your feelings change, sometimes by the hour. But God doesn't change. His love, His faithfulness, and His promises stay the same. The only reason Israel hadn't been wiped out was that God had kept His promises, even when they hadn't kept theirs. The New Testament says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." When everything else is shifting, you can stand on Him.

Then came the fifth debate. God invited the people back. "Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Armies. But you say, How shall we return?"

God's answer was surprising. "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me! But you say, How have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tithes and Offerings**

A tithe means a tenth. In the law of Moses, Israelites gave a tenth of their crops and animals to God. The tithes supported the Levites and priests, who didn't own farmland, and helped care for the poor, widows, orphans, and foreigners. In Nehemiah's time, people stopped bringing their tithes, so the Levites had to leave the temple and go work in the fields. When God's people stopped giving, God's work and the vulnerable both suffered.

Then God made a bold invitation. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and test me now in this, says the LORD of Armies, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there will not be enough room for."

This is one of the only places in the Bible where God invites people to test Him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tithing Today**

Christians understand tithing in different ways. Some believe Christians should still give a tenth of their income to their local church, as a starting point for generosity. Others believe that the tithe was part of the law of Moses and that the New Testament calls Christians to generous, joyful giving without a fixed percentage. Paul wrote, "Let each man give according as he has determined in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Most Christians agree on a few things: everything we have comes from God, generosity should be cheerful and not forced, and God cares how we use our money. Some teachers have twisted Malachi 3:10 to promise that giving will make you rich. But the blessing Malachi describes is God's provision, not a guarantee of wealth.

REAL TALK **Generosity**

You might not have much money right now. That's okay. Generosity isn't about the amount. Jesus praised a poor widow who gave two tiny coins, because she gave everything she had. You can be generous with your time, your attention, your talents, and your kindness, as well as your money. Try setting aside a portion of whatever money you receive, from a job, an allowance, or a birthday gift, to give to God's work or to help someone in need. Generosity grows like a muscle. The more you practice it, the stronger it gets.

Then came the sixth and final debate. God said, "Your words have been harsh against me." The people asked what they had said. God quoted them. "It is vain to serve God." They complained that serving God didn't seem to pay off. Arrogant people seemed happy. Evildoers were doing just fine.

But not everyone felt that way. "Then those who feared the LORD spoke one with another; and the LORD listened and heard, and a book of memory was written before him for those who feared the LORD and who honored his name."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Book of Remembrance**

Persian kings kept official records of people who had done something good for the king, so they could be rewarded later. In the book of Esther, King Xerxes couldn't sleep one night, so he had his book of records read to him. He discovered that Mordecai had once saved his life and had never been rewarded. Malachi says God keeps a book like that, too. He remembers every faithful person, every quiet conversation, and every act of honor, even when no one else notices.

God said of those faithful people, "They shall be mine, says the LORD of Armies, my own possession in the day that I make." Other translations say my treasured possession, or my special treasure.

REAL TALK **Seen and Remembered**

Do you ever feel invisible? Like the good things you do don't matter, and nobody notices when you choose to do the right thing? Malachi says God notices. When a few faithful people talked to each other about God, He listened. He wrote their names down. He called them His treasure. You are not invisible to God. Every kind act, every honest choice, every prayer is remembered. And one day, God will show the difference between those who served Him and those who didn't.

KEY VERSE

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me! The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple.

Malachi 3:1 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Who do the Gospels identify as the messenger who prepared the way?
2. How is God like a refiner?
3. What do you think about tithing and generosity today?
4. How does it feel to know that God keeps a book of remembrance?

TRY THIS *Choose one way to be generous this week with your money, your time, or your talents. Do it quietly, without telling anyone, and trust that God sees.*

CHAPTER 4

The Sun of Righteousness and the Bridge to the New Testament

Malachi 4

In English Bibles, Malachi's last six verses are numbered as chapter 4. In Hebrew Bibles, they're part of chapter 3. Either way, they form the grand finale of Malachi, and in Christian Bibles, of the whole Old Testament.

The final debate had asked whether serving God was worth it. Malachi's answer was that a day was coming that would make the difference clear. "For behold, the day comes, burning like a furnace, when all the proud and all who work wickedness will be stubble."

Stubble is the dry, leftover stalks in a field after a harvest. It burns quickly. Malachi says that those who choose pride and evil will have nothing left, "neither root nor branch."

But for those who honor God, the same day would bring something completely different. "But to you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings. You will go out and leap like calves of the stall."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Healing in Its Wings**

In the ancient Near East, the sun was sometimes pictured as a disk with wings, spreading its rays across the earth. Malachi borrows that image to describe the dawn of God's righteousness, bringing light and healing. The Hebrew word for wings can also mean the edges or corners of a garment. Some readers connect this with the woman who touched the edge of Jesus' cloak and was healed. Calves kept in a stall all winter would leap and run when they were finally let out into the sunshine. That's the kind of joy Malachi describes.

REAL TALK **Leap Like Calves**

Have you ever felt stuck, like a calf in a stall? Stuck in sadness, fear, shame, or the same old routine? Malachi promises that God's light brings healing and freedom. When Jesus heals someone, it's like a door swinging open and sunlight pouring in. Faith isn't meant to be grim and joyless. It's meant to make you come alive. If you're in a dark season right now, hold on. The sun is rising. And if the darkness feels too heavy, please talk to a trusted adult, or call or text 988.

Then Malachi gave two final instructions. First, look back. "Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded to him in Horeb for all Israel, even statutes and ordinances." Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the law.

Second, look ahead. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Elijah Is Coming**

Elijah was one of the greatest prophets in Israel's history. He confronted wicked King Ahab, called down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel, and was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind without dying. Because of Malachi 4:5, Jewish tradition expected Elijah to return before the Messiah came. To this

day, at the Passover meal, many Jewish families pour a cup for Elijah and open the door to welcome him. In the New Testament, an angel said John the Baptist would go in the spirit and power of Elijah. Jesus said John was the Elijah who was to come. John even dressed like Elijah, in camel's hair with a leather belt.

Notice what Elijah would do. He would turn the hearts of fathers to their children and children to their fathers. Before the great day of the LORD, God would bring healing to families.

REAL TALK **Turning Hearts**

Maybe your relationship with your parents is strained right now. Maybe you argue a lot, or you feel like they don't understand you. Maybe a parent has left, or you feel far away from them even when you're in the same room. God cares about families. He wants to turn hearts toward each other. That might start with you: an apology, a kind word, a conversation. It doesn't mean pretending everything is fine, and it never means staying silent about abuse. If a parent is hurting you, tell a trusted adult or call Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453. But where healing is possible, God is in the business of turning hearts.

And then, the Old Testament ends. The last word in Malachi is curse.

BACKGROUND CHECK **How the Old Testament Ends**

Jewish and Christian Bibles contain the same books of the Hebrew Scriptures, but they arrange them differently. The Hebrew Bible ends with 2 Chronicles, where King Cyrus of Persia invites God's people to go up and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. It ends with an invitation to go home. Christian Old Testaments end with Malachi, with its promise of a coming messenger and the Lord coming to His temple. Then you turn the page, and the very next book is Matthew. In synagogues, when Malachi is read aloud, the second-to-last verse is often repeated at the end, so the reading doesn't finish on the word curse.

After Malachi, about four hundred years passed without a new prophetic book. During those years, the Persians fell to Alexander the Great. The Greeks ruled. The Maccabees fought for freedom. Then the Romans took over. Through it all, faithful people waited and remembered God's promises.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Silent Years**

The four hundred years between Malachi and Matthew weren't empty. The Jewish people collected and copied their Scriptures, and the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the language much of the world spoke. Synagogues sprang up wherever Jewish people lived, giving them places to pray and read God's word every Sabbath. Rome built roads across its empire, and Greek became a common language from Spain to Syria. Looking back, many Christians see God quietly preparing the world for the good news of Jesus to spread quickly. Paul later wrote that when the fullness of time came, God sent His Son.

REAL TALK **When God Seems Silent**

Have you ever prayed and heard nothing back? Maybe you've waited a long time for an answer, and it feels like God has gone quiet. Four hundred years is a long time to wait. But God wasn't absent during the silent years. He was preparing. When God seems silent in your life, it doesn't mean He has forgotten you. Keep reading His word, keep praying, and keep showing up. The same God who broke four centuries of silence with the birth of a baby can speak into your situation, right on time.

And then, one day, an old priest named Zechariah was serving in the temple when an angel appeared. The angel told him that his son, John, would go "in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children."

The silence was over. The messenger was coming. The Lord was coming to His temple.

KEY VERSE

But to you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings. You will go out and leap like calves of the stall.

Malachi 4:2 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does the image of the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings mean to you?
2. Why do you think Malachi ends with a promise about families?
3. How did John the Baptist fulfill the promise of Elijah?
4. What difference does it make that the Christian Old Testament ends right before Matthew?

TRY THIS *Read Malachi 4 and then Luke 1:5-17 right after it. Notice how the angel picks up exactly where Malachi left off. Then thank God for keeping His promises, even after four hundred years.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

You've made it. Thirty-nine books, from In the beginning to the last words of Malachi. Along the way, the Old Testament has been building toward something: a Seed who would crush the serpent, a Lamb who would take away sin, a King from David's line, a Servant pierced for our transgressions, a Shepherd struck for the sheep. Malachi ends by promising a messenger who would prepare the way for the Lord Himself. Then the story pauses for four hundred years.

And then, turn one page in a Christian Bible, and you're in Matthew. "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." A few chapters later, John the Baptist appears in the wilderness. An angel had told his father that John would go "in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children." Jesus said of John, "For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you." And He added, "If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, who is to come." The messenger had come. That means the Lord had come too. John's father sang that "the dawn from on high will visit us." Jesus is the Sun of Righteousness, and He said, "I am the light of the world." Malachi's final word was a warning of a curse. But at the cross, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." The Old Testament ends with the threat of a curse. The New Testament ends with the promise that there will be no more curse.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God says, I have loved you. That was true for the bored generation in Malachi, and it is true for you.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Like the people in Malachi, we all give God our leftovers and break our promises. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus took the curse.

Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, died for our sins and rose again. He took the curse so we could receive the blessing.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for giving God your best. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus, who gave His best for you.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Welcome the King.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Malachi says, Return to Me, and I will return to you. You can return to God today. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been going through the motions. I've given You my leftovers and doubted that You love me. Thank You that You have loved me all along. Thank You that Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, took the curse for me on the cross and rose again. Forgive me, refine me, and make me Yours. Turn my heart toward You and toward the people You've put in my life. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Malachi 3-4, then turn the page to Matthew 1-3 and Luke 1.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Turn the page. You've finished the Old Testament. Now start the New Testament, beginning with Matthew, and watch every promise come alive.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Malachi's generation had plenty of doubts too, and God answered every one. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Malachi is right, God has loved you all along, and the sun is about to rise.

But to you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings.

Malachi 4:2 (WEB)