

Monday, August 5, 2019—Obadiah, Jeremiah 1-2

An old military strategy works from the promise that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Edom worked this way. When Babylon marched on Jerusalem and captured it, the Edomites, who were close relatives of the Israelites, cheered for Babylon and helped loot the city. Obadiah wrote his prophecy to chastise the Edomites for their calloused hearts and sinful ways. God would repay them. There is never a good time to cheer for the downfall of another or to join in on criticism and attack.

Jerusalem faced attack from Edom, but Jeremiah faced attack from Jerusalem. God called Jeremiah to tell the people to submit to His disciplining hand, allowing Babylon to capture them and take many of them into exile. The people did not agree, continually criticizing Jeremiah and threatening him. God’s assurance to Jeremiah—that He had called Jeremiah before he was born (1:5)—was of critical importance. This gave him strength and resolve to carry out his mission. His presence with Jeremiah would allow him to be immune to their attacks (1:18-19).

God’s case against His people was simple. They had exchanged Him for worthless idols (2:11). They had walked away from the real God and embraced false gods they made with their hands. Still, they thought they had not sinned (2:35). As a loving Father, He could not allow them to continue in this blind, destructive pattern.

Praise God for the hope He gives that one day He will be the only King (Obadiah 21), making right all that has gone wrong.

Sunday, August 4, 2019—2 Kings 22-25

A choice for improvement in one area can lead to improvement in others. Someone who chooses to exercise more regularly may find he also makes better choices about diet and rest to complement the exercise. When she chooses to save money for an important purchase, she may find the self-discipline reawakens a desire for reading the Word and knowing Christ.

King Josiah became king after two wicked predecessors. For nearly

sixty years, Manasseh and Amon led Judah away from God's presence and purposes. When Josiah became leader, he righted the ship. The Temple had been neglected, so he ordered the high priest to begin collecting funds to restore the building. In the process, Hilkiah discovered the Book of the Law and brought it to the king, and Josiah had it read aloud.

King Josiah was deeply moved and repented before God. The people had wandered so far from God they did not even know the truth of God's word for the nation. He read the Book to all the leaders of the people (23:1-3) and instituted radical reform (23:4-25). He did what was right even though he knew God eventually was going to punish the people for sin (23:26). After several more leadership changes, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, and the Temple was destroyed (25:1-17). God remained faithful to His people, however, and provided for them in captivity.

Praise God for His calling on the lives of His people and the blessings He brings from faithful obedience and genuine love.

Saturday, August 3, 2019—Habakkuk 1-3

Road trips prompt the question, "How much longer?" Hard times move people to ask, "Why?" Life often presents difficulty and confusion, so the natural reaction is to inquire about the reasons for this.

God is not afraid of questions. Questions indicate a desire to know Him, His heart, and His motivations. What God does not want is someone who asks questions and walks away or stops listening before He answers.

Habakkuk prophesied during increasingly dark days for Judah. The people were coming unhinged spiritually and morally (1:2-4). There was injustice where there was to be justice, and violence filled the place of peace. In addition, God was going to do something unbelievable (1:5-6). The Babylonians, notorious for their cruelty, were rising in power, God was going to use them to conquer and discipline His people.

Habakkuk was shocked. God was right to correct His people (1:13), but was He really going to stand by idly as such horrific sinners acted so terribly to

His people? He said he would wait on God's response (2:1). God responded, laying out His case against the people and His plan of discipline. His righteous ones would live by faith (2:4b), and the sinful would face great terror. Money, idols, and drugs would be no escape.

"But the Lord is in his holy Temple. Let the whole earth be silent before him" (2:20). Despite the weight of the message, Habakkuk was moved to worship because God remained God. Despite the deepest suffering, He would remain joyful in God, his true Savior (3:17-19).

Praise God for being greater than circumstances and enemies.

Friday, August 2, 2019—Zephaniah 1-3

When one witness shares testimony, there is some weight and authority to the content because of the underlying value given to a witness. When several witnesses share the same truth, the jury has much more confidence in believing their words and acting on them. Corroboration is a powerful tool for the jury and attorneys alike.

During the reign of Josiah, several witnesses stood before the people of God to tell them of their need for repentance. Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Micah, and Zephaniah all sang the familiar refrain of the rampant idolatry, the neglect of the poor and needy, and the call to repentance. More than any other prophet, Zephaniah turned the listeners' attention to the coming judgment on all sinners, the Day of the Lord.

The people had become numb to their sin (1:12). They had practiced sin so long they no longer felt remorse or a need for change. Because they sinned (1:17), God was going to give them the fruit of that seed. One more time, however, He called them through His prophet to repentance—praying, begging, and walking humbly (2:1-3). Perhaps God would save them from sorrow. Pride would bring many down (2:10-15).

He will restore the survivors (2:7), and the result would be worship of Him and Him alone. "Those who are left will be the lowly and the humble for it is they who trust in the name of the Lord" (3:12). Praise God for living among His

people, loving them, calming them, and singing over them (3:15-17).

Thursday, August 1, 2019—2 Kings 20-21

Time has a way of revealing less-than-flattering truths about heroic, historical figures. Some of the Founding Fathers, who built a country on freedom, owned slaves. Secret audio tapes have revealed shocking viewpoints from politicians lauded for their leadership. Those who the culture often puts on a pedestal have flaws because they're human.

King Hezekiah led the people of Judah like no other king before or after him (2 Kings 18:5). He had prayed the people through a fierce threat by the Assyrians (2 Kings 19), and God provided healing and a miraculous sign for Hezekiah when a devastating diagnosis came to him (20:1-10). By these accounts, Hezekiah was worthy of honor and celebration.

He was not perfect. When envoys from Babylon came to wish him well after his healing, Hezekiah showed them all the riches of his kingdom. Whether this was an innocent review of all the blessings God had given His people or a somewhat boastful display of the possessions of the country, Hezekiah made a mistake. Isaiah told him these goodwill ambassadors would one day return and lead Hezekiah's descendants away and take all the treasure with them (20:18). Hezekiah was unworried. At least during his personal lifetime there would be peace and security in the land (20:19).

His self-centeredness is the common flaw in all people. His son and successor, Manasseh, took this to a new level, reinstating and expanding idolatry throughout the nation (21:1-18). This sealed the fate God had foretold Hezekiah through Isaiah.

Pray for increasing holiness to purge sin and useless habits.

Wednesday, July 31, 2019—Nahum 1-3

Frightened kids huddle together, watching the playground bully have his way. They hope someone will stop him. Worried villagers gather in a hut and pray, hearing the radical religious group is on the move near them. Evil is a part of every life, but there is hope that one day God will judge the guilty and end

the oppression. What is unknown is when.

Nahum wrote his words of prophecy not to his own people but specifically to Nineveh. The capital of the Assyrian empire, Nineveh represented all the evil of the world and was the source of the misery the Northern Kingdom had experienced when Assyria sacked it in 722 b.c. The people of Judah would hear and read his words (along with modern-day readers) and realize that God will indeed bring justice in His timing.

“The Lord is a jealous God, filled with vengeance and wrath. He takes revenge on all who oppose him and furiously destroys his enemies!” (1:2). The holiness of God means He is completely different than everyone. He is capable of being loving, merciful, and compassionate while also being just and filled with wrath. He hates sin and will not allow it to reign.

God used Nineveh, but He remained their enemy (2:13). They did not give Him their allegiance and devotion. They enticed others to idolatry (3:4), so He was going to destroy them. She was “crammed with wealth” (3:1), but that would provide no defense against the power of God.

Praise God for His holiness and justice. Praise Him for being slow to anger and abounding in love.

Tuesday, July 30, 2019—Micah 5-7

Appearances can be deceiving. Dynamite and other explosives are small items which provide massive results. The critical factor is not the outward appearance but the inward design.

Micah saw the day coming when the enemy would invade Jerusalem, but God had a plan for recovery. Though the smallest of the 12 tribes, Benjamin held the hope of the nations. A non-descript city, Bethlehem, the regional bakery, would produce not a loaf of bread but the Bread of Life who would rule Israel with strength and majesty (5:2-4). He would usher in true peace and restore strength to His people (5:5-9).

This restorative work would require not only the destruction of Israel’s enemies but also the abolishment of all their idolatrous practices (5:10-15). Like

a prosecuting attorney, God makes His case against Israel for their hypocritical ways. God had delivered them from Egyptian slavery and given them a home for freedom and flourishing, and they had given their devotion and obedience to false gods and fleshly appetites.

How could they express their repentance? Should they offer sacrifices? God told them His desires—that they do what is right, love mercy, and walk humbly (6:8). Though seemingly insignificant, Israel could be a mighty force and witness if they simply obeyed. God promised to do such amazing restoration that the world would marvel at it all (7:14-17).

Praise God today that He is a God like no other (7:18), one who pardons and restores. Thank Him for His compassion, faithfulness, and unfailing love. Live in acknowledgement of His greatness and worth.

Nothing without Him,

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