2025 Great Fast Bible Reading Plan

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Introduction

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. One God. Amen.

Dear beloved,

As we are gearing up for the Holy and Great Fast, an idea was brought up by some of the youth that we participate together in a daily reading plan and study of the Scripture.

We have put together a reading plan that we can follow and which will be accompanied by some explanations, context, and meditations. The goal of the reading plan is to study the period of time in the Scripture known as the Divided Kingdom. From the death of King Solomon to the captivity of Judah by Babylon. And we wanted to study it from the perspective of the Prophets and specifically the 12 Minor Prophets.

In Week 1, we will see the Prophets Elijah and Elisha. In Week 2, we will read Hosea. In Week 3, Amos. In Week 4, Jonah, Nahum, Obadiah and a chapter from Isaiah. In Week 5, we will read about Isaiah and the deliverance of Judah from the Assyrian Captivity. In Week 6, Micah. In Week 7, Joel, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and a chapter from Jeremiah. And that will take us to the Captivity of Judah concluding our study.

Although some of these books are the shortest books in the Scripture, they are sometimes the most difficult to understand. Let us spend the Holy Great Fast, at least the time before Pascha Week, reading, studying and meditating on the Holy Scripture, encouraging and learning from each other.

Every Sunday, God willing, we will send a voice message to give some context to the readings of that week. And then every day a message about the reading - an explanation, meditation, application, etc. I'll encourage you all, also to participate in sending portions or verses that stood out to you and can be beneficial for others. We won't have any scheduled readings on Sundays, but Sunday will act as a catch-up day if you fall behind.

I pray that this study will enrich our lives with reading the Scripture daily, and meditating on the word of God. May the Lord use this plan for His glory and for our edification leading to our salvation. May we reach the Holy Pascha week with a strong foundation for hearing the Prophecies read, and a strong spiritual foundation.

Wishing you all a blessed Holy and Great Fast

Schedule and Outline

Introduction

- Daily readings of about 1 chapter, or 2-3 short chapters
- Sundays are "catch-up" days
- Sunday, the servant should send out an audio message to introduce the readings of the week
- Throughout the week, text or audio or video messages can be sent to give context to the reading, explain difficult parts, etc.
- People are free to share something they benefited or applicable in their life from the reading

Week 1: Elijah and Elisha

Monday	1 Kings 12: The Split of the Kingdom and the Creation of idols in Israel by Jeroboam	Summary
Tuesday	1 Kings 13: The Message of the Man of God - Jeroboam will not repent	Summary
Wednesday	1 Kings 17: Introduce Elijah the Prophet	Summary
Thursday	1 Kings 18: Elijah and Ahab	Summary
Friday	2 Kings 2: Elijah Ascends to Heaven	Summary
Saturday	2 Kings 4: Elisha's Miracles	

Week 2: Hosea the Prophet

Sunday	Catch-Up Day	Intro to Prophets and Hosea
Monday	Hosea 1-2	Chapter 1 Summary Chapter 2-3 Summary
Tuesday	Hosea 3-4	Chapter 4-5 Summary
Wednesday	Hosea 5-6	Chapter 6 Summary

Thursday	Hosea 7-8	
Friday	Hosea 9-10	
Saturday	Hosea 11-12	

Week 3: Amos the Prophet

Sunday	Catch-Up Day	Introduction to Amos the Prophet
Monday	Hosea 13-14	
Tuesday	Amos 1-2	Amos 1-2 Summary
Wednesday	Amos 3-4	Amos 3-4 Summary
Thursday	Amos 5-6	
Friday	Amos 7	
Saturday	Amos 8-9	

Week 4: Assyria and the Captivity of Israel

Sunday	Catch-Up Day.	Introduction to Assyria
Monday	Jonah 1-2	Jonah 1-2 Summary
Tuesday	Jonah 3-4	
Wednesday	Isaiah 8	Isaiah 8 Summary
Thursday	2 Kings 17 - The Captivity of Israel	2 Kings 17 Summary + Introduction to the Samaritans (next Sunday is Samaritan Woman!)
Friday	Nahum 1-3	
Saturday	Obadiah - Prophecies against Edom	

Week 5: The Attempted Captivity of Judah (Thwarted by Isaiah)

Sunday	Catch-Up Day.	Introduction to the Kings of Judah

Monday	2 Kings 18	2 Kings 18 Summary
Tuesday	2 Kings 19	
Wednesday	2 Kings 20	
Thursday	2 Kings 21	
Friday	2 Kings 22	
Saturday	2 Kings 23	

Week 6: Micah the Prophet

Sunday	Catch-Up Day. Look for an audio message introducing Micah the Prophet	
Monday	Micah 1-2	
Tuesday	Micah 3	
Wednesday	Micah 4	
Thursday	Micah 5	
Friday	Micah 6	
Saturday	Micah 7	

Week 7: The Captivity of Judah

Sunday	Catch-Up Day. Look for an audio message introducing Joel, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah	
Monday	Joel 1-3	Joel Summary
Tuesday	Zephaniah 1-3	Zephaniah Summary
Wednesday	Habakkuk 1-3	Habakkuk Summary
Thursday	Jeremiah 25	
Friday	2 Kings 24 - Captivity of Jerusalem and Judah	
Saturday	2 Kings 25	

Palm Sunday	Summarize:
	• During the captivity, we have two prophets: Daniel and Ezekiel
	• As Jeremiah prophesied, so it came to pass. 70 years after captivity, the Persian Empire arose and overtook Babylon. Cyrus the King issued an edict allowing Jews to return to their home.
	• They returned under three waves during the Persian Empire.
	  ◦ Once with Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple, once with Ezra who ushered in a spiritual revival, and once with Nehemiah who rebuilt the walls.
	  ◦ These events are described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.
	  ◦ During this time, we hear of three prophets who prophesied: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi
	
	May the Lord grant us a holy and blessed Pascha week	

Week 1: Introduction

Old Testament Historical Context

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

The Holy Scripture opens with the Creation of the World in the book of Genesis. From the very first chapter, we see the creation of mankind in the Image of God, according to His Likeness. But soon after, we have the fall of man. And man continues to sin and separate himself from God, even to the point that God wipes mankind from the face of the earth, except for one righteous man and his family - Noah. And from Noah, the Lord makes a new creation. From Noah's descendants will come the great man of faith - Abraham, the man after God's own heart - King David, and the Messiah Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ; the Incarnate Word of God.

The Holy Scripture lays out a single thread, from the Creation of the World and the Fall of Man, to the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of the Son of God. And as we read the Scripture, although it presents historical facts and narratives, we can see that thread. We can see the Love of God for all mankind, we can see the Promise of God and its fulfillment, we can see the Wisdom of God and those whom He gave it to. We can see the Spirit of God coming upon flawed characters, and working in them and through them. We can see the Acceptance of God of the repentant man no matter his sin. God has revealed Himself to us through His Holy Scripture. He speaks to us through His words, but we must read and study and understand and meditate on them, in order to hear His voice.

Let's look at the Historical Context for the time period we will study during this Fast, starting from the beginning in Genesis. For some of you, this might be review; for others, it might be brand new. In any case, if you have any questions, please feel completely free to ask! We are learning together, growing together, and encouraging each other that we may inherit the Kingdom together.

In the book of Genesis, we read about the patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob has twelve sons who become the fathers of the twelve tribes. Jacob and his family go to Egypt during the famine while his son Joseph had become vizier or second-in-command to Pharaoh.

In Exodus, we read that the Israelites were prosperous and multiplying in Egypt. And when a new Pharaoh came, who did not know Joseph, he saw them as a threat and enslaved them. They were in Egypt about 400 years when the Lord sent Moses to deliver them from Egypt. And this is the meaning of the word Exodus. In Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the Israelites receive the Law from God, build the Tabernacle, and are wandering through the desert for about 40 years until they reach the Promised Land. Then, in the book of Joshua, Joshua (the disciple of Moses) leads them to take conquest of the land and to distribute it among the twelve tribes.

In the book of Judges, the key verse that is repeated several times is that "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The Israelites would fall into idolatry or sexual immorality and be taken by another tribe like the Midianites or the Philistines or

the Ammonites. Then God would raise up for them a Judge - typically, someone who could lead their military to victory. And they would come out and give thanks to God and promise not to fall again... and then promptly fall again. And the cycle would repeat. This lasted about 400 years and gave us Judges like Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Jephthah and culminated with the last judge - Samuel the priest and the prophet.

In the time of Samuel, the Israelites ask for a king. Samuel doesn't like the idea and tells them - you have a King... God is your King. But they request someone to lead them "like the other nations." This is when we go from a Theocracy to a Monarchy. King Saul is anointed as the first king, and he starts off pretty good. But he did not honor God and did not obey God's commandments. He offers a sacrifice in place of Samuel, although he is not a priest. When God instructs him to wipe out the Amalekites, he keeps their king (King Agag) alive. He makes rash decisions.

The Lord chooses David to be anointed as the next king and to replace King Saul. King David is described by the Lord as "a man after My own heart." King David is not perfect. He falls into sins like adultery and murder - but he is repentant. He spends years in tears of repentance and this is exemplified in many of the Psalms that he authored. Every king after him would be compared to him; he becomes the gold standard. Good kings will have something like "because he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done." Or "He walked in the earlier ways of his father David." Evil kings are described as "he was not wholly true to the Lord his God as was the heart of his father David." King David conquested Jerusalem and made it the capital of the Kingdom, and purposed in his heart to build a Temple for God there. But because he had blood on his hands, the Lord did not allow him to build the Temple - instead, his son Solomon would build it.

When King David died, his son Solomon became king. Solomon is famed for asking the Lord to give him wisdom - and the Lord gave him wisdom. Solomon built the Temple of God, and reigned over Israel with wisdom. He authored books like Proverbs, Song of Songs and Wisdom. Israel became a great nation and a wealthy nation. People came from all over the world to hear the wisdom of Solomon and the Lord Jesus will later on reference the visit of the Queen of Sheba. But Solomon fell for foreign women and their gods and his heart turned from the Lord. He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines; women from the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites and a daughter of Pharaoh. And the women turned his heart from God to their gods. And the Lord responded to this by saying "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen." (1 Kings 11) This servant of Solomon is called Jeroboam. The prophet Ahijah tells him of God's plan and warns him: "Then it shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you." Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam but Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt and stayed there until the death of King Solomon. Before his death, the Tradition tells us that King Solomon repented and the Book of Ecclesiastes is what he wrote in his repentance.

That is the background of what we will start reading this week.

On Monday, we will read the account of the split of the Kingdom and the beginning of idolatry in the Northern Kingdom. We will focus on the Northern Kingdom for three weeks, until we reach its fall and captivity to Assyria in Week 4. Then, for three weeks, we will focus on the Southern Kingdom until we reach its fall and captivity to Babylon in Week 7. The important part of our study will not be just the history and the stories, but the words of the Prophets. The Lord never left His people without a witness to His word. He always had a prophet there to remind them to turn back to the Lord. He always had a prophet there to remind them of the consequences and what would happen if they did not. Even in the stories we already discussed; the prophet Samuel revealed to King Saul what the Lord commanded; the prophet Nathan is the one who rebuked King David when he committed adultery and murder; the prophet Ahijah told Jeroboam how the Lord would give him ten tribes and keep two to Solomon.

This week, we will be introduced to the prophets Elijah and Elisha who prophesied in the early days of the Northern Kingdom. We just selected a couple of passages that exemplified that Elijah and Elisha were men of God. They did wonders and signs, even raising the dead. And Elijah was taken up by a chariot of fire to the heavens. Let us see what messages and lessons we can glean from them, while familiarizing ourselves with their stories and the story of the Northern Kingdom.

Week 2: Hosea

Introduction

Last week we saw the beginnings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. From the very beginning, they setup idols and worshipped them and continued in idol worship until the end of the kingdom. But we saw that the Lord never left them without a prophet.

The word prophet means messenger. A prophet was someone who was sent by God to deliver God's message to the king and to the people. Sometimes we think of a prophet as someone who sees the future - and sometimes, that is the role of a prophet - The Lord reveals to him what is GOING to happen. But that is a narrow view of the prophets. The work and messages of the prophets was to reveal the will of God.

After the split of the Kingdom, Elijah and Elisha were our first big prophets. After them came the written prophets - 17 prophets whose prophecies are written and preserved in the Holy Scripture. We have 12 prophets called "Minor" because their books are shorter - Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habbakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. And then there are four prophets called "Major" because their books are longer - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. And Jeremiah also wrote the Lamentations. And then we have the prophet Baruch who is the disciple of Jeremiah. So a total of 17 written prophets.

These prophets were persecuted by Israel - that's why the Lord says in Matthew 5 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." and later in the gospel, when He laments over Jerusalem and says: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!"

They did not have an easy time. Isaiah was sawn in half. Some prophets were killed by the sword, or stoned, or beaten to death. Daniel, for example, was thrown in the lions' den.

Each book starts with "The word of the Lord that came to ..." (prophet name). The prophets were preaching a message of repentance but were also preaching about the coming of the Messiah. There is a strong message that as humans, there is nothing we can do for our own salvation, but there is One coming - a Messiah - who will save us. The prophets were speaking relative to their time period.

We have three categories for the time periods of the prophets. Pre-exilic prophets, exilic prophets, and post-exilic prophets. Each prophet spoke to his generation - so a pre-exilic prophet like Hosea would say something like "Repent for the captivity is coming." Jeremiah would say "Repent so that the captivity would end." Zechariah would say "The captivity is over, cling to the Lord because the Messiah is coming."

Studying the prophets is different from studying the historical books or the poetic books. Most people consider the Prophetic books to be the most difficult to understand. Fr Daoud Lamei says you can read Genesis and Exodus and understand 80% of it without any sort of commentary or help. Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy is a little bit harder around 60% but still doable. Historical Books after that are all stories - you read a story and meditate on it. And you'll understand almost 100% of it by yourself. Poetic books, are hit and miss. You might read a verse and understand it, and read another and not understand it. Some verses need commentary and some are easy to understand. But when you come to the prophets, without any commentary or someone to explain it, it's like 20%.

The reader needs to understand the time period and what the prophet is talking about. St Augustine says that some passages in Scripture are easy to understand, and some are hard and compares it with food. He says: "The Holy Spirit has, with admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, so arranged the HOly Scriptures as by the plainer passages to satisfy our hunger, and by the more obscure to stimulate our appetite. For almost nothing is dug out of those obscure passages which may not be found set forth in the plainest language elsewhere." (On Christian Doctrine - Book 2, Chapter 6). Sometimes I'm hungry and I need a quick meal and I'll eat whatever. But other times, I have a craving, or I'm looking for complex flavor. Still, both meals will provide me with the necessary sustenance.

We will start to study the minor prophets with the Prophet Hosea. Hosea is pre-exilic, one of the earliest prophets, and in the same time as him were Amos, Micah and Isaiah the prophets.

The name Hosea in Arabic is "Hosha3" like what the people were crying out on Palm Sunday: "Hosha3na" - Hosanna. Save us. It means "God saves" and is very close to the name of "Joshua" Ya-shoo3 (Ya --> Yahweh, shoo3 like sha3). Or Jesus (Ya Soo3). It's also very close to Isaiah - Ash3-ya - "The Lord is Salvation"

What are some features of the book of Hosea?

1 - The book of Hosea reveales the relationship of the Lord with His people. The Lord loves His people, and longs for His people.

2 - The people of God are introduced as His bride; yet the bride is afflicted with a sickness. Being her Groom, He approaches her as the true Physician, who alone, can cure her. What is this sickness?
- Lack of knowledge
- Attachment to the Land
- Loss of fulfillment
- Lack of discernment
- Nonchalance
- Pride
- Seeking God's gifts, rather than a relationship and unity with Him

On top of all of that, there is the idolatry and worship of Baal... the harlotry of Israel, seeking after other gods when they have the One True God. And in participating in the idolatry, they fall into magic, adultery, and all sorts of abominations.

3 - Repentance. No matter how often Israel falls, the Lord accepts the repentant heart, again because of His love.

May the Lord grant us to study the prophets and to glean from them His will as those same prophets revealed to God's people His will thousands of years ago. May it be an opportunity to look circumspectly and see ourselves in Israel, and may it be for our edification and salvation.

We'll read two chapters per day, and since Sunday is a catch-up day, we will finish next Monday, God willing.

Chapter 1

Chapters 1-3 of Hosea constitute the first part of the prophecy of this book.

God tells Hosea to take for himself a wife from the harlots and children of harlotry because the land has committed great harlotry.

First off, this is a hard saying for Hosea to hear. Many of the fathers say that Gomer, his wife, did not commit harlotry until after they were married. Harlotry is the word for prostitution - in those days of Israel, there was the worship of Baal and as we mentioned before, that worship included abominations like fornication, harlotry, other sexual immorality, magic and things like that. So this is a woman who after they got married and had children, would go and worship Baal and commit adultery. A very hard saying for Hosea

But the Lord is making a point here - God has taken Israel as His bride. He is her Groom. And she has committed adultery. God is revealing to us how He feels. Imagine being a husband or wife and your spouse does something behind your back - like if I agreed with my wife we wouldn't make a big purchase and then I found out she made the purchase behind my back. Or a wife agrees with her husband to register their kids in a certain school and he goes and registers them in a different school. Even with examples like this that are not adultery, it is a betrayal, it is unfaithfulness. It's not a good feeling. This is how the Lord feels. Israel has committed adultery to her Groom.

What is the message to us? In the New Testament, the Church is the Bride of Christ... So I ask myself. Have I committed idolatry? Have I put something before God? Am I chasing after money, popularity, fitness, titles and degrees, possessions, cars, houses, or anything else at he expense of my spiritual life?

The books of the Prophets are full of symbols and images like this.

Hosea has three kids:
Jezreel - Yazra3 eel - God plants or God sows. The first fruit of idolatry and rejection of God is simply the natural consequences - the reaping of what we sow. The chastisement that God plants in us are the fruit of our doing. St Paul writes in Galatians 6:8 "For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everylasting life."

Lo-Rahama - No Mercy - The second fruit of idolatry and rejection of God is that God will not have mercy. The Lord says in verse 6-7: "For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will

utterly take them away. Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword or battle, by horses or horseman."

When we read these prophecises, there are several double meanings - on the one hand, it is referring to the captivity. On the other hand, it is referring to the New Testament. One of the keys here is the word "save" or "salvation." What is salvation? When an Israelite would read this, he would think of salvation as being "deliverance from the captivity of Assyria" - or later on "deliverance from the captivity of Babylon" - or "from Persia" - or from the Greeks, or from the Romans, or in the modern day, delivery from the other nations of the land and restoration of the nation and kingdom of Israel. He is thinking about the worldly salvation from the worldly enemies. But when a Christian reads this, we think of salvation from sin, death and corruption. We think of eternal life. We think of what the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished in His Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

"I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by the Lord their God, not by bow nor sword or battle, horses or horsemen" - when Judah returns from the Captivity, there is no uprising or revolt or battle - but God puts it in the heart of the Persian King Cyrus that he allows the Jews to go back to their home. And when the Lord Jesus brings about the salvation of mankind, He does not do it with an army or an uprising or a battle. It's a double meaning.

So this second child of Hosea and Gomer, their daughter Lo Rahama, means "No mercy" and refers to Israel - the northern kingdom - which will not see the mercy of God, because they rejected the mercy of God, and chased after other gods.

The third child is called Lo-Ammi "For you are not My people and I will not be your God." This is the final fruit of idolatry and the rejection of God, is that you are no longer God's people. But there is hope... in verse 10

God anticipates their return to Him - but now Hosea is speaking with the prophetic eye about us - the Christians. In the Scripture, when you see references to Israel - many times, it is speaking prophetically about the New Israel which is Christianity.

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered." - the Lord here is renewing the promise that He made to Abraham - your children will be as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the sea. And indeed, we are all children of Abraham as St Paul says in Galatians 3:7 "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.'"

The Lord continues in Hosea: "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people', There it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.'"
The Israelites always called themselves God's people - but as Christians, we don't really use that title "God's people" - instead, we say that we are "children of God." The Gentiles rejected God first and they were not His people... but now it is the Gentiles who are called sons of the living God. St Paul refers to these verses by name in Romans 9 when He is discussing Israel's rejection.

"Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head;"

Who is our head, but the Lord Jesus Christ. The children of Judah - which are the Jews who will believe - and the children of Israel - which are the Gentiles who will believe, shall be gathered together under the Lord Jesus Christ as the head, and will be called the Body of Christ: Christians.

"and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel."

For a Jew, coming up out of the land means getting out of Assyria or Babylon or Persia... but for a Christian, it means coming up out of the earth and going to heaven. Our sights are on heaven. The holy men - Elijah, Elisha, Moses, - they understood this as we do.

See the prophetic eye? See how the Lord revealed to His prophets what would happen? See how the Lord used his prophet Hosea to leave a message for the ages? The story continues in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

"Say to your brethren, 'My people'" and to your sisters, 'Mercy is shown'. These are the opposites of the two children - Lo Ammi "not my people" and Lo Rahama "no mercy". Even in a kingdom and a people that has committed adultery, there are still some who are righteous. In every generation, there are many who are wicked and few who are righteous... but they are there.

These are the ones the Lord is talking to now - those righteous. Their mother is a harlot, but they are not children of harlotry. So the Lord pleads with them through the prophetic voice: "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges" or in another translation: "Plead with your mother, plead." Bringing charges reminds us of a court case or a trial - but it is a trial before the final judgment. And what is the goal of the trial? "Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts." And what happens if we get to the final judgment? "Lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst."

It is a message for each of us - bring charges against yourself so that you may repent, so that the Lord does not bring charges against you in the Final Judgment when there is no chance for repentance. What sin am I doing that I have not repented of yet? Maybe it's anger, or jealousy, or greed. Maybe it's lust or love of money. Maybe it's pride. Bring charges against yourself that you may repent, before the day of the Lord when all will be exposed and brought into the open.

There are of course many meanings to each of these words that the Lord uses. To give a few examples, "Lest I strip her naked and expose her" - When she forsakes Him by her own will, she would lose Him as a shelter - she would use the garment of righteousness. To "make her a wilderness and a dry land and slay her with thirst..." God the Holy Spirit is the Living Water, and is symbolized by water throughout the Scripture. So a rejection of God and a rejection of His spirit. is to lose the water which is the Holy Spirit. We can meditate for hours and if you want more, you can read the Commentary by Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty or listen to the Bible Study by Fr Daoud Lamei (but it's in Arabic).

"Their mother has played the harlot; for she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink'" - when we depend on something or someone besides God for our needs, we commit spiritual harlotry. God is the one who feeds us and clothes us and quenches our thirst. He is our Provider. If I lean on my money, or my job, or my influence for my needs, I have committed spiritual harlotry.

"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her loves, but not overtake them; yes she will seek them, but not find them." - thorns reminds us of the thorns and thistles of Genesis 3 after the Fall of man. We might find hardships in our life. We might find walls that block our paths. Maybe I don't get into the school I want to go to. Maybe the relationship that I am in falls apart. Maybe I am rejected from internships and jobs. And I see these things as being thorns that are blocking my path in life or blocking my future prospects - but let me seek spiritual guidance and take a closer look. Maybe the Lord is putting these thorns in my way, or these walls in my path, because I am on the wrong path. Maybe I am like the harlot seeking her lovers, and the Lord is blocking my path hoping that I will seek Him instead, as He is the way. As St Paul writes to the Hebrews: "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." (Hebrews 12:6). Abouna Jonathan recorded a podcast recently where he talked about his experience of not getting into Med School the first time he applied and how he had to take a gap year, and how this gap year was the year he learned prayer and his prayer life was transformed. The year he really started to seek the Lord. And he looks back on it as the most important year of his life - because he didn't get into Med School.

See what the Lord says about the harlot: "Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.'"

"she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multipled her silver and gold - which they prepared for Baal." The gifts that the Lord had given her were defiled and offered to Baal. So what is the fruit of this behavior?
1 - God takes away His gifts in due time. "Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time and My new wine in its season, and will take back My wool and My linen, given to cover her nakedness."

2 - Loss of joy and peace. "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, Her feast days, Her New Moons, Her Sabbaths - all her appointed feasts."

3 - Eternal Punishment. The end of it all. "I will punish her for the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, And went after her lovers; but Me she forgot," says the Lord.

In this section of the chapter, the Lord proclaimed the evil committed by his adulterous bride and the fruits of her evil. But now He will proclaim His desire for her to return to Him: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her."

How does He allure her?
1 - "I will give her vineyards" - the Lord Jesus said "I am the true Vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."

2 - "'And it shall be in that day,' says the Lord, 'that you will call Me 'My Husband.'" - it means she will accept the unity with God.

If it's not clear yet that this is a prophecy about the Messianic era and about the Christians, we can go to the last verse of the chapter: "I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy" (Lo Rahama) - "Then I will say to those who were not My people" (Lo Ammi) - "You are My people!" And they shall say, 'You are my God!'"

The Gentiles who had not previously obtained mercy and who were not previously God's people, the Lord will say to them "You are My people!" and they shall say "You are my God."

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, the Lord tells Hosea to "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery" - again, it's a very hard thing for Hosea to hear. Go and find your wife who is committing adultery and buy her back and accept her to stay with you and treat her as your wife. But it's a symbol of the Lord's love for us "Just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans."

But here, there is also a contrast: Hosea bought his wife back from self-inflicted slavery for 15 shekels of silver and one and a half homers of barley. 15 shekels of silver is lower than the price of a slave which is 30 shekels in the Law of Moses. And barley is the food of the poor and of the beasts, as opposed to wheat which is the finest. She was purchased for a cheap price, because in the eyes of the world, she is not worth more than that. But the Lord Jesus did not acquire us for gold or silver, wheat or barley, but He purchased us by His precious Blood, freeing us from the self-inflicted bondage of sin.

Chapter 4

The second section in the Book of Hosea is from chapter 4-10. This is when God brings charges against His people. You can think of this whole section like a trial.

In the beginning of Chapter 4: "Hear the word of the Lord, You children of Israel, For the Lord has a judgment for the inhabitants of the land: There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land."

Whenever I see children of Israel, I should put myself in there to examine myself. I am the land that the Lord is talking about. Hear the word of the Lord, Morcous, for the Lord has a judgment for you: There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God.

This is the first accusation brought about against Israel: no truth, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land. All three of these things are important.

First, truth. Truth is the word of God and the commandment of God. The Lord Jesus says in John 17:17 as He prays to the Father: "Consecrate them by the truth; Your word is truth." - There is no truth means they have rejected the word of God. In other translations, the word here is faithfulness. Am I faithful to the commandment of God?

Second, Mercy is how we treat others. Am I merciful to others? Am I good in my relationships and dealings with others? Am I trustworthy? Am I helpful? Am I supportive? Am I encouraging? Am I comforting? Am I generous with my time, my money, my energy?

Third, Knowledge of God is not just knowing ABOUT God, but knowing God as a person. Do I know God? Or do I just know about Him? Do I have a relationship with Him? Do I talk to Him? Do I let Him talk to me through various channels?

So these three judgments brought about by the Lord concern my relationship with myself, my relationship with others, and my relationship with God. Israel was lacking righteousness in all three categories. And he expands in the next verse: "cursing and lying, murder and theft and adultery gushed forth in the land, and blood is mingled with blood." These are the product of the lack of truth, mercy and knowlede of God. Sin and Corruption.

And the judgment: "Therefore the land shall mourn" - this is emptiness. You know when you feel empty, or when someone feels empty inside - that he is missing something. We usually say that there's a God-sized hole in the heart. And God is the only one that can fill that hole. But instead, we keep trying to fill the whole with things that are not God, or worse - with things that are contrary to God. With corruption.

"Therefore the land shall mourn and be diminshed with all the things that dwell in it: the wild beasts of the field, the reptiles of the earth, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea shall come to an end."

In patristic thought, animals were seen symbolically. Land animals symbolize works or actions because they walk the earth and represent our tangible deeds. Birds symbolize thoughts since they move freely in the air. And fish symbolize feelings or emotions because they dwell in the depths of the waters, hidden and unseen - yet active.
- Animals: Actions
- Birds: Thoughts
- Fish: Feelings

So here, when Hosea writes from the Lord that the land will mourn and be diminished with all things: beasts, birds and fish

When I separate myself from God's commandment, I find corruption and confusion in my actions, in my thoughts and in my feelings. I will do corrupt things, think corrupt things, and feel corrupt things. If I want to measure my faithfulness to God, I can measure my actions, thoughts and feelings.

I can measure my thoughts - how much of my thoughts is with God, and how much of my thoughts is with the world?

I can measure my actions - how much of my actions is acceptable to God, and how much of my actions is not?

I can measure my feelings - how much of my feelings are with love for others and mercy and compassion, and how much is anger and jealousy and lust?

The prophecy continues with giving many of the sins prevalent among them, that give grounds for the Lord to judge them:
- Ignorance and forgetfulness of God: Verse 6 - "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because you have forgotten the law of your God"
- Drunkenness and uncleaness: Verse 11 - "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart."
- Idolatry and divination: Verse 12 - "My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them."
- Offering sacrifices in the high places: Verse 13 - "They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, because their shade is good."
- Harlotry and whoredom: Verse 14 - "The men themselves go apart with harlots, and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot" and Verse 18 - "They commit harlotry continually"

And the prophecy shows how God would punish them for all of these things:
- Verse 9 - "I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds."
- Being unsatisfied: Verse 10 - "They shall eat, but not have enough; they shall commit harlotry, but not increase"
- Left to their sins: Verse 17 - "Ephraim is joined to idols, Let him alone"
- Made ashamed: Verse 19 - "They shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices"

In verse 15, a warning is also given to Judah not to follow the steps of Israel.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 continues with more judgments on Israel and now Judah. The beginning reads "Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king!" and we see the following sins:
- Persecuting others: Verse 2 - "The revolters are deeply involved in slaughter"
- Spiritual Harlotry: Verse 3 - "For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled."
- Pride: Verse 5 - "The pride of Israel testifies to his face"

Etc.

How do we read these chapters? Again, I have to put myself in this chapter. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God - let me examine myself. Was there a time when I have ignored the law of God? Was there a time when I forgot God in my mind? Was there a time when I let myself become subject to a substance like drugs or alcohol? Was there a time when I fell into sins of sexual immorality? Do I prioritize things before God? Do I put my faith in things like money, or even in gambling with sports or dice or cards or the stock market? Do I persecute others? Do I have pride? Do I blame others? Do I act cruely?

The Lord has brought charges against Israel, but in the same way, the Lord will bring charges against me on Judgment Day. Let me examine myself before that day comes and let me repent. In the next chapter, at the beginning of chapter 6, we will see a call for repentance.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6, we see the beginnings of a theme of returning to the Lord. We read in verse 1: "Let us go and return to the Lord our God; for He has grasped and will heal us; He will smite and plug the wound with lint."

Although Israel is falling into all of these sins that we mentioned in the previous two chapters, there is always the chance for repentant. We can remember in the story of Jonah about the city of Nineveh that the Lord accepted their repentance. And we can apply these prophecies to ourselves - there is no sin that is too great for God to forgive if we offer repentance.

Sometimes when we sin, we have a guilty feeling - this is the rebuke of the Holy Spirit in us. But it is not repentance - it can be the beginning of repentance. Repentance should be complete - a change of heart. Repentance is the despising or hatred of the sin. Repentance is the commitment to avoid this sin. Repentance is the admitting in front of God through the father the priest. Repentance is asking God's mercy, and asking for His help in overcoming. Repentance is restoring what you have taken.

And repentance and the forgiveness of sin are made possible by the Lord Jesus Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and Resurrection, and our participation in them with baptism.

And this draws us to the next point that we haven't mentioned yet - Messianic Prophecies. The Prophets are full of Messianic Prophecies; some of them are very clear, and some need explanation. But here in the beginning of Chapter 6 we see one that is clear.

"After two days He will heal us. In the third day we shall rise and live before Him"

Of course, any Christian when he hears "third day" and "rise and live" in the same sentence, is thinking about the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the third day. The two days here refers to the time the body of the Lord Jesus Christ lay in the tomb, and on the third day His Resurrection.

"Let us know, let us pursue, that we might know the Lord." - Resurrection gave us new life, new abilities, new vision, new knowledge through which we can follow the Lord's steps.

"We shall find Him ready as the daybreak" - this is a prophecy about the Resurrection being early in the morning

"And He will come to us as the early and latter rain to the earth" - this is a prophecy about the Holy Spirit. Water is one of the symbols of the Holy Scripture used in Scripture (along with fire, oil, wind and dove).

So we have in the beginning of this chapter, some very clear Messianic prophecies (like the rise on the third day) and we have some that are a little bit more vague and need explanation or understanding.

These are just some examples of how we can study the Scripture.

To summarize the rest of Chapter 6, although repentance is made available by God, and the prophet Hosea here is making that clear for the people - you have an opportunity to repent, Israel

and Judah are not repentant.

Verse 4: What shall I do to you, O Ephraim? What shall I do to you, O Judah? Your mercy [or in another translation, your faithfulness] is like a morning cloud and like teh early dew it goes away." - the morning cloud and the dew of the morning are only there in the morning... then they go away. Same with Israel and Judah's faithfulness. It is not stable or consistent. May the Lord grant us that our faithfulness to him be solid and strong like a rock, and not like the dew of the morning.

Verse 6: "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." - This is a VERY important verse, and one that I hope you will share with me in memorizing. Hosea 6:6 - the reference is easy to remember. "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

This was the big problem that the Pharisees had in the New Testament, and it's a problem that some of us may struggle with today. The Pharisees were so concerned with the letter of the law - watching the motion of every person, what is he doing on the Sabbath? Did he wash his hands before eating? Is his tithe exactly 10% and did he tithe 10% of every little thing he has? But they did not have mercy on their brother. They did not have a relationship with God, but we just focused on the minutiae of the law.

In Matthew 12, the Pharisees saw the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath and said "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" - and the Lord explains to them this verse from Hosea. He says: "If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." And then the Lord goes and heals a man with a withered hand on that same Sabbath. And when they tried to accuse Him, He asked them: "If you had a sheep and it fell into a pit on the Sabbath, would you bring it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." - He explained to them the Spirit of the Law of the Sabbath. Keep in mind that the Lord Jesus is the Lawgiver - they are trying to tell the One Who Gave the Law, what the Law means! But He explains to them - the Sabbath isn't about "don't do xyz" but it's about Honoring God - doing good deeds, spending time with the Lord instead of with the cares of the world. Having mercy on God's creation.

Until today, some Jewish people in an attempt to keep the Sabbath will not push the button on an elevator... and in some places there are elevators that go up and down on Saturdays stopping at every floor so that Jews can use them without pushing the button... is this what the Lord meant by honoring the Sabbath day and keeping it holy?

Mark 2:27 tells the same story as Matthew 12, and in it the Lord said: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

The Sabbath was made for man. The Law was given FOR man. But it is the Spirit of the Law that the Lord desires, not the letter of the Law.

Since we are in the Great Fast, let us take the example of prayer. Now I am increasing in my prayers for the Great Fast and I am praying from the Agpeya some extra prayers. How do I pray them? Am I just reading them as fast as I can to get through them? Is the point of prayer to check a

box about which prayers I read and which ones I finished, Or is the point a relationship with God? Is the prayer itself the goal, Or is prayer the means by which we enter into a relationship with God?

If we take the example of liturgy... am I attending liturgy on Sunday completely absent-minded or on my phone, or coming late, or just standing there and then taking communion and checking a box? Or am I attending the liturgy to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, and to spend time in His presence, and to abide in Him and He in me? And what do I do after liturgy? Do I take the peace of the Lord with me and spread it everywhere I go? Do I take my joy and give it to the waitress at the restaurant and the cashier in the store and the attendant at the gas station? Or am I cursing at the guy who switched lanes in front of me, angry at the waitress who got my order wrong, impatient with the slow cashier? What have I gained from attending the Liturgy then?

When I was a kid, if I ever got in a fight with my brother or sister or disobeyed my parents, or did something wrong, my mom would tell me "that's what you learned at church?"

The Lord says by Hosea the prophet: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than whoel burnt offerings." - I encourage you to memorize this verse and remember its reference Hosea 6:6.

Week 3: Amos

Introduction

Amos is a pre-exilic prophet. He prophesied around the same time as Hosea which was during the reign in Israel of Jeroboam II. So after Ahab, we had Ahaziah his son, and then Jehoram Ahab's son (since Ahaziah did not have children). Then we had Jehu and Jehoahaz and then Joash and then Jeroboam son of Joash who is Jeroboam II. All of these are evil kings.

So we said that pre-exilic prophets will be prophesying as "Return to the Lord for the exile is coming." And sometimes we see the stick and other times the carrot - "Return to the Lord lest you experience His wrath" or "Return to the Lord and you will experience His goodness and His mercy and His love." Of course, both are accurate - when I separate myself from the Lord in sin, I am separating myself from the Giver of all Good Things. And when I return to the Lord in repentance, I am returning and attaching myself to the Giver of all Good Things.

Let's talk about the person of Amos, the prophet who wrote the book.

His name means "burdened" or "bearer of a burden." The Jewish tradition says that the prophet Amos was slow of speech or slow of tongue - meaning that he was burdened by some sort of speech impediment. His name also gives us a hint about his prophecies - he will talk about the heavy burden of sin: unendurable and unacceptable to God.

He worked as a sheep herder and fruit gatherer in a small village called Tekoa. It is about 12 miles south of Jerusalem. If you have the map in your mind, you're thinking that's in Judah! And you're right! He lived in Judah. But he traveled up to Bethel (remember that's where Jeroboam I made one of his golden calves) and prophesied there against Israel.

The fact that he worked with sheep and gathered fruit, and that he was from a small village will reflect in his prophecies - we will see imagery drawn from the life of the dwellers of villages, and imagery of life in the wilderness.

During his time, Israel and Judah both saw prosperity. There was peace in the region - Assyria had conquered Aram in war, and Israel reacquired some of its land that Aram had taken. Assyria was at peace with Egypt - which was a big problem because for Assyria to go to Egypt, they had to pass through Israel. So with peace in the region, trade started to increase which led to economic growth - but usually economic growth means disparity. If people are getting rich, it means other people are getting poor. There starts to be two categories of people - the extremely rich traders, and the extremely poor farmers who were being oppressed by the rich.

In a time of economic prosperity, the rich start to see the practice of worshipping God as by giving money and sacrifices to the temple. The life of worship becomes separated from the spiritual concept completely. Also, when there is peace in the land, people start to think it is because of their own goodness - and start to see God as "the God of Israel only" and not the God of Gentiles.

This time period that we just described is actually very similar to our time period. We live in a time of relative peace - sure, there is a war in Ukraine and Russia and another in Israel, but we are not feeling the effects of war. We are sitting comfortably in our homes in America with a roof over our head, enjoying our comforts. And we live in a time where some are wealthy and some are not. And sometimes the wealthy oppress the poor. I know if you're in college or grad school, you may not feel the wealth right now, but we live in a time where it's easy to say: "I give my tithes, and I support the church, that's enough." Or even "I go to liturgy every week... that should count for something, right?" and go and do whatever I want outside of liturgy and outside of Sunday. And we are reminded of Hosea 6:6 that verse that we memorized together - "I desire mercy and not sacrifice."

The problems in those times, which are problems that we see in our modern society, include:

- Self-centeredness
- Permissiveness (everything is permissive)
- Superficiality
- Atheism
- Materialism

So who does the Lord raise up to prophesy? Amos, raised among the poor, seeing the oppression of the rich, the empty spirituality of the rich, and proclaiming to them that God is "God of all" and does not endure sin no matter who commits it - rich or poor, Jew or Gentile. Amos will say in 9:12 "all the Gentiles are called by His name" which is also a prophesy about Christianity.

In the Old Testament you see that the authors came from all different classes or types of people. You have kings like King David and King Solomon who wrote, you have priests like Ezekiel or Ezra, you have Moses who grew up in Pharaoh's house, then lived as a shepherd, and then became leader of the nation of Israel; and then you have someone like Amos who was a shepherd and a gatherer of fruit living in a small village.

Amos has many good qualities that we can learn from:

- Humility: "I was no prophet, nor a son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock." (Amos 7:14-15) - He was not ashamed to reveal his lowly and humble beginnings/profession.
- Courage: He will go before Amaziah - the chief priest of Bethel - without fear or faltering. He will prophesy in front of him about the devastation of his house and will testify to the truth.
- Wisdom: He speaks in a way that applies to everyone - rulers and elite, but also to those who are poor and living as farmers in the wilderness. His words are applicable to all for repentance
- Meditative: He contemplates on the atmosphere that he lives in, on nature around him, and lives this life of contemplation and it's reflected in his prophesies.

Amos dies by being clubbed to death by the priests of Bethel.

The Book is split into three sections:

- Chapter 1-2: Judgment of the Gentiles
- Chapter 3-6: Sermons to Israel
- Chapters 7-9: Visions and Promises of Salvation

Chapter 1-2

Chapter 1 opens with "The Lord Roars" - Amos is a shepherd and shepherds in those days in Israel would sometimes have to deal with lions. We remember King David and the lion. We remember Samson and the lion. The imagery here with roars is the Lord as a roaring lion. And a roaring lion strikes fear in the shepherd. Despite being a prophet who is maybe small in status, Amos' prophecies by the Lord are heavy. Like a lion's roar. And if we take them on ourselves, we will feel this roaring lion.

Chapter 1 and 2 are the Lord's charges and judgments against the nations.

Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel all get the same formula.

Amos is showing here that it doesn't matter who sinned, all sin is corruption and the Lord hates all sin. The Lord does not have preferential treatment or conditional love... we will see that even Nineveh, an Assyrian city, will be prophesied to and saved from destruction because they had a heart open to repentance. God is God of the whole earth, even if they don't all worship Him. He cares for all, judges all, condemns all.

Before getting to Israel's sin, he starts with the other nations. Sometimes we justify our sin with "well everyone is doing it" or "this guy did it and he turned out ok... nothing happened to him." So the Lord starts with those who are not his people so that the Israelites can know that there are consequences for sin.

Each nation's judgment is structured the same way "Thus says the Lord: For three sins of <place> and for four, I shall not turn away from it. For they did <this and that>. So I shall bring fire on them."

What does "For three sins and for four" mean? The Fathers express their comments on this a little bit differently from each other, reaching at least two conclusions that are complementary and beneficial for us. "For three sins and for four" refers to the maturity of the sin. St Jerome says that sin has evolved into its third and fourth generation. You can think of the first generation as "thinking of evil" - it starts in the mind. Then we progress to the second generation "doing the evil." The third generation is "continuing to do the evil" to where it becomes a habit, and specifically not repenting of it. The fourth generation is "preaching the evil." The Lord says you accepted evil in your mind, and I forgave you. You did the evil and I forgave you. You did not repent, and kept doing, and still I forgave you. But now will you preach it as well??

It's like if I first think about money, and then I steal, and then I don't repent, and then I tell people how easy it was. Or I think about money and then I gamble on sports or on the stock market or on crypto, and then I don't repent and then I start teaching people how to gamble on sports and stocks and crypto.

St Augustine comments on these numbers differently... St Augustine loves numerology and symbolism of numbers. He says that three represents the human soul - because in Genesis 1, we are created in the Image of God, according to His Likeness. And God is Trinity. But four represents the body, since the body comes from the dust of the earth (and usually earth is represented by number 4 because of the four directions NSEW). So for three sins and for four refers to our mental sins (like pride, hate, etc.) and our physical sins (like gluttony, carnal lusts, etc.). So God will judge us for those sins that we commit in our mind, and those that we commit with our hands.

So the prophet Amos expresses what he saw that the Lord showed him in this way, and he does it for each of these eight nations. Let's go through the eight nations and see what their sin is and how we can take it as a message to ourselves.

Damascus

- Damascus would go around fighting everyone and starting wars. They thought they couldn't be beaten and they were the best.
- This is the sin of Pride - the mother of all sins; the first sin
- Pride messes with the mind, emotions, body and spirit. Someone might get used to pride - used to thinking they are better or that others are worse, used to sitting in the first spot or walking in the door first, used to being the center of attention.

Gaza of the Philistines

- They would kidnap people and then sell them as slaves
- if you sell people for money, then what do you see as more valuable? Their sin is the love of money
- Love of money makes me look at money before my fellow brother
- Starts in the mind, then with doing - what am I forsaking for the sake of acquiring more money. Then I have a continual focus on money - whether obtained by cheating, by stealing, by gambling, sabotaging others, or maybe it's obtained in a lawful way, but at the expense of time with my family, or spiritual life.

Tyre

- They are like Gaza, except they took people from a nation that they had a covenant with. So they broke their treaty.
- Their sin is the breaking of an oath
- How many times have we broken our promises? Or our covenant with God? We have a covenant with God, which is baptism - are we careful not to break it? If I have an oath with God through my Father of Confession for a spiritual canon, am I breaking my oath? Or am I faithful to my canon?

Edom

- Edom pursued his brother with a sword and ravaged the womb on the earth.
- Edom is Esau, the brother of Jacob from the book of Genesis. And since the time when Jacob took the blessing, the descendants of Esau (who are called Edom) hated the

descendants of Jacob (who are called Israel).
- Hatred and lack of mercy
- There is a natural love and dealing with mercy between brothers and when this breaks, we can become like animals - not even recognizing the person in front of us. A hatred that fills someone to the point where they would be happy if something bad happened to the one they hate... we see this today in how some behave with politics.

Ammon

- The Ammonites come from the descendants of Ammon who was the son born to Lot's younger daughter. If you remember in Genesis, Lot's daughters just escaped from Sodom by the angel, and in Sodom all they know is sexual immorality. So now, thinking the whole world was destroyed, and only their father is left, they both decide to go in to him and bear children by him. The elder daughter bore Moab and the younger daughter bore Ammon. And both of them became great nations that were thorns in Israel's flesh for hundreds of years. And they were both brutal.
- Ammonites represent brutality based on greed - to expand their territory, they even attacked and killed the helpless - women who were pregnant and their babies.
- Greed starts in the mind and leads to a brutality of doing whatever it takes to get what I want

Moab

- The Moabites represent brutality based on revenge. They burned the bones of the king of Edom to ashes. It's not enough that he is dead, but also to burn his bones...
- You might think - well king of Edom was an evil king, we just heard a judgment about him! Shouldn't God be happy?! No! Because now on top of the sin of the king of Edom, there is another sin of the Moabites.
- Vengeance starts in the mind and leads to brutality of doing whatever it takes to get what I think I deserve

Judah

- Judah... although being God's people who have the Temple and have the Law... the same language. For three sins of Judah and for four. I shall send a fire. Same language. Same fire.
- Why? They have despised the law of the Lord. For the other nations it's all the "big sins" but this nation is different - this nation received the Law of God... and despised it. Reminds me of Romans 1
  - Romans 1:28-32 NKJV
    [28] And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; [29] being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, [30] backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, [31] undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; [32] who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that

those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.
- The Lord says "these were lies their fathers followed."
  - Although we have the Law of God, sometimes we follow a lie like "just do whatever you want and confess it after" - that's a lie!

Israel

- And now Israel... the same language.
- "they sell the righteous for silver" - what does this remind you of? It's a prophecy of Judas who will sell the righteous Lord Jesus Christ for 30 pieces of silver. But also in those days, they would take the poor of their brethren and sell them for silver or even (as seen in the next verse) for a pair of sandals.
- "the poor for a pair of sandals"
  - The poor represent the heavenly - the Lord says: "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"
  - The sandals represent the earthly since they walk on the earth and touch the earth. That's why when Moses approached the Lord, He told him to remove his sandals.
  - So here, Israel sold the heavenly for the earthly.
    - In the time of the Prophet Samuel, they had God as their king. A Heavenly King... but they wanted an earthly king. And giving up their heavenly king for an earthly king, is what started this whole mess with the divided kingdom.
    - In the time of the Lord Jesus, Pontius Pilate asked Him "are you the King of the Jews" and He responded "you have said so." And He told Pilate "My Kingdom is not of this world." - but they didn't want a Kingdom out of this world. They wanted one in this world that would defeat the Roman oppressors... so they crucified Him.
- Other sins
  - "They trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn away the afflicted and pervert the way of the humble."
  - "A son and his father go in to the same handmaiden in order to profane the name of their God"
  - "And having bound their clothes with cords, they made curtains by the altar"
  - "and they drank wine gained through false accusations in the house of their God"
  - Love of money, forsaking the poor, adultery, idolatry, drunkenness, etc.
- Before telling them their punishment, and their fire, He reminds them of what He has done for them
  - Destroyed the Amorites
  - Brought you up from slavery in the land of Egypt
  - Gave you the land to possess that you now possess
  - It's a message for us
    - I defeated Satan before you
    - I took you out of slavery in baptism
    - I gave you possession with Me by My Holy Spirit
    - But what did you do?

    - Israel rejected the word of truth and those who spoke to them the truth - Nazirites and Prophets.
- “Behold, I am weighed down by you,
  As a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.
    - Our sin is heavy on the Lord
    - Let us strive to be light as a cloud that carries the Lord

In the next several chapters, the Lord will continue His message to Israel through the prophet Amos.

Chapter 3

"O house of Israel, hear this word the Lord has spoken against you, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, 'Out of all the families of the earth, I have especially known you. Therefore I shall exact vengeance upon you for all your sins.'"

The Lord starts Chapter 3 by reminding Israel that they are not like the other nations, but they are chosen by God to know Him closely. He made them His children - so their sins will be punished more than other nations. And the same goes for us - we as Christians, we know the fullness of the truth. We are sons of God by adoption through our baptism. We know God's commandments, we know His goodness, we know Him - so there is a higher standard for us to live according to His word.

God chose Israel as His people not because He loves them more - He loves all equally, but so that they can be a light to the other nations. We also are called to be light - let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify who? Your Father in heaven.

We might think that this is a scary message, or even that the Lord is being harsh here... but He goes on to ask 7 questions which show His mercy. And the answer to these questions will be no.

"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" - if two people have different goals, direction, purpose, pace, understanding, can they walk together? No - naturally, they will split ways.

"Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?
Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?"

A lion cries out with a roar when he has caught his prey - so you know something happened. There's a reason for his roaring. What about the roaring voice of the Lord (callback to Chapter 1) - don't you think there's a reason for it?

"Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it?
Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all?
If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?
If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done *it?*"

We are seeing here again Amos' proclivity to using nature to deliver his prophecy! These questions represent for us two ideas:

1. That we are in trouble - we are prey with a lion, caught in a lion's den, birds fallen in a snare (and whenever we see snare, we think of the snare of Satan). We are in trouble and the Lord is our salvation. A bird cannot save himself from a trap. A lion's prey cannot save himself from the lion's mouth or the lion's den. The Lord is our salvation.

2. The Lord does not punish without giving a chance for repentance. He declares His word through Prophets and warnings and messages but only when those messages are ignored, will the Lord take action. There's a trumpet blown in a city so that the people would be afraid, and repent. The roar of a lion strikes fear in the shepherds hearts so that they know a lion is coming. The words of the prophet Amos are spoken to Israel so that they repent. Always think back to Nineveh - although they were a city great in sin, the Lord did not take action with them until at least Jonah went there and preached. And even when Jonah didn't want to and escaped and went the other way, the Lord didn't set His sights on Nineveh, but on Jonah so that His message would reach Nineveh and they would have the opportunity to repent - and they did.

"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." - it reminds us of Sodom and Gomorrah those evil and wicked cities, that even them the Lord did not destroy before consulting with Abraham and giving Abraham a chance to intercede for them. Would you destroy them if there were 50 righteous? No not for 50. What about 45? Not for 45. What about 40? Not for 40. What about 30? Not for 30. What about 20? Not for 20. What about 10? Not for 10. And the Lord didn't even find 10. But for the sake of Abraham, the one who he found - Lot - who had even just a little bit of righteousness, even just the potential to be righteous, just a small part of his uncle Abraham's hospitality and righteousness, the Lord delivers him out first. Do you see the love and mercy of our God?

These few chapters and indeed most of the minor prophets are sounding the alarm about sin, and we can take the message for ourselves. And as I was reviewing the last several chapters of Hosea and Amos that we read, and the voice messages that I sent, they sounded kind of depressing - we sinned in this way and that way and we will be judged, etc. But look at God's mercy and His goodness - even to the evil, even to the wicked, even to us sinners who reject Him daily. But let us live a life of repentance.

"A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?" - The prophets spoke the word of Truth; they spoke God's words. God spoke, they heard it and repeated it. That's all they can do. And you know... we can take any message from our fathers the priests and bishops especially - as a message from God. If our fathers the priests and bishops see clothing being worn by Christians outside and inside the Church is not befitting to them and does not please the Lord, they should speak out. When they see haircuts people walking around with not pleasing to the Lord who made us in His image, they should speak up. When they see that we are slacking in our spiritual life or in our service or our church life, they speak up. What is our response? Do we recognize this as a message from God? Do we recognize him as a messenger for God? Or do we persecute and kill them like the Jews killed the Prophets? "Oh that Abouna is strict. That Abouna is old-fashioned. That's just Abouna's opinion. I wish this Abouna would stop talking about that." - like in Chapter 2 "You gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying 'Do not prophesy!'" There is an authority to the message of the men of God.

The second part of Chapter 3 is about how the Gentiles will judge God's people. In verse 9: "Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt" - Israel was supposed to be the salt of the earth that reformed others, but "if salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men." And Amos gives a prophecy here about the Captivity:

Therefore thus says the Lord God:

“An adversary *shall be* all around the land;
He shall sap your strength from you,
And your palaces shall be plundered.”

12 Thus says the Lord:

“As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion
Two legs or a piece of an ear,
So shall the children of Israel be taken out
Who dwell in Samaria—
In the corner of a bed and on the edge of a couch!
13 Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,”
Says the Lord God, the God of hosts,
14 “That in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions,
I will also visit *destruction* on the altars of Bethel;
And the horns of the altar shall be cut off
And fall to the ground.
15 I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house;
The houses of ivory shall perish,
And the great houses shall have an end,”
Says the Lord.

The Lord is punishing here not for punishment sake, but for two reasons:

1. To wipe out idolatry ("visit destruction on the altars of Bethel")
2. To destroy the life of luxury that leads to looseness and indifference ("destroy the winter house along with the summer house, houses of ivory shall perish."

Chapter 4

So Chapter 3 had the first sermon to the children of Israel, and now Chapter 4 will have the second sermon.

The Children of Israel are oppressing the poor and the needy. And this oppression goes hand in hand with their rejection of true worship. The very unfortunate thing is that they think they are good - they think the warnings from the prophets don't concern them. Someone might say - I go to Bethel and offer sacrifices, I present tithes, I do burnt offerings! In their eyes, they love God - but they are deceiving themselves. As we sometimes do too. I go to church, I even go to Vespers. I serve in Sunday School. I help clean the church. I attend youth meeting. I'm a deacon. I give my

tithes. I'm good, right? - well... maybe... how am I like when no one is looking? Do I have a relationship with God? Or do I have obligations? Am I merciful to my neighbors? Do I love my enemy?

And the Lord tries different ways to bring them to Him:

- I gave you cleanness of teeth and a lack of bread. Yet you did not return to Me. - sometimes a lack of food gives us clarity and this is one benefit to fasting.
- I withheld rain from your city, and the crops withered. Yet, says the Lord, you did not return to me. - If there's no rain, who do I depend on? If my crops are dying, who can I turn to? Yet they did not return to Him
- I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, your olive trees, the locust devoured them, yet you have not returned to Me." - so He gave them increase in their vineyards, fig trees, gardens, olive trees and they did not turn to Him... so He tried the opposite and the locust devoured them. And still they did not turn to Him.
- “I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; Your young men I killed with a sword, Along with your captive horses; I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils; Yet you have not returned to Me,” Says the Lord.
- “I overthrew *some* of you, As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning; Yet you have not returned to Me,” Says the Lord.

Sometimes the Lord will give us different kinds of challenges in order that we return to him... A bad grade on a test, a sickness - even if it's just a cold at an inconvenient time, not getting into the school of my choice, failing a job interview, trials in my friendships, or more difficult things like a death in the family, or a more serious illness with someone I know, etc. Maybe I only turn to the Lord when I am failing and I feel that I need Him. Maybe I only turn to the Lord when I finally feel that something is out of my hands and there's nothing I can do about it. Maybe I only turn to the Lord when the person I usually turn to, is mad at me. So the Lord will try in different ways to divert our attention to Him, for our own sake.

Chapter 5

Week 4: Captivity of Israel

Introduction

This week, God willing, we will shift our focus away from pre-exilic Israel and see the prophecies pronounced to the nations of the Gentiles. I'll share a map with this voice message and reference it, to help give a better idea.

We will start today with Jonah, who prophesied to the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. We are all familiar with the story of the prophet Jonah, how he did not want to prophesy to the people of Nineveh and so he disobeyed God's message to him, and got on a boat heading the other way. And here, we have a big question... why didn't Jonah want to prophesy to Nineveh, to the Assyrians?

The Assyrians were one of the enemies of Israel. They were immoral idolaters, sexually immoral, child sacrifice and infanticide. And they were brutal... it's not mentioned in Scripture, but some of the archaelogical records discovered about Assyria describe their conquests - they would capture troops alive, cut off their arms and hands, cut off their noses, ears, extremeties, gouge their eyes, hang them, etc. One record says "with the blood of my captives, I dyed the mountain red like red wool. I cut off their heads and built a tower with it. I burnt their adolescent boys and girls." I once heard a sermon likening Assyria to modern-day ISIS. Imagine being called by God to go and prophesy to ISIS. We might be scared - but for Jonah it wasn't so much fear, as it was he didn't want God to have mercy on them. He knows that God is merciful. He knows that if he prophesies, there's a chance God will be merciful to them. And he hates that.

And that's exactly what happens. So Nineveh repents. And now we have a dichotomy - we can juxtapose Nineveh and Israel. Nineveh is repenting, and Israel is not.

We will read in Isaiah 10 how the Lord will use Assyria to take Israel captive, despite Assyria's pride.

Then we'll read from 2 Kings 17 - The account of the captivity of Israel by Assyria.

Take a look at the map that I shared. The dark green region is Assyria before the repentance of Nineveh. The light green region is Assyria after the repentance of Nineveh and the conquests of the lands around Israel. You can see one small holdout there in yellow which is the Kingdom of Judah. Assyria will attempt to take Judah, but fail because of the prayers of Isaiah the Prophet and King Hezekiah - that will be the focus of our study next week, God willing.

Of course, Nineveh's repentance does not last forever. They eventually go back to their ways, which brings in the prophet Nahum who will prophesy against them. And this time, it won't be so nice for them.

As we know through history and through the scripture, Assyria will eventually be conquered by the Babylonians, and they will go on to take Judah captive as well.

At the end of the week, we'll read Obadiah who prophesies to another nation - Edom.

One big takeaway from these stories and prophecies is that the Lord has all of His creation in mind and in view. He is trying to bring all to repentance. Sometimes He does it by sending a prophet. Sometimes He does it by an attack on a city. Sometimes by a full blown captivity. Whether it is Israel and Judah or Assyria or Edom, they are His creation and He loves them. Even in our modern day, we may think that God does not care about the Muslims or Hindus or Atheists, but He does. And He desires to bring them all into His fold. Sometimes He may do a miracle (like St Mary Zeitoun in Egypt). Sometimes He will send them a bishop like Anba Youssef of Bolivia or Anba Boles in Africa.

But sometimes He will send them you. And it is enough that you are a light to them - that they see you live morally and you are different from the rest of their peers. And they see that you have joy and peace. That you smile at everyone whether you know them or not. That you're always willing to help. And they see that you have commitment and you're faithful in your school work, contributing hard in your group projects, well-rounded, not proud and haughty, not drinking like everyone else, not in inappropriate relationships. Then your light - the light of Christ in you - will shine on them, and the Holy Spirit will work through them to bring them to the knowledge of the Truth. The word prophet just means messenger, and in our generation, we are the messengers to the other nations.

The prophecies this week are much easier to read and to understand, and they are all very short. This can give us a chance to read some commentaries on them individually in addition to our reading of the Scripture. I hope you will read along.

Jonah 1-2

We are very familiar with the story of Jonah, and the Book of Jonah - every year we have Jonah's Fast two weeks before the start of the Great Fast. It is three-days long fast, concluding with the Feast on Thursday which is called Jonah's Passover. The rites, tunes and hymns of Jonah's Fast are identical to those of the Great Fast Weekdays. On Monday we read Jonah 1, on Tuesday Jonah 2, on Wednesday Jonah 3-4. So we read the Book of Jonah every year, we hear sermons about it, we fast the fast and maybe read the books by HHPS or something. Jonah's Fast represents for us a mini-Great Fast. Just as the Great Fast ends with the Christian Passover - the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, so Jonah's Fast ends with Jonah's Passover.

There are a few ways to look at the fast.
We fast three days as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days, and then the Passover of Jonah is when he is spit out on the land. So he was dead three days, and then was alive. And he, even, says in his prayer in Chapter 2: "Out of the belly of Hades" (or Sheol) "You heard the cry of my voice."

We also fast three days as the Ninevites fasted three days (we'll read that in Chapter 3). And then the Passover is when they are delivered by God from the sentence of death by their repentance.

So this is why some people call it Jonah's Fast and some call it the Ninevites' Fast.

The Lord Jesus Christ mentioned Jonah in the gospels. In Matthew 12, after the Lord had cast out demons, the Pharisees said "this fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."

Sidenote, Now that we are reading the stories of the divided kingdom, we may recognize that name Baalzebub from when we read 2 Kings 1 and 2. It's the name of Baal - the false god that Jezebel and Ahab brought into Israel and worshipped.

So when the Pharisees said that, the Lord answered them that a house divided against itself cannot stand and proved to them that logically, He cannot be casting out demons by Beelzebub, but rather the Kingdom of God is upon them. And so they ask for a sign...

"But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.'"

So in this way, we see that Jonah is a TYPE of Christ. In communion of Jonah's Fast we say "Jonah in the belly of the whale as a type of Christ in the tomb for three days." So Jonah is a TYPE of Christ, that Christ, Himself, actually referenced.

Jonah 1

In Chapter 1, we see that Jonah flees from the Lord. We mentioned the reasons for his lack of obedience in the last voice message. Jonah starts to flee to Tarshis and boards a ship going in that direction. The Lord raised up a great wind upon the sea, and the ship was in danger of breaking up. The mariners, who are Gentiles, who do not know the Lord, started to cry out to their gods. They started to throw the cargo into the sea to lighten the load. And where is Jonah in all this? Sleeping... and not just sleeping, but snoring. I'm reading here from the OSB - in NKJV it says he is fast asleep. The idea is he's in a deep sleep - completely oblivious to what he has done, and what is happening around him.

The captain finds him and wakes him up and tells him to get up and pray like the rest of them! And they cast lots to figure out who is the reason for this calamity and of course the lot falls on Jonah. So they question him and Jonah says to them "Take me up and cast me into the sea, and the sea will grow calm for you." - and still, these honorable mariners tried hard to return to land. But when they couldn't, they cried out to the Lord and said: "Please, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life, nor bring righteous blood upon us; for you O Lord, have brought this about." And they throw him overboard and the sea stops its raging. Then they feared the Lord even more and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and vowed vows.

There are many lessons to learn from this story.
First, God used Jonah's disobedience (a bad thing) to bring about something good - the salvation of the mariners. The mariners, who are Gentiles, who do not know the Lord, on account of Jonah will believe on the Lord, pray to Him asking for His deliverance, and offer to Him a sacrifice and vow vows. And even their prayer - "Do not let us perish on account of this man's life, nor bring righteous blood upon us." - God to them at first was not God, but Jonah's God. But now, He is the One who will bring judgment, the One who hears prayers, the One who is worthy of sacrifice. The mariners are saved because of Jonah.

There is also a lesson to learn from Jonah - when they asked him "Tell us, what is your occupation? Where do you come from? What country and people are you?" - they're asking him "Who are you?" and Jonah's answer: "I am a servant of the Lord, and I worship the Lord God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." - again, I am reading from the Orthodox Study Bible. Look at this answer "I am a servant of the Lord, and I worship the Lord God of heaven." This should be our answer. Who are you? I am a servant of the Lord. Before being a Software Engineer, or for some of you a med student or a biomedical science student, or a dental student, or a dentist, or an athlete, or even a father or a husband, I am a servant of the Lord. That is my primary title, and everything else comes second. If I have to choose at work between being a servant of the Lord and getting a promotion, I will choose to be servant of the Lord. If I have to choose at school between a good grade and being a servant of the Lord, I will choose being a servant of the Lord. If I have to choose between going to an event and being servant of the Lord, I will choose being a servant of the Lord. If I have to choose between making a lot of money and being servant of the Lord, I will choose being a servant of the Lord. Every. Single. Time.

Everyone listening to this message is a servant of the Lord. I don't want you to think I'm only talking to people who have assigned services, or to the youth meeting servants. I am talking to each of you and to myself before all of you.

If I do have a specific service that I am assigned in the church - like Sunday School and Youth Ministry, deacons, cleaning, orban, kitchen, board member, visiting the sick, consolation service, sports ministry, IT and AV, Church Van, etc. There are many services in the church... this message applies doubly (x2). I am a servant of the Lord, and a servant in this specific area of service, before everything else.

Jonah 2

When Jonah is thrown overboard, the Lord commands a huge sea creature to swallow Jonah and Jonah is in the belly of the sea creature three days and three nights. And from the belly of the sea creature, Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. Chapter 2 is the prayer of Jonah.

I want to encourage you to take Jonah's Prayer and to pray it - hold your bible during your prayer time and pray Jonah's prayer. There is much to meditate on in his prayer. Remember that Fasting without prayer is just a diet!

Then the Lord commanded the sea creature and it cast up Jonah onto the dry land.

Isaiah 8

The Prophet Isaiah is one of the four major prophets because he wrote one of the longest books. He is one of the great prophets who prophesied in the Southern Kingdom. He is known for his Messianic Prophecies about almost everything in the life of the Lord Jesus. To the point that sometimes Isaiah is referred to as the fifth gospel. He will be featured heavily in the chapters we read next week when we start talking about Judah. But, he did prophesy and warn about Israel's impending conquest by Assyria and he used it as a lesson for Judah to remain faithful to God.

So we'll read today from Isaiah 8.

"Moreover the Lord said to me, 'Take for yourself a large new book, and write on it with a man's pen concerning making a swift plunder of spoils, for it is near at hand.' Then make witnesses for Me of faithful men: Uriah and Zechariah, the son of Berechiah. Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, 'Call his name Quickly Spoil, Swiftly Plunder; for before the child shall know how to call for his father and mother, one shall take the power of damascus and the spoils of Samaria in the presence of the king of Assyria."

I'm reading here from the OSB, and the NKJV is a little bit different. Isaiah goes in to his wife (who is called the prophetess) and she bears a son and he's called Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. So this name means "Quickly spoil, Swiftly plunder." And I'll share with you an icon of

God uses three different methods to declare His prophetic warning to the people here with Isaiah. He uses a book or a scroll where he writes on it Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. He uses two witnesses: Uriah and Zechariah son of Berechia. And He uses Isaiah's son who he names Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Quickly Spoil, Swiftly Plunder.

What is the point of these methods?
1 - Isaiah writes the actual prophecy with pen and paper.
2 - Then he brings two witnesses and the point of the witnesses is to put their seal on it and witness that Isaiah wrote it BEFORE it happened. Throughout the Scripture and in the Law of Moses, something is established as fact by the mouth of two or three witnesses.
3 - Then this scroll or book or tablet will be put in the Temple to be seen by everyone.
4 - Finally, Isaiah has a son and names him the same thing and claims that this will come to pass before the boy's first year of age (before he can say baba and mama).

Now what does it mean?
Before this, Syria and Israel were joining forces against Judah. So the prophesy is that within a year, Damascus and Samaria (which are the capitals of Syria and Israel) as we read in verse 4 will be taken by Assyria - their riches and their spoils will be taken, and this will happen quickly. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz - Quickly spoil, Swiftly plunder.

So when this happens to the Northern Kingdom within a year, and they see that Isaiah had prophesied it to come to pass, then they will ask - what else did he prophesy? Isaiah's ministry are prophesies about the Southern Kingdom because they also rejected God, although to a much lesser degree than the Northern Kingdom at times.

For example, in verse 6: "Inasmuch as these people refused the waters of Shiloah that flow softly, and rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah's son;" - Shiloah is an aqueduct which is dug around

Jerusalem, and is a symbol of the house of David. The people have refused the God of King David, and instead rejoice in other gods. The King of Assyria and all his glory; He will go up over all his channels and go over all his banks. He will pass through Judah, He will overflow and pass over, He will reach up to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel." - this is a prophesy about the King of Assyria trying to overtake Judah as well. And he will come very close - even to the neck. And he will fill the land. But he won't be successful.

Isaiah here calls the land of Judah "Immanuel" - as we know, Immanuel means "God with us" and then he says in verse 10: "For God is with us."

This chapter does not have any very clear Messianic prophesies. Like if you read Isaiah 7 (the previous chapter), you find the most famous Messianic Prophecy: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

And if you read Isaiah 9 (the next chapter) you hear: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined." which is mentioned by the Apostle Matthew in his Gospel (Matthew 4:15-16) and later on in the chapter, the other very famous prophecy:

"For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

But this chapter, right between these two hugely important prophecies, Chapter 8 has some less clear Messianic Prophecies.

We have a reference to Immanuel ("God with us")
We have "A stone of stumbling a rock of offense" (14-15) which St Peter quotes in 1 Peter 2:8 as being the Lord Jesus Christ to those who are disobedient.
We have "I and the children whom the Lord has given me" (18) which St Paul quotes in Hebrews as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Book and Prophecies of Isaiah are very rich in meaning and like all the prophets in lessons for our lives. I hope that we can spend some time and study it chapter by chapter in the future.

1 Kings 17

Yesterday we read 2 Kings 17 which is the chapter describing the captivity of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by Assyria. It's the climax of all of the stories and prophecies we have read so far.

We started with Jeroboam who was made king over the ten tribes, and he built high places in Bethel and Dan and made two golden calves. And after him, Ahab and Jezebel brought in the worship of Baal. And after them every other king continued in their evil ways. And from the king down, the entire nation participated in the same corruption.

The chapter is pretty self-explanatory, but I want to read some verses here from verse 7-18. It sums up all of the narrative and prophets that we have read so far in these four weeks.

> “7 For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God,
> who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of
> Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, 8 and had walked in the
> statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of
> Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. 9 Also the children of
> Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that *were* not right, and they
> built for themselves [a]high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified
> city. 10 They set up for themselves *sacred* pillars and wooden images[b] on every
> high hill and under every green tree. 11 There they burned incense on all the
> high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and
> they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, 12 for they served idols, of
> which the Lord had said to them, “You shall not do this thing.”
>
> 13 Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of
> His prophets, every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways, and keep My
> commandments *and* My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded
> your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.” 14
> Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of
> their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. 15 And they rejected His
> statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His
> testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became
> idolaters, and *went* after the nations who *were* all around them, *concerning*
> whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. 16 So they
> left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded
> image *and* two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of
> heaven, and served Baal. 17 And they caused their sons and daughters to pass
> through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to
> do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. 18 Therefore the Lord
> was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none
> left but the tribe of Judah alone.

How did Assyria do captivity?

They did it in two steps. First, they take some of the Israelites out of their land into Assyria. Then they bring people to resettle the land. So if you read in verse 24: "then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities." So the idea is to take the people out of their land so that they become culturally and even ethnically Assyrian, and then resettle the land with your own people so that the land itself also becomes Assyrian.

Remember that this land is part of the Promised Land that the Lord had promised to Abraham and his descendants and given to Moses and Joshua. This is a holy land. And so when these Assyrians came and defiled the land with their gods, the Lord sent lions. So the king of Assyria sent an Israelite priest back to the land to teach them the rituals of God (aka the Law of Moses). Again, there were still some Israelites living in Samaria - they weren't all taken away to Assyria. But over many generations and hundreds of years, they started to intermarry with those Assyrians. This is all very important to understanding the relationship between Jews and Samaritans that we see in the New Testament.

Later on, after the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews will return to Jerusalem and their land and rebuild the temple and the city walls. This is in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and we discussed this at length in our Bible Study during the meeting. Those Jews would come back and find Samaritans there and the Samaritans will offer to help rebuild the Temple and claim that they are Jews who worship the God of Israel. The Jewish leaders recognize that these people have mixed religious practices and they worship other gods, and they refuse help from them. In Ezra 4:3 "You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us." So the Samaritans start to oppose the project by discouraging the Jewish people, trying to delay the work by bribing Persian officials and even writing letters to the kings of Persia saying the Jews are rebellious against Persia. Some of these tactics are successful and construction is halted under King Artaxerxes. But then under King Darius, the work starts again. So the Samaritans build their own temple on Mount Gerizim.

By this time in history, the only thing that is considered to be Scripture or inspired word of God is the Law of Moses. The rest will be canonized as Scripture after the Babylonian Captivity in the time of Ezra... so these Samaritans only have the Books of Moses.

So now we come to the 1st Century and what is the political climate like between Samaritans and Jews?

1. The Jews worship in the Temple, and Samaritans worship on Mount Gerizim
2. The Jews are ethnically Jewish, descendants of Israel, and value their ethnicity, whereas the Samaritans come from an ethnically mixed race of Assyrian and Israelite.
3. The Jews believe in the Law and the Prophets (for the most part) and have additional writings like the Psalms, Daniel, etc. but the Samaritans only have the Torah (the Law of Moses) and reject any later Jewish writings.

All of this leads to hostility between Jews and Samaritans in the 1st Century and in the time of Christ. Jews and Samaritans basically just avoided each other. But the Lord Jesus Christ challenged those social norms in His ministry.

He tells the parable of the Good Samaritan who did good - better than the priest or the Levite. He heals the ten lepers, one of which is a Samaritan and the only one to come back to thank Him is the Samaritan. When Jesus and His disciples pass through a Samaritan village and they are not welcomed, James and John say "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" and the Lord turned and rebuked them. The Lord Jesus tells the disciples after His Resurrection that they will "be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." And of course, the biggest example is when the Lord goes out of His way to meet the Samaritan woman at the well and bring salvation to her, whom we now know as St Photini. This will be the gospel reading this Sunday - the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman. So hopefully this will shed some light on the background to that story and those lessons.

Week 5: The Kings of Judah

Introduction

Assyria, after conquering Israel, wants to continue its conquest South and will start to threaten Judah and the capital city of Jerusalem. We'll be reading about that this week from 2 Kings 18-23, but before we get into it, let's introduce the Kingdom of Judah.

Really, the last time we mentioned them was in Week 1 - we saw that Rehoboam, the son of King Solomon, retained two tribes - Judah and Benjamin. The other ten tribes gave their allegiance to Jeroboam in the North, in the Kingdom of Israel. And we saw how badly that went...

Judah was not much better. Judah, of course, did have one advantage over Israel - they had the Temple that was built by King Solomon in Jerusalem. If you remember, what really started the issues in the Northern Kingdom was that Jeroboam built the high places and the golden calves in Bethel and Dan. And the reason he built them was so that people wouldn't be tempted to go to Jerusalem and worship in the Temple, and then become attached to Judah. Judah doesn't have these issues, so you would think that they shouldn't have any reason to fall into idolatry, right?

Unfortunately, that's not the case. Even from Rehoboam, the first king, he tolerated idolatry. We read in 1 Kings 14: "Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed, more than all that their fathers had done. For they also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. And there were also perverted persons in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel."

So they had idolatry, sodomy, prostitution, and many other sins. The Lord brought judgment on them by the Egyptians who in the early days of King Rehoboam, came up against Jerusalem and plundered the Temple and plundered the king's house and took all of the gold. But still, they did not repent.

After Rehoboam, his son Abijam reigned for three years and "he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David."

After Abijam, his son Asa reigned for forty-one years and "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did his father David. And he banished the perverted persons from the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made." "His heart was loyal to the Lord all his days."

During King Asa's reign is when King Ahab was king over Israel. And after King Asa, his son Jehoshaphat reigned in Judah for twenty-five years "And he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. And the rest of the perverted persons, who remained in the days of his father Asa, he banished from the land."

After King Jehoshaphat, his son Jehoram reigned for eight years. And he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done - he worshipped Baal and made high places. When he became king, he also killed his six brothers, to ensure his throne. We read his account in 2 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 21. But why? How could such an evil king from a father and grandfather of good kings? Because he married the daughter of Ahab - Athaliah.

This is why the Lord always forbid Israel from intermarrying with other nations - because their wives would bring their idols with them and have evil influence over their husbands. This is around the time of Elijah the Prophet, and Elijah actually sends a letter to Jehoram. So even though we usually identify Elijah as a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the Lord used him to prophesy also to the Southern Kingdom. The letter said: "Thus says the Lord God of your father David:

Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, 13 but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father’s household, who were better than yourself, 14 behold, the Lord will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; 15 and you will become very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day." Still, he did not repent.

The Lord stirred up the Philistines and the Arabians to come up against Judah and against Jehoram and they invaded the king's house in Jerusalem. They took all his possessions and even all of his sons and their wives, except for his youngest son (Ahaziah). And still, he did not repent.

Finally, the Lord afflicted him with the disease of his intestines and he did in severe pain. The Scripture tells us "He reigned in Jerusalem eight years and, to no one's sorrow, departed. However they buried him in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings." It was a dishonorable death and he was a dishonorable king.

After him, his youngest son Ahaziah became king and reigned over Judah for only one year. He did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab. Remember, that his mother Athaliah, is the daughter of Ahab.

When he was killed, his mother Athaliah - the daughter of Ahab, reigned in his place. And she wanted to killed all of the royal heirs - but Ahaziah's sister took one of Ahaziah's sons and hid him away and nursed him and took care of him for six years. When he was seven years old, he was taken into the temple and the priest - Jehoiada - took him in and guarded him in the Temple, and the crowned him and anointed him as king. And he sent the guards of the temple to Athaliah the Queen to kill her. And everyone rejoiced.

Joash became king at 7 years old and reigned for 40 years in Jerusalem. He "did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him." Unfortunately, Jehoiada the priest died, and Joash lost his way. He abandoned God and allowed idol worship. When he was rebuked by Jehoiada's son, he had him stoned to death in the Temple. So although he started very well and he even repaired the Temple, he ended very poorly.

Then, his son Amaziah reigned in his place and he reigned 29 years. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like his father David; he did everything as his father Joah had done. so he also started good and ended poorly. He followed the Law, and the Lord gave him defeat over Edom, but then he became prideful! And he worshiped Edomite idols and God sent him a prophet, but he did not heed him. He was later assassinated.

Then, his son Uzziah reigned in his place and he reigned 52 years. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. So he also started good and ended poorly. He sought God and God made him prosper - victories against Philistines, Arabs, Ammonites. He built cities, strengthened Judah, improved agriculture... and then he became prideful. He tried to take over the priestly role and offer incense. He was struck with leprosy and forced to live in isolation the rest of his life.

After him, his son Jotham reigned for sixteen years and he "did what was right in the sight of the Lord; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done (although he did not enter the temple of the Lord)." He was a good king, and the Lord gave him many victories and he had astrong relationship with God - "he prepared his ways before the Lord his God" (2 Chr 27:6). Under his reign, the people were still corrupt - so although he was good, he could not bring about a spiritual revival. He was one of Judah's best kings...

And after him, his son Ahaz reigned and he was one of Judah's worst kings. King Ahaz was interested in power - political power, military alliances, his kingdom, etc. He was not interested in God. So he went after the ways of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire - he offered his son as a sacrifice. Isaiah prophesied during the time of King Ahaz and told him to trust in God, but he didn't listen. Instead of believing in God's protection, he sought protection from Assyria, and Judah became a state under Assyria's control. He went to Damascus and saw a nice altar there and then sent to his priests to make the same one.

After he dies, King Hezekiah becomes King, and that's where we will start reading from 2 Kings 18.

So to summarize all the kings:
Rehoboam - 17 years - evil
Abijam - 3 years - evil
King Asa - 41 years - good
King Jehoshaphat - 25 years - good
Jehoram - 8 years - evil (married Athaliah, daughter of Ahab)
Ahaziah - 1 year - evil (raised by Athaliah)
Athaliah - 6 years - evil (daughter of Ahab)
Joash - 40 years - good as he followed Jehoiada the priest, and then bad.
Amaziah - 29 years - started good, ended bad
Uzziah - 52 years - started good, ended bad
Jotham - 16 years - good
Ahaz - 16 years - very bad

The last few kings of Judah will be Hezekiah, a good king who will reign 29 years. Manessah who started bad and then repented and reigns 55 years. Amon, who will be evil and reign 2 years. Josiah, who will be the last good king and will reign 31 years. Then the last four evil kings:

Jehoahaz for 3 months
Jehoiakim for 11 years
Jehoiachin for three months
Zedekiah for 11 years.

One theme that we can see in all of these kings is that the good kings reigned for much longer... King Asa 41 years, King Jehoshaphat 25 years, King Joash 40 years, King Amaziah 29 years, King Uzziah 52 years. King Hezekiah 29 years. King Manasseh 55 years. King Josiah 31 years.

And the evil kings we see 3 months, 1 year, 3 years, 8 years, 11 years, at the most 16 years. When they did not depend on the Lord, it left them prone to execution or assassination, diseases, taken captive or prisoner, quarrels, etc.

The good kings were not perfect, but it's a much better track record than the kingdom of Israel.

This week, we'll read about the Great Kings: Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah. We'll see how the Lord preserved Judah as a Kingdom because of the prayers and leadership of the Prophet Isaiah and the Good King Hezekiah. And we'll see the repentance of King Manasseh.

2 Kings 18

There is something I didn't mention before about all the good kings. If we read from 1 Kings 15 about the righteous King Asa: "Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did his father David. And he banished the perverted persons from the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. Also he removed Maachah his grandmother from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah. And Asa cut down her obscene image and burned it by the Brook Kidron. But the high places were not removed."

And if we read from 1 Kings 22 about the righteous King Jehoshaphat: "And he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away, for the people offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places."

And if we read from 2 Kings 12 about Joash who started as a righteous king: "Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him. But the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places."

2 Kings 14 Amaziah: "However the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places."

2 Kings 15 Uzziah: "Except that the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places."

2 Kings 15 Jotham: "However the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places."

So every good king so far, although he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to everything his good fathers had done, and some being compared to King David, the Scripture mentions that he did not remove the high places. These High Places were established by King Solomon in Judah for worshipping foreign gods and godesses for his foreign wives, in the time of his life that he deviated. Remember that he returned in repentance before the end of his life. And these high places continued to be a stumbling block to Judah all the way until the days of King Hezekiah.

King Hezekiah was different. From 2 Kings 18, our chapter today: "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to everything his father David did. He removed the high places and broke into pieces the sacred pillars. He cut down the sacred wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent Moses had made, because up to those days, the sons of Israel had burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, and after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those that were before him. For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept all the commandments the Lord gave Moses. The Lord was with him. He prospered wherever he went."

King Hezekiah is the first king to remove the high places. And on top of that, Hezekiah broke in pieces the Bronze Serpent that Moses had made. Moses made this thing in the Book of Numbers hundreds and hundreds of years ago, and it's never again mentioned in the Scripture until now. Apparently, the Israelites had been burning incense to it and worshipping it, and calling it Nehushtan which means The Great Brass Serpent.

I want us to take a message for this for ourselves. We all have ups and downs. We may have times in our life where we deviate from the Lord and from doing what is right, or where we are caught up in sin or caught up in temptations or lusts. May God have mercy on us, when we come to our senses and repent, let our repentance be complete. And we can take two points from here about a complete repentance:

1. Look for the Hidden Sins
    - This Bronze Serpent was hidden from us in the Scriptures... we didn't know it was happening until it was mentioned here. So let us also look for the hidden sins of our life.
    - The ones we have grown so accustomed to, that we don't feel they are sins anymore.
    - The ones we have justified for so long that we believe our justifications and excuses

2. Remove the Causes of Sin
    - The High Places established by King Solomon became a cause of sin for the Kingdom of Judah for generations. And although they had good kings, they never removed the High Places.
    - So the lesson here is not just to "stop doing a sin" - but to REMOVE the causes of sin.
    - In the Saturday Psali we sing "All the causes of sin, remove from our souls, O my Lord Jesus Christ, my Good Savior."

Let me REMOVE those things that caused me to sin. For example:

- I have a wicked friend who introduced me to sin - it's not enough for me to stop doing the sin, but let me remove the cause of the sin from my life. Let me remove the High Places!
- I have an app on my phone or a website that I frequent that leads me into temptation, let me remove that app from my phone. Remove the High Places.
- I know that when I get into watching Netflix or YouTube, I can go for hours and forget about everything around me - forget my spiritual life, even my studies or my family. So let me remove the app from my phone or even block it on my home's network! Let's remove the high places!
- I know that my Spotify has songs that are not appropriate for my ears as a Christian. What should I do? Install Spotify on my phone, my tablet, my laptop and my car? Definitely not. Remove the High Places! Don't build them up.
- I know that using social media gives me negative feelings - maybe jealousy, or lustful thoughts, or greed, or idolatry in making a celebrity my idol or something, or pride in looking at my own pictures and counting my likes and reactions, or gluttony in consuming videos about food and other luxuries non-stop. Remove the High Places! Deactivate my account and uninstall the app.
- The Lord Jesus Christ taught the concept of "radical amputation" - if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. HE Anba Youssef gives an example of if my eye causes me to sin by watching something inappropriate for me, what should I do? Should I really pluck out my eyeball? No! But let me amputate the extension of my eye: the phone or the laptop. Move the computer to the living room where my family is. Change my phone from an iPhone to a dumb phone that doesn't have a display, or doesn't have internet. Am I willing to pluck my eye out? Am I willing to remove the causes of sin?

What are the causes of sin in my life, and how can I be like Hezekiah to uproot them completely?

2 Kings 21 - King Manasseh

In 2 Kings 21, we see the evil King Manasseh. Despite his father being the most righteous king, a king like King David, the only king to get rid of high places and the bronze serpent and all of those things... King Manasseh comes and is one of the most evil.

He brings back the high places. He raises up an altar for Baal. He makes a wooden image. He worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He builds altars in the house of the Lord (in the Temple!) for these host of heaven so that he can worship them there. Host of heaven here doesn't refer to God and the angels or anything like that... it refers to the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, Jupiter, Mercury, etc. It was part of the Assyrian religion and the Assyrian gods. He also offered his son as a sacrifice. He practiced witchcraft. He practiced sorcery and consulted psychics. He set a carved image of Asherah - a Canaanite goddess in the Temple of the Lord. He killed many innocent people "till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." And all this he didn't do behind closed doors in his bedroom, but he compelled the whole kingdom of Judah and seduced them to do not just more evil than they ever had before, not just more evil than the kingdom of Israel, but more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed already.

The very interesting thing about this king, though, is that he ruled for 55 years. He is the only evil king of Judah to rule for a long time - and not only that, but the longest time. Longer than any other good king. Why?

1 Kings 21 only gives us half of the story. And this is common in this era we are studying - the other half can be found in Chronicles. 2 Chronicles 33.

> “ 10 And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. 11 Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze *fetters,* and carried him off to Babylon. 12 Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, 13 and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord *was* God.
>
> 14 After this he built a wall outside the City of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate; and *it* enclosed Ophel, and he raised it to a very great height. Then he put military captains in all the fortified cities of Judah. 15 He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem; and he cast *them* out of the city. 16 He also repaired the altar of the Lord, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel. 17 Nevertheless the people still sacrificed on the high places, *but* only to the Lord their God.
>
> 18 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the Lord God of Israel, indeed they *are written* in the book of the kings of Israel.

King Manasseh was carried away by the Assyrians and the Scripture says they took him with hooks - which refers to a hook through the nose, and with bronze fetters (chains). He was carried away like an animal and degraded and his pride was broken. And he repented. Sometimes when we are going through a hardship, we might realize that the Lord is calling us to repentance.

I've seen some high school and college age youth who are unfaithful with their schoolwork - and even openly so - whether it's inappropriately using AI, or cheating on assignments, sometimes even paying for services that do their work for them, etc. and then they wonder why they aren't being offered internships and jobs... the Lord is calling you to repent!

Sometimes, I am surrounding myself with ungodly people - friends and relationships. And then I find myself in betrayal or heartbreak or loneliness or I find out that I was being used, or these were not really my friends... the Lord is calling me to repent!

Sometimes we are chasing our self-image, or even a false-image of ourselves that we create on social media. I'm chasing attention, likes, reactions, engagements, etc. and then I find myself struggling with anxiety and depression, or a low self-worth... the Lord is calling us to repentance!

Here's a big one for youth - sometimes I neglect my parents' advice and wisdom. I even disrespect them, argue with them, dismiss their advice, ignore their phone calls, call them "old school" or "Egyptian mindset." And then I get older and find myself in financial struggles, personal failures, failed relationships, lack of guidance... the Lord is calling me to repentance.

Sometimes I only turn to the Lord when I'm in despair, when I'm in deep trouble, when I feel like I "need him" - so how will I expect the Lord to call me to Himself? If that's the only place I am willing to meet the Lord, and the Lord wants to meet me and He knows that what is best for me is to meet Him, then where will He meet me?

This is what happened with King Manasseh. King Manasseh definitely knew of the Lord from his father. And maybe He specifically knew that He could call out to the Lord in a time of trouble, as his father King Hezekiah did when he was sick. And that's what he did. And we can read his prayer in an important part of our Orthodox Scripture called The Prayer of Manasseh. The Prayer of Manasseh is one of the parts of the Old Testament that is not present in Protestant Bibles like the New King James Version... so you'll have to read it in Coptic Reader or in the Orthodox Study Bible. I'll send it in the group today.

I will encourage you to take this prayer and pray it the rest of this week in your prayers. It is a powerful prayer of repentance. And let me consider my sins when I am praying it, and let me take the message of repentance from King Manasseh today.

Week 6: Micah

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Week 7: Prophets to the Southern Kingdom of Judah

Introduction

Last week we read the prophet Micah, who prophesied to the Kingdom of Judah. His prophecies are the longest ones to the Kingdom of Judah of the Minor Prophets. Of course, Isaiah and Jeremiah had much longer prophecies, but for the rest of this week, we will be reading one prophet per day. Starting with Joel's three chapters today, Zephaniah's three chapters tomorrow and Habakkuk's three chapters on Wednesday. On Thursday, we'll get a taste of Jeremiah, and then we'll finish our study by reading the narrative of the Captivity of Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom of Judah by Babylon.

Joel

The prophet Joel is the one that we know the least about, of all the prophets. His book cannot be dated with certainty - usually it says the word of the Lord that came to the prophet during the reign of kings x y z... but with Joel, we read in verse 1: "The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel." Period. So we aren't sure when exactly he prophesied, but his prophecy is thus understood by the church as being applicable to all generations and all time periods.

Joel is known as the prophet of the day of Pentecost. He prophecies about the pouring down of the Holy Spirit. His prophecies also focus more on the repentance of the nation as a whole, and not just the repentance of individuals.

Chapter 1

He starts with a fearsome message that sounds like a wakeup call to the inhabitants of the land. "Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days? Or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation."

I want to comment on this first part because this is the importance of the upbringing of parents. Many parents these days are leaving their children to be babysat by the TV, the Tablets and the Phones. Or they are expecting the Church to raise their children. But not so, my beloved. If God grants you, you will be parents one day, and you need to know the importance of raising your children. Telling them your experiences and how God has worked in your life. Telling them your mistakes and how you learned from them. Telling them the wisdom that you received from your parents, and your elders and your servants. This theme is consistent throughout the Scripture that this is God's model for the bringing up of children.

What's the wake-up call? Seemingly, there was a plague in the land. A plague of locusts. And he mentions four types of locust: "What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what

the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten." (v. 4)

How is this to be understood? Actually, as with much of the Old Testament and especially the prophecies, it can be understood on several different levels.

The first is the literal level - this is a real event that happened and the people are struggling to find food to eat because of this plague. And they need to turn to the Lord.

The second is the prophetic level - these four stages of locusts or these four kinds of insects, are seen by the Fathers of the Church to refer to the major conquests of Israel - the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek and the Roman. And this is supported of course by the next few verses when the prophet Joel talks about "A nation has come up against My land."

Of course, there is a third level which is the one most important to us, the tropological level - related to moral metaphor. The four stages of locust refer to the four stages of sin. Sin can start small, but then consume us. It might start out as just "a small lie" - "just a thought" - "just a glance" - a chewing locust. It's just chewing... but very quickly can become a consuming locust and consume our minds, our hearts, and our actions. We discussed the four stages of sin when we studied the first two chapters of Amos - we said it starts as "thinking of evil" - then "doing the evil" - then "evil becomes a habit" (continuing to do it without repentance) - and finally even "preaching the evil" and teaching others how to do it.

The rest of the chapter is a call to repentance. The Lord would send certain things like plagues, occupation by a foreign nation, etc. as different ways to bring the people to repentance. I'll mention one more verse which is verse 14 - one of the famous verses of the Scripture: "Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord." One of the very clear things understood in the Scripture and in the Church is the link between fasting and repentance. Fasting is not just a diet change, but a mode of repentance and of turning back from sin and from evil and reorienting my mind and my hear to the Lord. It's also a time to gather with the rest of the Body of Christ - to pray more liturgies together.

Chapter 2

A similar idea is given in chapter 2, verse 12: "Now, therefore," says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." So rend your heart, and not your garments" - in those days, someone might mourn or repent with sackcloth and ashes, but on the inside, there is no repenting. It's just an outward symbol. As we do today, I might be fasting from food, but inside there is no change. The Lord says Rend your heart, and not just your garments. And again in verse 15 of this chapter "Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room. Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar" - it's a call to the whole assembly. Whether you are an elder, a child, a nursing babe, a bride and groom on their wedding day, or even a priest - the time of repentance is here. Blow the trumpet and make sure EVERYONE knows - the time of repentance is here.

And what will the Lord's response be?

In verse 18: "Then the Lord will be zealous for His land, and pity His people. The Lord will answer and say to His people, 'Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, And you will be satisfied with them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations." and now we start to see prophecies about the New Testament. The Lord will save us from our sin and will bind Satan before us - "But I will remove far from you the northern army, and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea; his stench will come up and his foul odor will rise, because he has done monstrous things. Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things!"

And the Lord in this prophecy doesn't stop there, but reveals to us the next step in the economy of Salvation - the pouring of His Spirit upon us. If you're reading the Orthodox Study Bible, this section will be chapter 3. If you're reading New King James, then we're in chapter 2 verse 28:

28 “And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.
29 And also on *My* menservants and on *My* maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

30 “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.
31 The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.
32 And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Shall be saved.

These verses are quoted in Acts 2. When the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles in the 3rd hour of Pentecost, and they start to speak in tongues, and everyone in the multitude, from many different nations and languages - Parthians and Medes and Elamites and those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and Libya, Romans, Cretans and Arabs - each of them can hear the message of the gospel in his own language. And some of them said "well these people must be drunk" - but St Peter stands up and says "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" and then he recites these verses.

Chapter 3 (4 in OSB)

If we just take a part of chapter 3 (or in OSB, it's chapter 4), we can read from verse 18: "And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; A fountain shall flow from the house of the

Lord and water the Valley of Acacias." and verse 20: "Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation."

As with all of the prophets, he ends with a message of hope. The Lord is coming, He will pour out His Spirit, there will be a final Judgment, and all of those who include themselves in His Body and in His Church, shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Listening to this message isn't a replacement for reading the Scripture. Read these short chapters, and let the word of God fill you, - having put the effort to listen to this introduction, the Lord will bless your time and your understanding even in the verses we have skipped over. I hope you'll read along!

Zephaniah

The prophet Zephaniah is from the tribe of Simeon, but he lived in Jerusalem. His name means "God has hidden" - and it seems like he was from the royal line of King Hezekiah that we read in verse 1. He prophesied during the days of the righteous King Josiah and his prophecies will focus on repentance from pride.

Chapter 1

When we read Chapter 1, it is talking about a difficult time and it's called in verses 7 and 8 "The Day of the Lord." Actually, this phrase or this title was used several times in most of the prophets we have read, and I kept meaning to discuss it, but I kept forgetting, or it was in a chapter that I didn't record a message about it. Anyway, what is the Day of the Lord?

Whenever you see this phrase "The Day of the Lord" - think Judgment day. It's a reference to judgment day. And Zephaniah is giving us here a clear picture of what that day will look like. In the first half of the chapter, who will be judged?

I'll just read some sections from the first several verses: "I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land, I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, the stumbling blocks [which are the idols] along with the wicked. I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place, the names of the idolatrous priests with the pagan priests - those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops [remember we mentioned in another prophet that the host of heaven is like the sun, moon and stars];" and listen to this in verse 5: "Those who worship and swear oaths by the Lord, but who also swear by Milcom" - Milcom is an Ammonite god, but you see how the Lord is specifically talking about those who worship God, but have also taken for themselves other gods. There is no shared obedience with the Lord - you are either obedient to the Lord, or not. As the Lord says in Matthew 6: "You cannot worship God and mammon." And He continues: "Those who have turned back from following the Lord, and have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of Him."

And then near the end of the chapter, Zephaniah gives us a picture of what that great day of the Lord looks like. From verse 14-18: "The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is better; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and

gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust and their flesh like refuse. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy"

The Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 also tells us about the end times. He says "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places." and "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." - "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

I encourage you to read Matthew 24 and see all the similarities with this chapter in Zephaniah.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 starts with the answer to this Judgment Day. How do I escape the Day of the Lord's wrath? By repentance. Zephaniah says: "Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together,
O undesirable nation,
2 Before the decree is issued,
Or the day passes like chaff,
Before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you,
Before the day of the Lord’s anger comes upon you!
3 Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth,
Who have upheld His justice.
Seek righteousness, seek humility.
It may be that you will be hidden
In the day of the Lord’s anger."

So to escape this day, seek righteousness and humility. Seek the Lord. It may be that you will be hidden. And this is where we related back to Zephaniah's name - God has hidden. What does it mean God has hidden? God has hidden my sin because I turned to Him and I repented. God has hidden me from the Judgment Day and hidden His judgment from me.

But those who don't turn to Him will not be hidden. The other nations, who refused the Lord in verse 4: "Gaza shall be forsaken, And Ashkelon desolate; they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, And Ekron shall be uprooted. Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoats, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: 'I will destroy you; so there shall be no inhabitant.'" from verse 8: "I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the insults of the people of Ammon, with which they have reproached My people, and made arrogant threats against their borders. Therefore, as I live, Surely Moab shall be like Sodom, And the people of Ammon like Gomorrah." and in verse 11: "The Lord will be awesome to them, For He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth;" - 13: "And He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria and make Nineveh a desolation."

Chapter 3

Then, in chapter 3, the same message extends to Jerusalem: "Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city! She has not obeyed His voice, She has not received correction; She has not trusted in the Lord, She has not drawn near to her God. Her princes in her midst are roaring lions; Her judges are evening wolves that leave not a bone till morning. Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the Law."

The Lord seeks the repentance of all, and especially the repentance of Jerusalem - Jerusalem, the people of God had everything! They had a Law, they had a Temple with the presence of God, they had sacrifices to atone for sins and priests to administer those sacrifices. They had prophets to help them turn back when they fell. And yet, they were insolent. In verse 7 the Lord says: "Surely you will fear Me, You will receive instruction' - so that her dwelling would not be cut off, despite everything for which I punished her. But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds."

But where is the message of hope that we always see at the end of the prophets? See here in verse 8: "Therefore wait for Me, " says the Lord, "Until the day I rise up for plunder." - when you read this verse in OSB: "Until the day of My rising up as a testimony". It is a clear prophecy of the Resurrection.

And so we will rejoice in God's faithfulness as we read in versed 14: "Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: 'Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One will save; He will rejocie over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing." - We read these verses in Matins of Lazarus Saturday and again in the 9th hour of Palm Sunday, for very obvious reasons: "Rejoice O daughter of Jerusalem the King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst"

The prophet Zephaniah is full of Messianic Prophecy and also Prophecies about the Judgment Day and the Second Coming. I hope you'll read along.

Habakkuk

The prophet Habakkuk prophesied during the end of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, right before the Babylonian Captivity. The name Habakkuk means "to embrace" or "to wrestle" and as with most of the prophets, his name gives us an idea about his prophecy. Habakkuk is going to wrestle with some difficult concepts that we sometimes wrestle with too, and that many people in the world wrestle with. The book reads like a dialogue between Habakkuk and the Lord.

He starts in verse 1: "How long, O Lord, shall I cry out to You, and You will not hear me? Being wronged I cry out to You; You will not save. Why have You shown me hardship and suffering, to look upon misery and ungodliness? Judgment is before me, and the judge takes bribes. Therefore the law is disregarded and justice is done ineffectually, for the ungodly oppress the righteous; therefore justice shall go forth perverted." Habakkuk is asking the Lord about why is there evil in the world? And specifically, why is evil allowed to continue in Judah in God's land? Why should the wicked be allowed to prosper? Why should they even be allowed to oppress those who are good?

It's very reminiscent of the questions that we see in our modern day - why is there evil in the world if God is good? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do good things happen to bad people? And the prophecy here starts with a prayer. Habakkuk is faithful and he prays to the Lord.

The Lord gives him an answer, and a clear answer... but we'll see that Habakkuk will wrestle with that answer too.

"Behold, you scoffers, take notice; look and be amazed and be gone, for I am working a work in your days which you would not believe even if someone told it to you. For behold, I am raising up against you the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation that marches through the breadth of the earth to take possession of dwellings that are not theirs. He is terrible and awesome. His judgment and dignity proceeds from himself." etc.

So the Lord tells him "I am going to bring the Bablyonians against Judah and they will overtake Judah." And of course, the Babylonians are pagans, and they are bitter and hasty and they do not know God. Whatever they do to Judah will not be according to God's commandments... so Habakkuk wrestles with this. Babylon is even worse than Israel! How could You, being a good God, use a corrupt nation like Babylon as a tool to bring about Justice?

And then in 2:1, "I will stand on my watch, mounted upon the rock, and see what He shall say to me, and what might I answer when I am reproved?" - see how faithful Habakkuk is? Habakkuk assumes He will be reproved by God for his stubbornness, and yet he is faithful. He is straightforward with God, speaking to God about his concerns and ready to accept the response of the Lord.

Chapter 2

The Lord answers Habakkuk by giving him a vision and instructing him to write the vision on a tablet. "Write the vision distinctly upon a tablet, that he who reads it may flee. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, and it will come up at the end, and it will not be in vain; if he should tarry, wait for him, for he will surely come, and he will not tarry! If any man should shrink back, My soul will not be well pleased in him; but the righteous shall live by My faith." (2:2-4)

These verses are quoted by St Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews chapter 10. St Paul uses them to encourage the people to endure suffering as you wait for the fulfillment of God's promise. And he says "The just shall live by faith." And then he explains in the next chapter what faith is: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" and then gives examples of those who were faithful: "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." - "By faith Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his household" - "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out, by faith he dwelt in the land of promise." etc. All of these works done by all of these righteous by faith, as they awaited the promises of the Lord.

The same message the Lord is conveying here to Habakkuk. And Habakkuk is writing down to convey to us. Be patient and have faith. Even in struggles, even when we see evil surrounding us and our society devolving, have faith and be patient and do the works of righteousness.

But what about those who don't do the works of righteousness? Verse 5: "But the one who is drunk and the scoffer, the man who boasts, shall accomplish nothing; he widened his soul as the grave, and as death he is never satisfied, and he will gather to himself all the nations and will take to himself all the peoples." But what about the arrogant man? The one who drinks and scoffs and boasts and is never satisfied, and who is drowning in his pride? What about this Babylonian? Pride is the fountain of all vices, and so the Lord will give five woes here that all stem from this pride:

1. Verse 6: "Woe to him who multiplies to himself possessions which are not his."
    - Babylon was greedy for more land and more possessions.
    - So we can take this as a message for ourselves about the sin of greed.
        - Maybe I am greedy with my money and I am willing to do whatever it takes to make more money, compromise my values, cheat the system, etc. Or even just being stingy and not giving to others or to God.
        - Maybe I am greedy with ambition: titles and certificates and academic competition - I'm looking to join random clubs and get leadership roles not to serve others, not to grow myself, but to grow my resume.
        - Maybe I am greedy with attention... I crave constant attention or validation through likes and interactions, I get jealous at what others have.
        - Maybe I am greedy with overconsumption... indulging in food, drink, luxury, comfort, impulsive spending, etc.

2. Verse 9: "Woe to him who takes advantage of evil gain for his own house, so that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the hand of evil."
    - The message here is also about greed, but more particularly about self-reliance or self-sufficiency. If I just get the right grades, the right resume, the right job, I will be secure from failure. If I have enough money, I will be secure from poverty. If I post on social media about how great I'm doing, and all my fancy meals, and all the places I'm traveling to, then everyone will know I am stable, and I'll be secure. This kind of security is called "Spiritual atheism."
    - Our society today is focused on hacks... study hacks, money hacks, productivity hacks. But the idea of surrendering myself and my problems to the Lord - that's not practical. Or that's weakness, I need to show strength. And I set my nest so high, that I have to live under pressure to keep it from falling.

3. Verse 12: "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed, who establishes a city by wrongdoing."
    - For the Babylonians, this was slavery and murder. Atrocious injustices that they would commit against their fellow humans in order to expand their cities and their nation.
    - What injustices do I commit against my fellow human?
        - Do I use people for their talents or their money or their popularity? Do I have real friendships or is it based on what I can get from others?
        - Maybe I see someone as easy to make fun of, I look funny around him, so let me keep him around...
        - Maybe I'm just mean to people

4. Verse 15: "Woe to him who gives clouded and intoxicating drink to his neighbor, that he might look upon his private parts.
    - These are the sins of intoxication and sexual immorality
    - Let me be aware of the things that intoxicate me - whether it's alcohol and drugs, or maybe it's social media; maybe it's movies or TV; maybe it's gambling; maybe it's watching sports or Fantasy Sports - that's the newest craze of addiction in Florida.
    - Let me be cautious of what my eyes look at, and where my eyes wander.
5. Verse 19: "Woe to him saying to the wood, 'Awake and rise up,' and to the dumb stone, 'Be exalted.'
    - This is the sin of idolatry
    - What is my god? Is it money? Is it fame and popularity?

The point here is that God will USE corrupt nations to bring about His righteousness, but He does not ENDORSE them. All nations will be accountable to His justice. All will be judged in the end. When we see our society around us devolving into the Babylonians - with an obsession of self-sufficiency, of materialism, of sexual immorality and where God always comes second, let me be faithful and do the works of righteousness and be patient for the coming of the Day of the Lord.

Chapter 3

When Habakkuk hears this message from the Lord, he turns to the Lord and prays. And we will read this praise of Habakkuk on Bright Saturday during the Old Testament Praises section.

"Lord, I have heard Your report and was afraid; I considered Your works and was greatly astonished. You shall be known between the two living creatures; In the approaching years You shall be acknowledged; You will be revealed when the time comes. When my soul is troubled, You will in wrath remember mercy."

He goes on to talk about the destruction of the Lord: "The earth stood and was shaken to and fro; He looked and the nations melted away. The mountains were shattered by force; The everlasting hills wasted away. Were you angry, O Lord, with the rivers? Or was Your wrath against the rivers, Or was Your fury against the sea?"

And at the end, he gives his response: "For though the fig tree will not bear fruit and there be no grapes on the vines; the labor of the olive tree fail and the fields yield no food; though the sheep have no pasture and there be no oxen in the cribs; Yet I will glory in the Lord; I will rejoice in God my Savior. The Lord God is my strength; He will direct my feet to the end; He will set me upon high places, So to conquer by His song."

And we see here again the name of Habakkuk: "To embrace." He embraced the Lord's promises and with faith, awaits the coming of the Lord.

One last thing - after this, Babylon will come and take Judah captive as the Lord revealed to Habakkuk. And we know that Daniel will be carried away to Babylon - Habakkuk will NOT be carried away. But he does go to Babylon once in a wonderful story mentioned in the Book of Daniel.

Daniel 12

I want to read for you the last section in the Book of Daniel from Daniel 12:33 according to the numbering of the Orthodox Study Bible:

"Now the prophet Habakkuk was in Judea. He had made a stew and had broken bread into a bowl, and was going to the fields to take it to the reapers. But the angel of the Lord said unto Habakkuk, "Go, carry the dinner you have into Babylon to Daniel, who is in the lions' den. Habakkuk said, "O Lord, I have never seen Babylon, nor do I know the den." Then the angel of the Lord took him by the crown, and carried him by the hair of his head, and with the speed of the wind set him in Babylon over the den. Habakkuk cried out, saying, "O Daniel, Daniel, take the meal God has sent you." Daniel said, "You have remembered me, O God, and You have not forsaken those who love You." So Daniel arose and ate; and the angel of the Lord immediately set Habakkuk down in his own place once more. After this, on the seventh day the king went to the lions' den to mourn for Daniel, and he came to the put and looked inside- and there sat Daniel. The king cried out with a loud voice, "Great are You, O Lord God of Daniel, and there is no other besides You." Then he drew him out of the den, and cast in those who had plotted Daniel's destruction; and they were devoured in a moment before his face."

It's a wonderful story about this great prophet Habakkuk, and I suspect one of the reasons the Lord in His providence and His wisdom chose Habakkuk for this service and this great blessing, was to show him the land of captivity in the flesh, that he had showed him previously with the prophetic vision.

I hope you will read and contemplate on these three beautiful chapters of the Prophet Habakkuk.

Jeremiah