

True Worship

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRULY WORSHIP GOD? Focal Verses • AMOS 5:14-15, 18-27

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will EVALUATE how God establishes justice for the righteous and punishes deceivers, REFLECT on actions of injustice within the community of faith, and COMMIT to stop our participation in unjust actions and help others do the same.

In Focus

Joyce Williams was always dressed beautifully when she came to worship on Sundays. During holiday services like Christmas, Mother's Day, and Easter, her hats could be seen from blocks away.

When the opening hymns began to play, you could always count on Joyce to be yelling loudly at the end of every verse, making sure she was seen as the most visible worshipper in the sanctuary. When the pastor preached you could hear her shouting "Amen!" at the beginning and "I don't know, pastor!" at the end. When the time for offering came, she would always glare at the ushers to let them know she wasn't giving today.

One day as people were beginning to enter the church, there was a young woman who was dressed in a cutoff shirt and tight skirt walking in with an older woman. Joyce began to talk out loud.

"Oh, I don't know about these girls today. Dressing like hussies, can't keep their clothes on and have the nerve to show up in God's house." The young lady looked embarrassed. Just then Pastor Freeman walked past.

"Everyone is welcome in God's house, Ms. Williams, regardless of how they look. If your hats can make it in, so can this young lady's clothes," said Pastor Freeman defiantly.

What does it mean to truly worship God? Is it more about what happens in church or how we live in the world?



Keep in Mind

"But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Amos 5:14 Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken.

15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

18 Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.

19 As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.

20 Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? Even very dark, and no brightness in it?

21 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.

22 Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.

23 Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.

24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

25 Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?

26 But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.

27 Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.

The People, Places, and Times

Feast Days. There were three major feast days in the nation of Israel: the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Feast of Harvest (Pentecost), and the Feast of Ingathering (Tabernacles). These were pilgrimage festivals that required participation from the entire Israelite community. All work was to cease and travelers made their way from all over Israel to celebrate these festivals in Jerusalem.

Amos. The prophet Amos was born in the city of Tekoa. He prophesied in Israel around 750 B.C. He was not the descendant of prophets; rather, he was from “among the herdsmen of Tekoa” (from Amos 1:1). He was a shepherd and also tended and gathered sycamore figs. He received his call to ministry while he was out in the pastures, with his sheep (Amos 7:14–15). His career as a shepherd and a common working man informed his view of the world and the way he communicated his prophetic message. He used images from nature and

agriculture in his prophecies. Amos lived during an era of relative peace and prosperity. This prosperity led to an atmosphere of indulgent luxury, corrupt power, and moral depravity in Israel. Many had turned to the worship of idols and other gods. Some religious practices were still maintained; however, these had deteriorated into empty rituals. Israel’s religion didn’t have the intended impact on how they lived their lives.

Sikkuth (Moloch) & Kaiwan (Chiun). Sikkuth is another name for the Mesopotamian astral deity Sakkut (Ninib). This god was also associated with the planet Saturn. Kaiwan was the Babylonian Saturn god. The name means “the steadiest one” and is taken from Saturn’s slow-moving orbit. The differences in spelling are likely because when foreign gods were referenced, the original vowels were often replaced with the vowels from the Hebrew word for “abomination.” The Phoenicians were thought to offer human sacrifices to this god.

Background

Amos begins chapter 5 as a eulogy for the “dead” nation of Israel. Israel was not yet dead, but the lament was meant to impress on the nation the severe danger it was in. The death of Israel is described as the death of a virgin (v. 2). The death of a virgin would have been considered particularly tragic because she had no children to carry on her memory. This type of death is distinctly permanent. Furthermore, the dead virgin is described as having been left lying in a field, unburied. To leave a body unburied would have been a shocking and appalling image to consider, yet this is how the demise of Israel is described. Its depraved moral climate and refusal to turn back to God had indeed set it on the path of destruction.

Israel could not trust in the power of its armies to defend them against the coming destruction. Amos declared that their armies would be systematically cut down in battle (v. 3). Their trust in false gods was misplaced. The Israelites were known to visit idol temples in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. But Amos announced that each of these is set for destruction as well. Their only hope was to return to God. Amos repeatedly declared the way of escape for some. If they will seek after God, they will live (vv. 4, 6). Despite Amos’ lament, he presented God’s offer to save a remnant who would turn to Him.

How can we create idols in places where we are supposed to be worshipping God like in church?

At-A-Glance

1. Love Good, Hate Evil (Amos 5:14–15)
2. A Day of Darkness (vv. 18–20)
3. God Desires Justice, Not Empty Rituals (vv. 21–24)
4. Israel’s Idolatry Results in Exile (vv. 25–27)

In Depth

1. Love Good, Hate Evil (Amos 5:14–15)

Israel has become complacent in their presumption of God’s favor (v. 14). Israel has mistakenly believed that, despite their sinful ways and their worship of other gods, they can still count on God’s protection. However, Amos declared to them that their actions had displeased God and would have destroyed their nation. For some to be spared, they must seek good and avoid evil. The two-fold action of seeking and avoiding is emphasized in verse 15. They are to “hate” the evil and “love” the good. The terms “hate” and “love” indicate decisions that one must make. Seeking good is connected with choosing to love good. Avoiding evil is connected to choosing to hate evil.

What would it mean to love good in our lives today?

2. A Day of Darkness (Amos 5:18–20)

Again, the prophet’s message seizes on Israel’s presumption of God’s favor. It was common in times of trouble for the Israelites to long for “the day of the LORD,” when God would rescue them from their enemies. But “the day of the LORD” will now be a day of reckoning. For those who have turned to idols and denied justice to the poor, there will be no rescue, but rather darkness and judgment waiting for them. This will be a jarring turn of events for Israel. It is described metaphorically as escaping a lion, only to find that you must escape a bear, then resting at home, only to find that a snake is waiting to bite you.

Why do people often want God’s judgment on others but not on themselves?

3. God Desires Justice, Not Empty Rituals (Amos 5:21–24)

The worship of other gods had seeped into Israel’s religious practices, but the people still maintained their Israelite rituals and festivals

too. However, God is not fooled by their empty worship. True worship flows out of the hearts of those who earnestly seek to follow God's will. A true worshiper's relationships and personal life will be consistent with public worship. Israel's worship is hypocritical. They publicly give offerings to God and worship Him with their music, but they continue to reject justice and righteousness in their everyday lives. Their religious practices have become distasteful to God, and He refuses their show of piety. Rather than continued injustice and hypocrisy, the Lord desires a continual, daily flow of justice and righteousness.

How does seeing worship as a lifestyle help us to avoid being hypocrites?

4. Israel's Idolatry Results in Exile (Amos 5:25–27)

Israel's unfaithfulness is called out here. In addition to making offerings to the Lord, they have begun worshipping foreign deities. Idol worship often included parades in which the people would carry handmade representations of their gods. Amos describes an image that depicts Israel, the chosen people of the Lord, the one true God, carrying around idols made to worship other gods (v. 26). It is a sad betrayal of the God who had redeemed them. Idolatry leads to injustice. It is at the root of their oppression of others and their choice to love evil and not good. As a result, the Lord will send them into exile—what happens to all those who choose other gods?

What sinful symptoms in our world are connected to idols we don't think about as much?

Search the Scriptures

1. What do you think it would have looked like for an Israelite to love good and hate evil during this time in Israel's history (Amos 5:14–15)?
2. What were the attitudes and motives of the Israelite worshipers (Amos 5:21–23)?
3. Why did God refuse their worship (Amos 5:25–27)?

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Discuss the Meaning

1. Amos declared that God desires justice and righteousness, not religious practices that do not impact our lives. How does your public worship inform your desire for social justice in our society?
2. Amos instructed Israel to love good and hate evil. How might you love good and hate evil in your daily life?
3. How would others know that you love good and hate evil?

Liberating Lesson

Most Christians have no problem determining the difference between good and evil. In fact, even non-believers often choose to do the right thing. But merely choosing not to do evil is different than actively opposing evil. Opposing evil requires a level of conviction that goes beyond a simple understanding of right and wrong. This concept has been examined in social experiments and hidden camera television shows. During these experiments, an unsuspecting participant is presented with a scenario requiring them to determine right or wrong morally. Generally, participants will choose to do the right thing. The scenario is then changed slightly. Now the participant is presented with a scenario in which someone does wrong to another person. The participant must decide to either intervene or ignore the injustice they witness. It is often the case that only certain individuals will go out of their way to oppose an injustice. Most people are content to sit by while others are mistreated. God desires Christians to seek to do good and oppose evil and injustice. We are charged with standing for justice in our communities and in our world.

Application for Activation

It is often difficult to choose to love good and hate evil. One way to be prepared for those times and situations where we have decisions to make is to determine what is good or evil. Get

a piece of paper and write "Love Good" on one side and "Hate Evil" on the other. On the "Love Good" side, write all the ways to seek good daily. On the "Hate Evil" side, write all the ways you can hate evil daily. Thinking about these things beforehand can help us avoid falling into sin and move us forward in serving others in our community.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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Say It Correctly

Tabernacle. TA-ber-na-hul.

Damascus. da-MAS-kus.

Moloch. MOE-lokh.

Sikkuth. see-KOOTH

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 155

Isaiah 18–22

Psalm 65:9–13

DAY 156

Isaiah 23–27

Psalm 66:1–4

DAY 157

Isaiah 28–30

Psalm 66:5–12

DAY 158

Isaiah 31–35

Psalm 66:13–20

DAY 159

Isaiah 36–41

Psalm 67

DAY 160

Isaiah 42–44

Psalm 68:1–6

DAY 161

Isaiah 45–48

Psalm 68:7–1

God is Merciful

CAN GOD SHOW MERCY TO ANYONE?

Focal Verses • JONAH 4:1-11

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will IDENTIFY God's larger perspective and plan for the salvation of all people, REMEMBER God's compassion for those who do not know Him, and SHOW compassion to those far from God.

In Focus

As Marcus watched the screen, his face began to cringe. The story on the news was about an angry mob persecuting a minority group in another country. There on the television, he saw images of children with sad faces as they watched their homes being burned down. Marcus couldn't understand why any normal human being would approve of this.

He exclaimed out loud, "People like that don't deserve to live. I just wish we would just go and bomb them all!"

His wife overheard him, walked over to the couch, and put her arms around him. "Sweetheart, you seem to be really worked up about this."

"I am," said Marcus. "There's no reason why people like that should be allowed to live." "Well," Kelly sighed, "I hear you are upset, but you should never wish death on people. It makes you just as bad."

"What do you mean?" Marcus responded, as he reached out to touch her arm.

"Well, God is a God of justice, but he is also a God of compassion," she said.

"I never thought about it like that," Marcus said. "Instead of wanting people to be assassinated, I should be praying that they would be transformed."

What makes it hard to love those who are not like us? In this lesson, we learn about the pervasive, all-inclusive love of God.



Keep in Mind

"...I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (from Jonah 4:2, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Jonah 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

6 And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his

grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

10 Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

The People, Places, and Times

Nineveh. Genesis 10:11 identifies Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah, as the founder of both Nineveh and Babylon. Nineveh was located along the eastern bank of the Tigris River. It was the capital of the Assyrian empire for many years. The inhabitants were described as wealthy, warlike, highly civilized merchants who worshiped Ishtar (Astarte) the fertility goddess. The Medes eventually attacked the city, and it fell around 606 BC.

Assyrians. By today's borders, their empire would span the countries of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Assyrians were known for their fierce cruelty. For example, they sometimes captured their enemies and skinned them alive or cut off their heads and piled them in a pyramid to terrify those still alive in the city. Isaiah 36 records that when the Assyrians were

about to attack Jerusalem, they began with a campaign of fear to get them not to trust God.

Background

The king of Israel during Jonah's ministry was Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23–29). King Jeroboam II was the son of King Jehoash (a.k.a King Joash). King Jeroboam II ruled the Northern Kingdom of Israel for forty-one years. Jeroboam II ruled the entire region east of the Jordan down to the Dead Sea. Jonah prophesied about this extension of Israel's territory (2 Kings 14:25). Jeroboam II's long reign allowed him to increase his luxury through oppression and vice. Israel prospered while iniquity flourished (Amos 2:6–8; Hosea 4:12–14). Jonah's contemporaries include Hosea (1:1) and Amos (1:1). After the people of Nineveh repented, Jonah had the opportunity to establish a relationship with the

Ninevites. Instead, he positioned himself alone, outside the city, under a bush.

Did Jonah do the right thing being alone? Why or why not?

this plant. Jonah actually wants to die after he experiences the heat without the plant's shade.

How can we deal with our anger in healthy ways?

At-A-Glance

1. Jonah's Complaint (Jonah 4:1-4)
2. Jonah's Gourd (vv. 5-7)
3. Jonah's Rebuke (vv. 9-10)

In Depth

1. Jonah's Complaint (Jonah 4:1-4)

Jonah had just preached to the Ninevites, and the Ninevites were spared the judgment of God. Instead of being happy about God's grace toward the Ninevites, Jonah was angry. He said he was angry because he knew God would show mercy to Ninevah and this is why never wanted to go to Ninevah. His theological knowledge of God is correct, God is merciful. Jonah just didn't want God to be compassionate to an enemy of Israel.

The extreme hate that Jonah has toward the Assyrian people can be seen in his request for God to kill him. Jonah would rather be dead than for the Ninevites to experience God's grace. God prods Jonah with a question. He asks Jonah if it is right for him to be angry about His grace.

Why do we sometimes get upset when God is gracious to people we don't think deserve it?

2. Jonah's Gourd (Jonah 4:5-7)

Jonah, fuming in anger, walks outside the city. As he sits in his makeshift shelter, God causes a large, leafy plant to shade Jonah. At this act of kindness, Jonah is thankful to God. The plant provides shade to ease his discomfort. Then God causes the leafy plant to dry up and wither.

Jonah is outraged. He expresses anger and frustration as he did when he realized the grace the people of Nineveh experienced. God spared the people of Nineveh, but He wouldn't spare

3. Jonah's Rebuke (Jonah 4:9-10)

God questions Jonah's right to be angry. He provokes Jonah to express his emotions over a small thing, such as having shade. Jonah retorts that he is right to be angry about this plant. After all, it gave him shade and allowed him to be comfortable in the heat.

Then, the Lord rebukes Jonah. Jonah feels sorry about the plant but does nothing to cause it to grow. This plant had a short life span, and Jonah is upset about it. God allows Jonah to see a larger picture when he declares that there are 120,000 in Nineveh who don't know their left from their right and also animals. God wants to show mercy to His creation. He has compassion, and His love ranges wide over humanity.

How can we let go of control over others and recognize that God is the One really in control?

Search the Scriptures

1. Is Jonah justified in his anger at God (Jonah 4:2)? Explain why.
2. Why do you believe God spared the city (v. 11)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does the verbal exchange between God and Jonah in this chapter teach us about speaking the truth in love?

2. The book of Jonah concludes with God giving mercy to both Jonah and the inhabitants of Nineveh. What outcomes can Christians expect when extending mercy instead of callousness?

Liberating Lesson

Jonah's callous heart prevented him from caring for others. Like Jonah, we may need a fresh love for God's truth to care for others too

genuinely. When offended, we can challenge others in love. God's loving challenge is often in the form of blunt questions. For instance, God challenged Jonah to repent by providing for him while pressing him to examine his motives.

Application for Activation

When offended, we sometimes respond in anger or frustration. Like Jonah, we may fail to remember God's mercy to us. Our shortsightedness limits our ability to extend mercy to others. This week, commit to doing one act of kindness for someone with whom you are having conflict or for a stranger. Pray to see the needs of others as God sees them.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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Say It Correctly

Vehement. VEE-hi-mint.
Beseech. bi-SEECH.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 162

Isaiah 49:53
Psalm 68:15-23

DAY 163

Isaiah 54:58
Psalm 68:24-31

DAY 164

Isaiah 59:63
Psalm 68:32-35

DAY 165

Isaiah 64:66
Psalm 69:1-5

DAY 166

Jeremiah 1:3
Psalm 69:6-12

DAY 167

Jeremiah 4-6
Psalm 69:13-18

DAY 168

Jeremiah 7-9
Psalm 69:19-28

God is Compassionate

SHOULD SINNERS BE PUNISHED OR SHOWN COMPASSION FIRST? Focal Verses • MICAH 7:14-20

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will ANALYZE God's mercy even when punishment seems in order, REFLECT on experiences when God's mercy and compassion were more than expected, and CARRY out acts of mercy and compassion.

In Focus

Roger and Becky Altman dreamed of buying a new house after they lost their child so they could start in a home with new memories. They saved enough for the down payment and found a builder. They wanted doors that reminded them of Becky's grandfather's farmhouse. The builder from Jones Construction was not sure if he could have the doors manufactured according to the Altmans' request, but he needed the money, so he assured them there should not be any problems.

A week before their move-in was scheduled, the Altmans went to take a peek at their home. They immediately noticed the doors were not customized to their request. Without hesitation, Becky called the Mr. Jones and explained the actions she would pursue based on what was outlined in the contract. Roger stopped Becky, took the phone, and allowed the builder to explain.

Once he was finished, Roger suggested to his wife that if Mr. Jones could build a shed behind the house that looked like her grandfather's farmhouse, all should be forgiven.

While consequences are essential to maintaining order, they are not always necessary to maintain relationships. Are you more quick to punish or avoid people after mistakes? Or, do you give them opportunities to fix them?



Keep in Mind

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy” (Micah 7:18, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Micah 7:14** Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.

15 According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things.

16 The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf.

17 They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the

earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee.

18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

20 Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

The People, Places, and Times

Bashan. The area east of the Jordan River was divided into three parts: the plain, Gilead, and Bashan. Bashan was known as a fertile territory with a multitude of flocks. The Israelites eventually overtook the territory and gave it as an inheritance to the tribe of Manasseh (Deuteronomy 3:3; Joshua 22:7).

Gilead. Gilead is the land that borders Bashan. It was also among the land seized during the battle with King Og, but it is famous for other reasons. The Bible talks about the healing balm that soothed and remedied sickness, which is what the area was known for (Jeremiah 8:22). Gilead became synonymous with God's healing power. Both David and Jesus knew it as a place of retreat.

Staff. The shepherd's staff was used as a walking stick to guide animals and defend the flock. It could be so unique that it could be considered a way of identifying the owner, much like a license presents the identification of its owner. Because shepherds had the daunting task of controlling something larger than them (an entire flock of sheep), it was necessary to have an extension of their hand that would give

them the ability to prod and pull the flock when they went astray or needed direction.

Background

Micah began chapter 7, lamenting the evil and injustice done in Judah. He saw so much that he declared, "Woe is me!" (Micah 7:1, KJV). The people's crimes were so appalling that he likened this season to the time after the summer harvest when no more fruit was left. He wanted to "taste" and experience good things, but none remained; there was violence and extortion, oppression and injustice everywhere he looked.

From this point, Micah spoke a psalm of trust and salvation for Israel. He told them the Lord would not let their enemies gloat over them. This was a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Additionally, he informed them that one day, their walls would be rebuilt, and foreigners from Assyria to Egypt would come to be part of Israel. At the same time, the rest of the nations would be uninhabited as punishment for what they did to God's people. This led Micah to speak of God's mercy and faithfulness to His people.

At-A-Glance

1. We Need God (Micah 7:14–15)
2. We Acknowledge God (vv. 16–17)
3. We Praise God (vv. 18–20)

In Depth

1. We Need God (Micah 7:14–15)

Micah asks God to care for His people as tender and affectionately as a shepherd oversees his flock. More specifically, he requests divine provision because they are God's children. He uses the imagery of lush pastures in Gilead and Bashan to urge God further to restore the people and the land. Although it may appear to be a monologue, God responds. He interjects a quick, comforting word to assure Micah that He will forgive and restore. Like Micah, who draws from their history, God cites a past experience to confirm that He will continue intervening on the side of Israel.

2. We Acknowledge God (Micah 7:16–17)

After Micah requests favor for Israel, he then asks God to punish their enemies by shaming them and having them acknowledge the limitations of their power compared to the Lord. Micah is very specific when he relays to God the wrath he wants them to receive. Micah's petition is for all their enemies to experience God so His dominance and authority cannot be doubted or disputed. When Micah suggests, "They will come out to meet the LORD" (from v. 17, NLT), this could signify repentance because the nations would have to change their ways. However, Micah wants them to approach God humbly (like snakes, which symbolize the lowest position possible).

3. We Praise God (Micah 7:18–20)

How fitting is it that Micah would begin to praise God? He recognizes that no being on Earth or heaven is as merciful as God and begins praising

Him. After considering the nation's immorality compared to God's grace, Micah boasts of the love and compassion God repeatedly extends through His never-ending forgiveness. Micah rejoices in the covenant between his ancestors and God. He knows that God will honor His promises to Abraham and Jacob, and as such, Israel will always know the covenantal love of God.

Search the Scriptures

1. What is the writer comparing God's people to (Micah 7:14)?
2. What does God take delight in doing (v. 18)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. In what ways are God's love and compassion more than we expect?
2. What type of limits do we place on the compassion we extend to others when they have done wrong?

Liberating Lesson

Compassion feels like a thing of the past, just like chivalry. While this may appear true at first glance, innumerable examples of empathy, forgiveness, and reconciliation suggest otherwise. It happens in households, schools, workplaces, churches, salons, barbershops, restaurants, and other places but simply doesn't go viral on social media. Every day, we face situations where we can turn the other cheek and extend compassion or subject someone to the consequences of their actions. In the same way, although God demands justice, He also has mercy for those who repent. Jesus' work on the Cross fully demonstrates this.

Application for Activation

Think of a specific person you know who has done something wrong. Should that person receive mercy or punishment? Make a point to offer forgiveness to this person, and if possible, alleviate the consequences of the original wrong.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Solitarily, so-li-TA-ri-lee.
Pardoneth, PAR-dun-ith.
Retaineth, ree-TAYN-ith.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 169

Jeremiah 10-13
Psalm 69:29-36

DAY 170

Jeremiah 14-17
Psalm 70

DAY 171

Jeremiah 18-22
Psalm 71:1-8

DAY 172

Jeremiah 23-25
Psalm 71:9-14

DAY 173

Jeremiah 26-29
Psalm 71:15-18

DAY 174

Jeremiah 30-31
Psalm 71:19-24

DAY 175

Jeremiah 32-34
Psalm 72

God Promises Salvation

HOW DO BELIEVERS RESPOND TO OUR TROUBLES?

Focal Verses • HABAKKUK 3:2-6, 17-19

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will RECOGNIZE that there are times when we may not understand how God is moving, EMPATHIZE with wondering why God allows certain things to happen, and DISCOVER that God's character dictates that unrighteousness will not go forever unpunished, nor charity unrewarded.

In Focus

Cheryl struggled to keep her car on the road as she sped home from the office. After years with the school district, the administrators had decided to eliminate her position. As she drove, Cheryl thought bitterly of the dozens of hours of overtime she had worked and never charged the district for.

Her reports were always well prepared and on time. Her supervisors always praised her for her efforts, and she had been named "Employee of the Year" multiple times.

The worst cut was the coworkers who were remaining. Neither of those women had been with the district more than four years. One rarely reported to work on time and frequently left early. The reports prepared by the other were sloppy and often contained wrong information. Cheryl had to cover for both of these women countless times, yet the district chose to cut her job. It just didn't seem fair!

Cheryl was the sole supporter of her children. How would she make the payments on the house? How soon could she find another job? She began crying and wondering why God would allow her to be in this terrible situation.

How do we respond when God allows difficulties and disasters to happen to His people?



Keep in Mind

"Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation"
(Habakkuk 3:18, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Habakkuk 3:2** O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

4 And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.

5 Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.

6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and

the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold; and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

The People, Places, and Times

Habakkuk, the prophet. There is little information about the prophet Habakkuk. There is no mention of his father's name or what city he is from. Habakkuk did live in Judah, and his prophecy occurred before Judah fell to the Babylonians. He may have been a contemporary of the prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah. The Habakkuk book is small, containing only three chapters, but it has two verses often quoted by Christians. "...the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4, KJV), and "...the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

Background

The Prophet Habakkuk was greatly disturbed by Judah's condition. All around, he saw the people living in wickedness and the violence and oppression that permeated the land. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been invaded and the people were carted away, and Judah is a little better morally. Judah's constant state of debauchery, combined with God's apparent

indifference, worries the prophet. Habakkuk knew that God was just, yet there was injustice around him. He struggled to reconcile what he knew about God with what he saw going on around him. Because he was a man of God, Habakkuk took his problem directly to God in prayer. In the first chapter of the book of Habakkuk, the prophet demands to know how long God will allow this sinful condition to go unchallenged. The second chapter is God's response to Habakkuk.

God responds to Habakkuk's accusation that He has remained silent by pointing out that Habakkuk does not know how to recognize His answers. God's response has not come in the way that the prophet expected. God tells Habakkuk that He will use the Babylonians to punish Judah. God also tells Habakkuk to wait and see just what He would do. Habakkuk was astonished by God's response. Rather than a revival, the lawlessness of Judah would be dealt with through an invasion. Habakkuk wonders how God could conquer Judah with an even more evil nation. God assures Habakkuk that

Babylon, too, would be punished. Our lesson focuses on Habakkuk's remarkable prayer when he finally recognizes that God has everything under control. Habakkuk's faith rests in his remembering what God has done in the past and his conviction that God alone can be trusted with the future. Although his book begins in fear, it ends with a marvelous revelation of faith.

At-A-Glance

1. Response in Crisis (Habakkuk 3:2–3)
2. Recognition of Judgment (vv. 4–6)
3. Praise in Destruction (vv. 17–18)
4. Strength in Salvation (v. 19)

In Depth

1. Response in Crisis (Habakkuk 3:2–3)

Habakkuk appeals to God to remember mercy in His wrath. God has revealed His plan to the prophet, and the prophet is pleading on behalf of the people. He seems to ask that in the ensuing 70 years of captivity, God would secure His people and show them some compassion. In prayer, Habakkuk remembers what God has done in the past. God's past performance convinces Habakkuk that he can continue to trust in God.

2. Recognition of Judgment (Habakkuk 3:4–6)

Habakkuk remembers that God hid His awesome power, which flashed out in sudden acts of miraculous interventions, such as the various plagues He leveled against Egypt. When God was leading the people out of Egyptian captivity, He used pestilence and plagues to destroy the land and flock. The text continues describing what happens when God is present: "the earth shakes," "nations tremble,"

"ancient mountains crumble," and "age-old hills collapse." God's creation is no match for His presence. Further, He is unhindered; the text declares He "marches on forever."

3. Praise in Destruction (Habakkuk 3:17–18)

The prophet laments that there will come a time when there will be no fruit on the trees, and the livestock will be gone. God's people, who had once been blessed with a land of milk and honey, would soon suffer starvation. Despite this, Habakkuk determines that he will remain joyful. His intent to remain joyful likely points to his confidence in God.

4. Strength in Salvation (Habakkuk 3:19)

Habakkuk is no longer worried about the situation because he knows that his salvation lies in the Lord. He declares that God will make his feet like those of a hind. This female deer is a slender, graceful creature, renowned for its swiftness and surefootedness, which enables it to escape from its enemies. Habakkuk uses this allusion to demonstrate how he and all the remaining faithful will endure the impending confrontation with the Babylonians. Nothing has changed Habakkuk's situation. Judah is still sinful, and the Babylonians are still going to invade. The change is in Habakkuk! This book begins with the prophet's declaration of fear and ends with a declaration of faith in the nature and character of God. With God as the source of his strength and comfort, Habakkuk is now confident that he can rise above the challenge that faces him.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Habakkuk's initial reaction after hearing God's "speech" (v. 2)?
2. What virtue did Habakkuk appeal to God to remember (v. 2)?
3. How does the prophet declare he will respond in the face of these destructions (v. 18)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Habakkuk declared that he would rejoice in God even though afflictions may surround him. How do we respond to God in the midst of a crisis? What do these responses reveal about our level of faith in God?
2. What does Habakkuk's response reveal about his character?

Liberating Lesson

We often forget that God did not promise the world would be peaceful. He did, however, promise to remain a source of strength and comfort to us. Our inability to understand why God allows things to happen should not hinder us from trusting in His power and plan. God has a divine plan and purpose for each of us—whether we recognize it or not. At the beginning of this book, Habakkuk wants to know why God is allowing such evil to go on in the land. He wants to know why God won't move to stop it. Today, we only need to look at our phones to see the latest account of some horrific event. We may find ourselves asking the same questions: "Why won't God stop these terrible things?" It often appears to us that God is not moving. However, God revealed to Habbakuk that He was indeed moving, but not in the way the prophet expected.

Despite everything happening around us, we must be mindful that God desires us to become more like His Son. Only when we trust in Christ, does He begin to work in us, transforming our hearts and guiding us toward a life that reflects His love and purpose. It does not matter what our problems are because God is always in control. This fact allows us to move from our fear to faithfulness and truly rejoice in the God of our salvation.

Application for Activation

Habbakuk declares, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!" (v. 18, NLT). This particular verse should speak loudly and boldly to each of us. The God who saved our souls from destruction is the God who can be trusted in all things. Not only will God give His people the ability to face the challenges of life, but He will also give us the power to rise above them. Make a list of the perplexing or troubling things in your life. How can you use Habakkuk's example as a model for expressing your faith in the Lord despite these situations?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Context & Concepts: Based on information from *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, Walter A. Elwell, editor (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), pp. 320-321.

Say It Correctly

Habakkuk, haa-buh-kuhk

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 176

Jeremiah 35-37

Psalm 73:1-9

DAY 177

Jeremiah 38-41

Psalm 73:10-14

DAY 178

Jeremiah 42-45

Psalm 73:15-28

DAY 179

Jeremiah 46-48

Psalm 74:1-8

DAY 180

Jeremiah 49-50

Psalm 74:9-17

DAY 181

Jeremiah 51-52

Psalm 74:18-23

DAY 182

Lamentations 1-3

Psalm 75:1-5

Notes
