

September
1992

*This month take
a walk through . . .*

The Minor Prophets

With this devotional guide you can read through the entire Bible in one year. Read the daily Scripture reading in one sitting, or divide the Scripture portion to start and end your day with God's Word. If pressed for time, read the "Heart of the Passage" for the main theme of the day's reading.

Overviews, charts, insights and special features will help you grasp what God's Word is saying to you. Personal applications will enable you to draw on His truth when you need it.

It's all here for you! So why not get started right now . . . on your lifechanging journey through God's Word.

Dear Friend,

You've probably heard this popular motto: "With God all things are possible." But did you realize that with God some things are also impossible?



Dr. Bruce Wilkinson is Founder and President of Walk Thru the Bible, a worldwide publications, seminars and video ministry.

In the Book of Amos, you'll learn that it's impossible to hide from God. Try as you might, you cannot run far enough, burrow deep enough or soar high enough to escape His persistent presence.

And that presence will either comfort or convict you, depending on how obediently you walk with Him.

Consider carefully your relationship with God today. Do you feel more comforted or convicted by His presence? If the answer disturbs you, then this month's readings will help you find peace. The 12 Minor Prophets whose books you'll read show how God's abiding presence can become your daily comfort and consolation.

Don't miss a single day of discovery this month...along *The Daily Walk*.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Bruce H. Wilkinson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bruce H. Wilkinson
President & Executive Editor
Walk Thru the Bible Ministries

HOSEA

*H*osea's book is a bittersweet story of unfaithfulness and undying love. It involves two similar relationships: the Prophet Hosea to his adulterous wife Gomer; and God to His faithless covenant people. Gomer forsakes Hosea for other lovers; Israel forsakes God by going after pagan idols. But perfect love keeps on loving even after being spurned. In Hosea's case, that means buying back his wayward wife from the slave market; for Israel, purifying punishment will be followed by restoration.

Focus	Harlotry and Hope in Hosea's Day				
Divisions	Moral Sins of Gomer	National Sins of Israel	International Sins of Israel	Promises of Israel's Ruin	Promises of Israel's Renewal
	1	3 4	6 7	8 9	11 12 14
Topics	Physical Adultery	Spiritual Adultery			
	Personal Tragedy	National Transgression			
Place	Northern Kingdom of Israel				
Time	About 45 Years (755-710 B.C.)				

Moral Sins of Gomer

1 Tuesday
September

Hosea 1-3
Heart of the Passage:
Hosea 1, 3



Overview: Hosea's family life becomes a painful but accurate picture of the problems within his nation. He marries a woman named Gomer who bears him three children appropriately named by God as signs to Israel: Jezreel, "God scatters"; Lo-ruhamah, "not pitied"; and Lo-ammi, "not my people." All too soon, Hosea's home is shattered by Gomer's unfaithfulness. She leaves her prophet-husband in search of other lovers and sinks to such depths that Hosea must redeem her from the slave market. Hosea's steadfast love in the face of such unfaithfulness parallels God's love for His people in the midst of their idolatry.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
Marriage of Hosea and Gomer	Unfaithfulness of Gomer	Undying Love of Hosea
Faithless Wife		Forgiving Husband

Like a delicate seismograph, Hosea's sensitive soul recorded the hidden and secret rumblings of divine judgment.



Your Daily Walk: What do the following have in common: a conversation with a brick wall . . . a telephone call answered by a recorded voice . . . and a debate with a corpse?

Answer: They all represent one-sided conversations. Try as you might, the brick wall, answering machine, and corpse will never respond to you. Why? Because there is no life in them.

There is something pathetic about a one-sided relationship, the kind in which the love of one partner grows deeper with each passing day while the other fails to respond to that love. Does that describe your relationship with God? Romans 5:8 states: "God [showed] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God has demonstrated His love for you; have you responded to that love? If one-sided describes God's love for you (as it did Hosea's love for Gomer and God's love for Israel), then why not respond today? By putting your faith in the fact of Christ's love and sacrificial death, you can become a child of God right now. A love like that is just too good to ignore (1 John 4:10).



Insight: The Prophet Who Outlived His Audience
According to 1:1, Hosea ministered during the reigns of four kings in Judah (southern kingdom). Hosea's long career, therefore, spanned the reigns of the last six kings of Israel (northern kingdom), making him one of the few "Ten-King Prophets" in the Bible.

National Sins of Israel

Wednesday

September

2



Overview: Because of his own painful experiences, Hosea is able to identify with the sorrow of God over the sinfulness of His people. Hosea's loyal love for Gomer pictures God's undying love for His people. But Israel's sin-hardened populace refuse to respond to God's last gracious appeal. The people stand guilty and defenseless before God's accusations. Even now God would heal and redeem them, but in their arrogance and idolatry they refuse to return.

Hosea 4-6
Heart of the Passage:
Hosea 4

Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6
Guilty People and Priests	Rebellious Priests and Princes	Merciful God of Goodness
God's Indictment	God's Displeasure	God's Demands



Your Daily Walk: Complete this sentence at least five different ways: "I know for certain that _____." Now examine the responses you gave. Is the level of your "knowledge" the same in all cases, or does it vary? Perhaps you said, "I know my name is Norman (or Norma) Christian." That is knowledge from firsthand experience. But is that the same kind of knowledge as represented in the statement, "I know the world is round"? Or "I know my car will start tomorrow morning"?

Death and destruction were coming upon the people of Israel. Why? Because, in God's own words, "My people are destroyed *for lack of knowledge*" (4:6). In a nation founded by God, built upon godly principles, and centered around the temple of God, it seems incredible to think there was no knowledge of God. But the issue was not facts *about* God; the issue was firsthand experience *with* God.

Might the shocking statement of Hosea 4:6 be true of your nation as well? Godly foundations and an abundance of churches are no guarantee of the knowledge of God. Write a short note of godly concern to an elected official today, sharing the truth of Hosea 4:6. Remember, if the knowledge of God is to permeate your country, it first must be the experience of your life.



Insight: The Tattered Ten Commandments Chapters 4-6 show how the nation has broken each of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Can you find at least one statement corresponding to each broken command?

The knowledge of God is far from the love of Him.

3 Thursday
September

Hosea 7-8
Heart of the Passage:
Hosea 7



Overview: Israel's sin remains the focus of Hosea's prophecy. The nation's iniquity is like a raging fire. Her rebellion has weakened her to the point of spiritual stupor. She is beyond realizing who God is or what He has done for her. For this idolatrous, sin-riddled nation, there can only be one verdict: Exile.

Chapter 7				Chapter 8							
1	Burning Sin	10	11	Betrayal of God	16	1	Blight of Idolatry	7	8	Banishment from the Land	14
Sowing the Wind						Reaping the Whirlwind					

By chastening, the Lord separates the sin that He hates from the sinner whom He loves.



Your Daily Walk: A bird lies fluttering on the ground, obviously injured. You respond to this pitiful sight by reaching out your hand to try and help. Instead of recognizing your intent, the bird jerks free in a frantic effort to escape. You are the only one who can help, and yet the bird refuses your assistance—perhaps at the cost of its life.

“How foolish! How wasteful!” you say. And yet, that is precisely how God’s people responded to God’s overtures. “I would heal . . . I would redeem . . .” cried the Lord, but Israel refused (7:1, 13). Blinded by sin and devoured by wickedness, the people rejected God’s gracious offers. And the heart of God grieved. Instead of compassion, He was forced to extend a hand of chastening—punishment in place of pardon, exile rather than encouragement.

Are you grieving the Lord today by your stubborn refusal to respond to His grace? Pinpoint a bad habit, an unchecked passion, a persistent sin that is saddening your Lord. Then remember the illustration of the injured bird. The choice is up to you. Yield to God’s love, before you feel His hand of discipline.



Insight: Will They Never Learn? (8:5-7)
The golden calf, which nearly cost Aaron his life and resulted in the deaths of 3,000 Israelites, was later destroyed (Exodus 32). But the idea lived on during the reign of Jeroboam, first king of the northern kingdom. He ordered similar golden calves to be erected at Dan (in the north) and Bethel (in the south). For years these calves were the focus of Israel’s idolatrous worship (1 Kings 12:26-33). And perhaps it was in the very shadow of these same calves that Hosea stood as he prophesied destruction for idol and idolater alike.

Dynamic Dozen: The Minor Prophets

Some of the least known men in the Bible wrote some of its most potent books. Spanning the globe with the prophetic pen, the Minor Prophets give us insights into the person and work of God found nowhere else in the Bible. Who were these men?

PROPHET	Home Town	Approximate Dates of Ministry (B.C.)	Meaning of His Name	Message of His Book
HOSEA	Unknown	755-715	"salvation"	God's loyal love
JOEL	Unknown	835	"Jehovah is God"	plagues past and future
AMOS	Tekoa	760-753	"burden-bearer"	Israel ripe for judgment
OBADIAH	Unknown	848-841	"servant of Jehovah"	Edom's doom
JONAH	Gath-hepher	782-753	"dove"	salvation for the Gentiles
MICAH	Moresheh-gath	735-700	"Who is like God?"	justice and injustice
NAHUM	Elkosh	664-654	"consolation"	destruction of Nineveh
HABAKKUK	Unknown	609-605	"embrace"	just shall live by faith
ZEPHANIAH	Unknown	632-628	"Jehovah hides"	day of the Lord
HAGGAI	Babylon?	520	"festival"	rebuilding the temple
ZECHARIAH	Babylon?	520-480	"Jehovah remembers"	coming of Messiah
MALACHI	Unknown	432-424	"My messenger"	appeal to backsliders



Promise of Israel's Ruin

4

Friday

September

Hosea 9-11

Heart of the Passage:

Hosea 11



Overview: Like the pounding of a hammer, Hosea's indictment of Israel continues.

Worship has no meaning for God when offered by people with idolatrous hearts. The nation has been wasted by unchecked sin. Once a fruitful vine, Israel now lies spiritually barren and fruitless. Yet God remains loyal to His people. His love will not permit Him to leave sin unpunished—just as a loving father must discipline his erring children. But in the midst of that painful process, God's promise shines brightly. Restoration and blessing await His people when the painful chastening is over.

Chapter 9	Chapter 10	Chapter 11
God's Hatred for Israel's Barrenness	God's Promise of Israel's Bondage	God's Heart for Israel's Blessing
Punishment Coming		Restoration Coming

A prophet deserves honor, not because he foresees the coming event, but because he sees the meaning within the current event.



Your Daily Walk: Contrast these two statements from today's reading: "I hated them [Israel]" (9:15). "My repentings [compassions] are kindled together [for Israel]" (11:8). How can you reconcile these verses? Is God contradicting Himself?

The answer can be found in the ageless maxim, "God hates the sin, but loves the sinner." A holy God can never excuse or condone sin. Yet God never blurs the distinction between the sinner and his sin. His love for the sinner never ends, nor does His hatred for the sin.

How do you view those around you who have fallen into gross sin? Have you been so offended by their actions that you now shun them? Remember, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Pick someone whose lifestyle would normally cause you to avoid him or her, and plan an activity to demonstrate God's love toward that person. Ask the Holy Spirit to cause the individual to see in your love the extended hand of a loving God, whose compassions never cease!



Insight: Determined Declaration of Love

The concluding 5 verses of Chapter 11 have been called "the finest presentation in the Old Testament of the tension between the love and justice of God." The final resolution of this tension is seen at the cross, for it is there that God becomes both "just, and the justifier" (Romans 3:26).

Promise of Israel's Renewal

Sat.–Sun.

September

5/6

Hosea 12–14
Heart of the Passage:
Hosea 14



Overview: Hosea ends his book the same way he began it—by driving home his three-part theme: Israel's past is stained with disobedience and rebellion; Israel's future holds the ominous threat of calamity; and Israel's present demands an immediate and complete change of heart if that calamity is to be averted. Hosea's heart has already been broken by the harlotry and shame of his wife Gomer. Now he pleads one last time with his countrymen that they not duplicate Gomer's folly: "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God" (14:1).

Chapter 12	Chapter 13	Chapter 14
Israel's Past Recounted	Israel's Future Previewed	Israel's Present Responsibility
Rebellion	Removal	Repentance



Your Daily Walk: Few sentences in the English language are more difficult to say than the little two-word phrase, "I'm sorry." You've sinned; you've failed miserably. How do you tell God about it? How do you make it right with Him so you can enjoy fellowship once again?

Hosea 14 has been called by some the Backslider's Chapter. It describes the steps necessary for God's erring people to be restored to fellowship with Him:

1. Return to the Lord (14:1). Remember, if God seems distant from you, it must mean you have moved.
2. Confess your sins to the Lord (14:2). Agree with Him that what you have done is wrong and needs to be forgiven.
3. Put your confidence in the Lord (14:3). Trusting your own strength or understanding can only bring disappointment. Instead, lean on the Rock that can never be moved.

Are you, like Israel in Hosea's day, estranged from your God? Restoration is only a prayer away. Read chapter 14 twice. Then do business with God. He's waiting for you, and His door is always open.



Insight: Great Truths in Tiny Capsules
Think through these fragments of thought from Hosea's pen. What great truths about God do they teach you?
"I desired mercy, and not sacrifice" (6:6).
"How shall I give thee up?" (11:8).
"I will heal their backsliding" (14:4).

As long as we live we should more and more be turning from all that is evil, and to all that is good.

Judgment by Locust and the Lord

7 Monday
September

Joel 1-3
Heart of the Passage:
Joel 1-2



Overview: The headline in Joel's day screamed forth the news: "Locust Plague Strips Countryside Bare; Worst Disaster in Decades." But God uses the occasion to teach the Prophet Joel—and through his pen, the nation of Judah—an important truth about the future. Though the land had been laid desolate by the locusts, its condition would pale by comparison with the destruction to be inflicted during the Day of the Lord—the time when the Lord will destroy His enemies and exalt His friends. There can only be one proper response in the face of such warnings: obedience to God.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	
The Day of the Locust	The Day of the Lord	The Judgment of the Nations ¹⁷	The Blessing of God's Nation ²¹
Plague	Punishment	Prosperity	

We can ignore God, but we cannot get away from Him.



Your Daily Walk: You are driving down the highway when suddenly a little red light begins to flash on your dashboard. You are faced with a choice. You can either (a) stop and take care of the problem (which will cause the red light to quit flashing), or (b) take out a hammer and smash the warning light. Which would you suggest?

Perhaps you chuckled at the second option. And yet, every day countless Christians take out mental hammers and smash the warning lights God has provided for their safety: conscience, counsel, the direct commands of God's Word. Rather than correct the problem, they ignore the warning—and then wonder what happened when their spiritual "motor" sputters and stops.

God sent a locust plague in Joel's day to act as a warning light to the nation. Where is a warning light blinking on and off in your life? Perhaps it's a traffic ticket, or a bad report card, or an ulcer. Don't ignore God's voice. Write in the margin the "lesson from the locusts" He wants you to learn today!



Insight: A Day like No Other
Five times in Joel the phrase "the day of the LORD" appears, and you'll find it more than 25 additional times in the Bible. Do a treasure hunt through the following verses to discover more about this most remarkable "day": Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5; 30:3; Amos 5:18; Zephaniah 1:7, 14; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10.

AMOS

Externally, the northern kingdom was marked by flourishing business, solid economy, stable government. But internally the diagnosis of the nation's condition was grim. Idolatry, injustice, greed, hypocrisy, oppression, and arrogance indicated a growing malignancy of deep-seated sin. Amos, a farmer by trade, dons the mantle of a prophet to make God's message clear: "Repent, or perish." The storm clouds of judgment are soon to break over God's people.

Focus	"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!" (6:1-2)								
Divisions	Pronouncements of Judgment on Israel			Promptings of Judgment by God		Pictures of Judgment for Amos		Promises After Judgment for God's People	
	1	2	3	5	6	7	8	9	
Topics	Sermons					Signs			
	Indictment					Encouragement			
Place	Neighboring Nations			Northern Nation of Israel					
Time	About 10 Years (760–750 B.C.)								

Pronouncements of Judgment upon Israel

8

Tuesday

September

Amos 1-2
Heart of the Passage:
Amos 2:6-16



Overview: Amos, a herdsman and farmer from the rural regions of Judah, emerges as God's prophetic spokesman to Israel. In the midst of a period of prosperity and peace, the northern ten tribes have become indifferent to their God. Their complacency, immorality, and idolatry will be tolerated no longer. First to Israel's neighbors, then to Israel herself, Amos forcefully delivers God's stern warning, "I will send a fire . . ." (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5).

Chapter 1											Chapter 2				
Judgment Pronounced on . . .															
Damascus ¹		Gaza ⁶		Tyre ⁹		Edom ¹²		Ammon ¹⁵		Moab ³		Judah ⁵		Israel ¹⁶	
Gentiles											Jews				

It would
tire the
hands of an
angel to
write down
all the
pardons
God bestows
upon true
penitent
believers.



Your Daily Walk: In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis portrays the Son of God as Aslan, a great and powerful lion. Over 2,000 years before, the Prophet Amos used the same imagery, describing God as a roaring lion ready to leap on His prey in judgment (1:2).

If you had to choose another animal to which God might be likened in today's section, perhaps it would be the elephant, the proverbial "animal that never forgets." Nation by nation, God carefully recounts the transgressions which have accumulated, showing that each nation is ripe for judgment. God never overlooks a sin.

But for His children, God has made a special provision—a gracious "lapse of memory." Both Isaiah (43:25) and Jeremiah (31:34) promise the repentant sinner that God erases from His memory all trace of past sins. Sadly, many Christians still live under the shadow of past sins which God has long ago forgiven and forgotten. Does that describe you? Then try this exercise. Using a red pen, write out the sins from your past which God could seemingly never forget. Then look at what you have written through a piece of red cellophane or red-stained glass (the way God looks at your sins through the blood of Jesus Christ). What you see is what God remembers!



Insight: Seven, the Painfully Perfect Number
Eight times in two chapters Amos uses the expression, "For three transgressions . . . and for four." Add them up and you have seven—the prophet's way of signifying a full and complete multiplying of sin, thereby deserving the fullness of God's wrath.

Promptings of Judgment by God

Wednesday

9

September

Amos 3-5
Heart of the Passage:
Amos 4



Overview: Amos now moves from the general to the specific in his description of Israel's injustice and God's indictment. Violence, oppression, rebellion, and drunkenness characterize the nation's lifestyle. Through famine, pestilence, drought, mildew, death, and defeat, God has patiently called the nation back to Himself. "Yet have ye not returned unto Me," saith the Lord. As a result, there is but one recourse for the nation: "Prepare to meet thy God" (4:12).

Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
Israel's Sin of Presumption	God's Plea to Return	Amos's Call for Repentance
No Fear of God	No Love for God	No Hope but God



Your Daily Walk: In the margin, make a list of as many activities as you can think of that regularly take place at your church (you'll probably be able to think of at least 20). Then look up Amos 5:21-25 and draw a line through each item on your list that Amos mentions. Are you surprised at the result?

You will often hear messages preached on the love of God, but when was the last time you heard a message on "The Things God Hates"? And yet, in the space of only five verses, Amos outlines at least seven activities which God despises. The Israelites were giving offerings, holding feasts, praying prayers, and singing songs . . . but all were only empty religious motions. Though the people's actions were correct, their attitudes were corrupt—a condition that God found to be detestable.

Here's one sure way to help you avoid Israel's mistake. Take your list of religious activities and turn it into a prayer list today: "Father, may my worship be acceptable to You; may my singing in the choir bring praise to Your name; may my gifts and offerings be an expression of gratitude for all You have given to me!"



Insight: Where Do You Get Your Sermons, Amos? Amos shows a striking familiarity with the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. For example, compare . . .

Amos	Pentateuch	Amos	Pentateuch
4:1	Deuteronomy 15:7-9	4:6-7	Deuteronomy 28:23, 48
4:4	Deuteronomy 14:28; 26:12	5:7, 10	Exodus 23:6-8
4:5	Leviticus 2:11; 7:13	5:21	Numbers 29:35

Though Amos had a tongue like a whip for the oppressor, it spoke out of a heart of love for the oppressed.



Pictures of Judgment

10

Thursday

September

Amos 6-7

Heart of the Passage:

Amos 7



Overview: Continuing his reprimand of Israel, Amos challenges those who have developed a false sense of security in their money, homes, beds of ivory, and lives of leisure. Possessions alone can never bring security. To picture this, the prophet visualizes a locust swarm, a devastating fire, and a plumbline. Though the first two judgments are stayed by God, there is no escaping the fact that the nation has drifted far from God's righteous standards. God's long-postponed punishment can be delayed no longer.

Chapter 6	Chapter 7			
Prophecies of Israel's Judgment	Pictures of Israel's Punishments			
	1 Grasshoppers	2 4	5 Fire	6 7 Plumbline 17
Judgment Is Close	Judgment Is Clear			

The real value of a thing is the price it will bring in eternity.



Your Daily Walk: Thought for the day: Before you set your heart on something, look around to see how happy it has made those who have it.

If you want a quick barometer of your relationship to God, look at your attitude toward things. Do you possess them, or do they possess you? Do you find yourself content with what you have, or covetous of what others have? Do you love people and use things, or vice versa?

The Israelites enjoyed many material blessings from God. But rather than putting their trust in the One who owned them, the people looked for security in the things they owned. Because of the nation's misplaced affections, God declared He would remove both His people and their possessions.

What three material possessions do you prize above all others?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Which of the three comes closest to possessing you? (Circle one.) Thank God for the blessings He has entrusted to you. Then in an act of prayerful commitment, transfer the ownership of each one back to Him. You'll be showing by your life, as well as saying with your lips, that you are finding your security in Him alone.

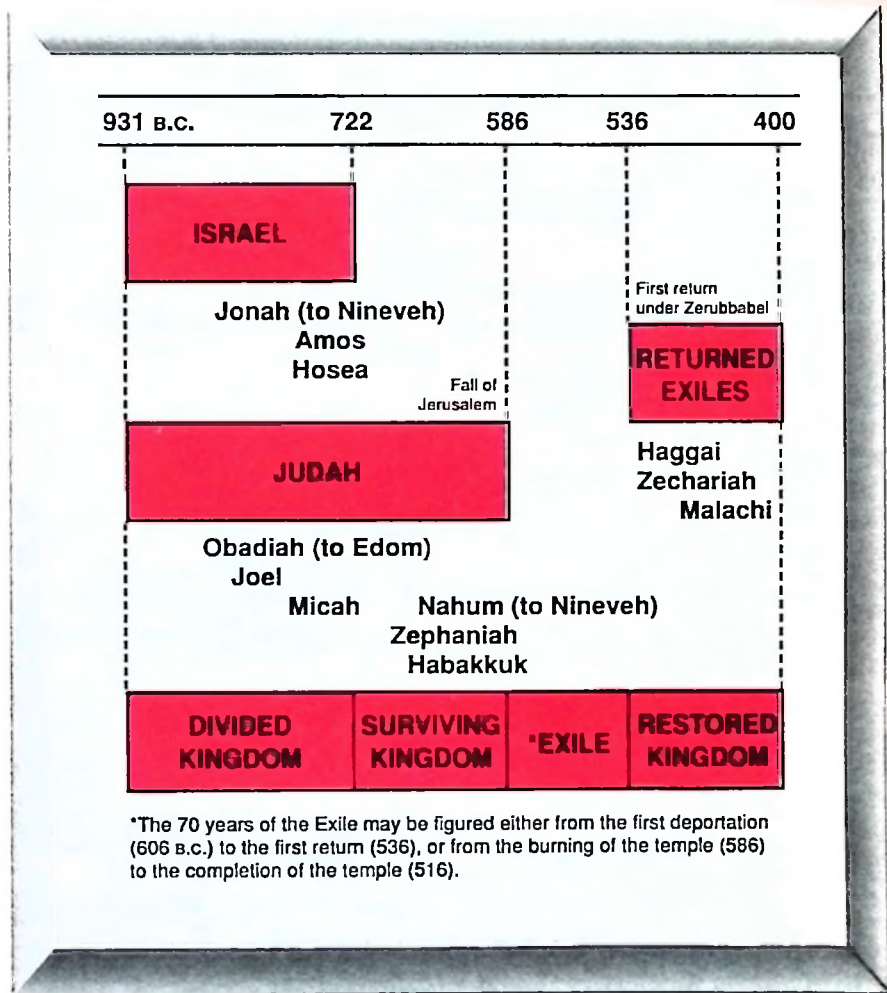


Insight: Playing "Follow the Leaders"

The tragedy of those leaders who were at "ease in Zion" (6:1) was that they continued in their self-centered, extravagant lifestyles, totally insulated from the ruin that was overtaking their country. Amos warns that those same leaders would later lead the pitiful columns of exiles going off into captivity (6:7).

Placing the Minor Prophets

CHRONOLOGICALLY . . . nine of the books of the Minor Prophets were written before the Exile, and three after. Those written before the Exile were aimed at four different audiences: Israel (northern kingdom), Judah (southern kingdom), Nineveh (capital of Assyria), and Edom (neighbor to Judah).



Promises After Judgment

Friday

September

Amos 8-9

Heart of the Passage:

Amos 9



Overview: If “a picture is worth a thousand words,” then today’s section provides one of Amos’s most eloquent descriptions of judgment. He pictures the nation as a basket of summer fruit—fully ripened and ready for destruction. Next, the prophet shows God standing beside the altar in an ominous forecast of coming calamity upon the nation’s worthless worship. Divine discipline must come, but in its wake will follow restoration and renewal. God will raise up the people again, restore them as a nation, and root them in the land.

Chapter 8	Chapter 9				
Israel, Ripe for Judgment	1	God’s Reasons for Judgment	10 11	Israel’s Restoration After Judgment	15
In the Basket		At the Altar		In the Land	

It is possible for God to do that which is contrary to His nature.



Your Daily Walk: Perhaps you remember that Jesus said, “With God all things are possible.” But in another sense, even with God some things are impossible. After reading the last chapters of Amos, see how many ways you can complete this sentence: “It is impossible to _____.”

One thing you will discover in today’s section is the truth that it is impossible to hide from God. Amos chapter 9 sounds remarkably similar to Psalm 139 in its description of God’s inescapable knowledge and judgment. Since today’s reading is short, why not read Psalm 139 as well, particularly verses 7-12. Which locations does the psalmist consider and then rule out in his attempt to hide from God? (You should be able to discover at least five.) And what does he conclude about the likelihood of hiding from God in the dark (v. 12)?

God’s presence will either comfort you (if you are walking in obedience) or convict you (if you are walking in disobedience). Which of those two words (*comfort*, *conviction*) best characterizes your relationship with God today? If the answer disturbs you, get alone with God and take a hard look at your life. Remember, those who try to play hide-and-seek with God always lose.



Insight: The Get-Rich-Quick Scheme That Failed
Amos 6:4-7 answers the *what* and *who* of Israel’s luxurious living; 8:5-6 describes the *how*: long hours, lax ethics, and abuse of the poor and needy. It’s a reminder that money can only buy things that are for sale—and happiness is not one of them.

Edom's Day in Court

Sat.–Sun.

September

12/13

Obadiah
Heart of the Passage:
Obadiah 8-14



Overview: Sibling rivalry between twin brothers Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27) leads to national enmity between their respective peoples, Israel (Jacob) and Edom (Esau). In a moment of urgent need, with Israel's enemies knocking at the gates of Jerusalem, the Edomites are summoned to assist their brothers. But rather than play the role of "brother's keeper," Edom allies itself with Israel's enemies, even helping to sack the city of Jerusalem (vv. 10-14). Obadiah, an obscure prophet of unknown background, arrives on the scene with a word from God. Haughty with wisdom and false pride, Edom would be "cut off for ever" (v. 10). Justice would one day be served, God's people vindicated, and God recognized as Judge over all the earth.

Verses 1-7	Verses 8-14	Verses 15-21
The Arraignment	Edom's Day in Court: The Indictment	The Sentence
Day of Destruction	Day of Shame	Day of the Lord



Your Daily Walk: Medical science has yet to discover a hand or eye, kidney or lung that is capable of "going it alone." Each organ needs the other members of the body to sustain and nourish it. The only truly "independent" organs are amputated, dead, and useless.

The same holds true in the body of Christ. Each member of the body (and you belong in that category if you have put your trust in Christ as your Sin-bearer) needs the other members for strength, support, encouragement, and nourishment. There is a divinely established sense of interdependence.

On a national scale, Edom refused to assume its rightful role as brother's keeper, and paid a stiff penalty for its choice. What about you? Are you willing to get involved in the lives of your brothers and sisters in Christ? Call up a friend who is in the midst of a difficult decision or deep crisis and make yourself available. That's what life in the body of Christ is really all about!



Insight: Epitaph on Edom's Doom
From the time of Obadiah's prophecy, Edom was continually subject to foreign powers. It lost its national identity before the time of Christ, and in A.D. 70 disappeared from the pages of history—exactly as the prophet had predicted centuries earlier.

Search each page of prophecy, not to criticize, but to internalize the message God has for you.



The Greatest Fish Story Ever Told

14

Monday

September

Jonah 1-4
Heart of the Passage:
Jonah 3-4



Overview: Running from God is not something reserved for thieves and murderers.

Sometimes preachers get into the act as well!

Consider the story of Jonah, a prophet commissioned by God to preach an ultimatum (“Shape up or ship out!”) to Israel’s archenemy, Assyria. Jonah quickly goes A.W.O.L. (Absent Without Leave) and

finds a ship headed in the opposite direction. Destination: Tarshish. God sends first a storm, then a hungry fish to turn Jonah around and head him back toward Nineveh. After delivering his one-sentence sermon, Jonah watches helplessly as the entire city of Nineveh—right down to the cattle—repents in sackcloth and ashes. When God spares Israel’s enemies, it takes a hot wind, a shade-giving vine, and a hungry worm to teach Jonah a lesson about the mercy of God for sinful mankind.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
Jonah in the Ship	Jonah in the Fish	Jonah in the City	Jonah in the Suburbs
Protesting	Praying	Preaching	Pouting

In the chess game of life, never forget that the first move is God’s; and so also is the last.



Your Daily Walk: One of the most interesting discoveries about the Book of Jonah is that everyone obeyed God except the preacher! The storm . . . the dice . . . the sailors . . . the fish . . . the Ninevites . . . the east wind . . . the gourd . . . the worm . . . everyone and every thing obeyed God’s command except the one who claimed to be a follower of God.

Check up on yourself. Do your actions support or deny your claims of being a Christian? God often gives a second chance for obedience (as with Jonah), but wouldn’t it be much simpler and less painful to obey Him the first time around?

Put yourself in Jonah’s sandals and write a short, first-person account of how you would have reacted in one of these situations: on the ship, in the fish, in the city, or on the hillside. Can you identify the “Nineveh assignment” that God is asking you to tackle today?



Insight: A Fishy Story—Could It Happen? Did It Happen? In answer to the question, “Could it happen?” read Baxter’s *Explore the Book* (iv, 151-154) for two documented cases of men swallowed by sharks or whales—and then lived to tell about it. To answer the question, “Did it happen?,” check Matthew 12:39-40 for confirmation of the story from an irrefutable source!

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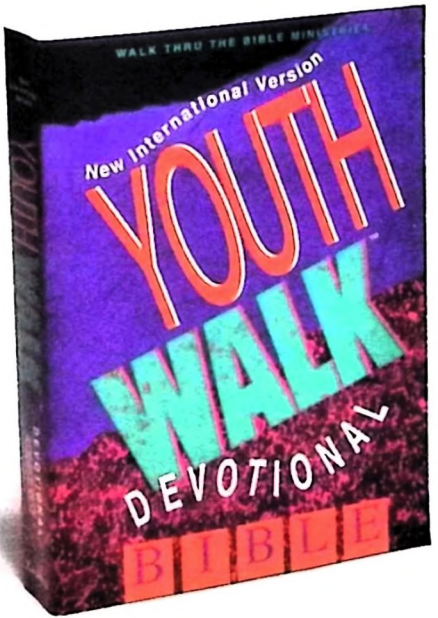
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BIBLEOPOLY

The image shows the BIBLEOPOLY board game box. The central board is a grid with the word "BIBLEOPOLY" in the middle. The board is surrounded by various icons and text, including "MEDITATION", "COMMUNITY CELEBRATION", "ABYSS", and "IN THE BEGINNING". To the right of the board, there are three cards labeled "ONE", "FIVE", and "TEN" with corresponding colored markers. To the left of the board, there is a vertical strip of colored triangles representing different cities.

MICAH

Leaving the familiar surroundings of his rural life, Micah journeys to Jerusalem to deliver God's message of judgment to a corrupt and immoral Judah. The prophet aims his rebukes at those who use their God-given authority to cheat the poor and abuse the powerless. Throughout Micah's quarter century of ministry, three themes ring clear: Sin will not go unpunished; judgment will be swift and soon; and once the discipline is completed, God will restore His people to their covenant land.

Focus	Coming Judgment	Coming Justice	Coming Comfort
Divisions	Condemnation of Judah's People	Condemnation of Judah's Leaders	Controversy Between Judah and Jehovah
Topics	1 Sin and Its Outcome Incurable	2 3 The King and His Kingdom Inevitable	5 6 7 The Lord and His Justice Inescapable
Place	Judah and Israel		
Time	About 25 Years (735–710 B.C.)		





Condemnation of Judah's People

15

Tuesday

September

Micah 1-2

Heart of the Passage:

Micah 1:1-2:2



Overview: Micah begins his prophecy by launching into a general declaration of coming calamity upon Israel (Samaria) and Judah (Jerusalem). Both kingdoms will be overthrown because of their treachery and brutality. Cities which before had known laughter and feasting

would soon experience bitterness and distress at the hands of the cruel Babylonians. Corrupted leaders, scheming merchants, covetous people—all are evidence that Judah's wound is incurable. But though tears will flow freely in Judah when God's chastening hand is felt, there is cause for hope in the Lord. Divine discipline will set the stage for God's Messiah to institute a rule of justice and peace.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2				
No Tears for Judah's Ruin	1	No Hope for Judah's Return	11 12	No Fears for Judah's Remnant	13
God's Rebuke		God's Wrath		God's Reward	

Every believer is a witness whether he wants to be or not.



Your Daily Walk: You are driving through a quiet residential neighborhood when you happen upon a house that catches your attention. The yard is three feet deep in weeds, the front porch is about to collapse, and the house hasn't seen fresh paint in years. The mailbox proclaims in letters three inches high, "The Wilsons live here."

Driving further, your attention is captured by yet another house. The lawn is immaculate, the front porch is cozy and inviting, and the house sports a fresh coat of paint. Again, the mailbox announces to the world, "The Walkers live here." Now, what are your preconceived notions about the Wilsons and the Walkers? God's people were to be God's namebearers to the world, demonstrating by their quality of life what the God of heaven was like. In the same way, you bear the name "Christian" in a world that is filled with conflicting definitions. How are you doing? Put a telephone book by your bedside tonight, to remind you when you wake up that the name "Christian" is not something to be borne lightly!



Insight: Roots of a Prophet

Micah's home town of Moresheth-gath (1:1, 14) was located about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem on the border of Judah and Philistia. Like Amos, Micah was from the country. His occupation is unknown, but Moresheth was a productive farming area.

Condemnation of Judah's Leaders

Wednesday

September

16



Overview: As you read today's section, watch Micah's focus narrow from the nation (chapter 3) to the remnant (chapter 4) to the King (chapter 5). The nation's leadership is morally and spiritually bankrupt. But against such a dark backdrop, God's promises of peace shine all the more brightly. Judgment will not utterly sweep away God's people. A remnant will be spared to enjoy the blessings of peace and safety yet again. Out of an obscure town called Bethlehem would emerge a Judge and Shepherd of God's people. In that day, vengeance would fall on the disobedient nations, while a purified remnant would enjoy unparalleled privileges and blessings.

Micah 3-5
Heart of the Passage:
Micah 3, 5

Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
False Preachers of Peace	Future Promises of Peace	Future Prince of Peace
Prophets	Plowshares	Promised Ruler



Your Daily Walk: It has been said, "Anyone who profits from his mistakes has probably written a successful autobiography!" How about you? Are you profiting from your past mistakes, or simply passing over them?

It is one thing to err in your ways. It is something else again to lead others intentionally into wrong paths. Micah's "declaration of discipline" upon Judah was severe, but no more severe than the error of Judah's leaders. Princes were plundering the innocent; judges were distorting justice for a fee; prophets were preaching for a profit (3:1-5). Because their responsibility was great, so too would be their reprimand as leaders of God's people.

The importance of good modeling in the Christian life is hard to overestimate. Which three Christians have helped you most by their consistent, godly model? Ask yourself: On how many other Christians' lists would my name appear if they were asked the same question? Pick one problem area (such as your temper or tongue) and make it your "Focus in Christlikeness" today.



Insight: Micah and Isaiah, Alike Yet Different
In some ways, Micah is like Isaiah in miniature. Both prophets address the same people and problems. But Micah focuses on moral and social issues, while Isaiah stresses world affairs, political concerns, and Messianic prophecies.

Micah's unfeigned sincerity stands in stark contrast to the false prophets around him who regulated their messages by their income.



17 Thursday
September

Micah 6-7
Hearts of the Passage:
Micah 6



Overview: A controversy exists between God and His people, and a court convenes to resolve the issue. God Himself is the Prosecuting Attorney, and His people are the defendants. Heaven and earth are called together as jury to sit in judgment on the case. The evidence is presented

against the nation of Judah: halfhearted worship, empty ritual, persistent rebellion, deception, hypocrisy, corruption, greed, idolatry. The verdict is swift and decisive: 'Guilty as charged!' And yet, though the evidence is overwhelming and the sentence must be executed (exile in Babylonia for 70 years), there is more to look forward to than an endless imprisonment. A full pardon and renewed status await God's people when their days of exile are completed.

Chapter 6		Chapter 7	
God's Denunciation	Israel's Desolation	Israel's Depravity	God's Delight
"Command"	"Remember!"	Murder	Mercy

To worship means to recognize supreme worth.



Your Daily Walk: *How worthy is the God you worship?*

If you were to give God all your earthly possessions as a thank offering, would He be worthy of that?

If you were to serve God every moment of your life in selfless ministry to others, would He be worthy of that?

If you were to give your body to be burned at the stake for His name, would He be worthy of that?

If you were to find a hymnal and sing every song it contained a hundred times over to the glory of God, would He be worthy of that?

To these and hundreds of imaginary situations like them, the answer is a resounding "Yes!" God is worthy of your greatest gift, your noblest act of service, your very life, for "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and . . . delighteth in mercy?" (7:18).




Insight: Weaving Together the Woe and the Worship

Notice how Micah skillfully weaves together the twin themes of judgment (1:2-2:11; 3:1-12, 6:1-16) and hope (2:1-2:12).

No More Time for Nineveh


Friday

September 18

 **Overview.** "To whom much is given, much is required." Nineveh had been given the privilege of knowing the one true God. Under Jonah's preaching this great Gentile city had repented, and God had graciously stayed His judgment. But now, about 150 years later, Nahum proclaims the downfall of once-mighty Nineveh. The Assyrians had forgotten their revival and had returned to their habits of violence, idolatry, and arrogance. As a result, Babylon would so destroy the city that no trace of it would remain—a prophecy fulfilled in painful detail.

Nahum 1-3
Heart of the Passage:
Nahum 1

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
God's Displeasure Proclaimed	Nineveh's Doom Predicted	Nineveh's Downfall Portrayed
God's Worthiness	Man's Worthlessness and Pride	

 **Your Daily Walk:** One Nineveh, and yet really two—both pagan and idolatrous, both under God's sentence of judgment. One repented after Jonah's preaching and received a "stay of execution." The other felt Nahum's stinging condemnation. One was allowed to live, the other was annihilated. What made the difference?

An important spiritual truth can be found in Nineveh's sorry end: the principle of communication to the next generation. Nineveh's revival was short-lived, not because the people were insincere in their repentance, but because they failed to pass on their new-found knowledge of God to the succeeding generation. As the years rolled along, Jonah, the "prophet from the sea," and the great God he represented, were largely forgotten. Revival dwindled and died, and in its place returned the old pagan practices.

Do you see the importance of teaching the truths of God to your offspring? Without that knowledge they are likely to fail when confronted with the same kinds of crisis situations which you, in God's strength, have learned to conquer. Share with your children a spiritual truth God is teaching you. Remember, their knowledge of God will depend in part upon your faithfulness in passing on the truth.

Nahum's message rumbles and rolls, leaps and flashes, like the horsemen and chariots he describes.



19/20

Sat.–Sun.

September

Habakkuk 1–3
Heart of the Passage:
Habakkuk 1, 3



Overview: The Book of Habakkuk is not so much the sermons of a prophet as it is the saga of a prophet plagued with a problem. Looking around his native Judah, Habakkuk observes violence and injustice on every hand. What he sees causes him to cry out to God with his perplexing questions: “Why are the wicked prospering in Your nation, Lord? Why are the righteous beaten down? Why don’t you do something to right the wrongs of society?” God’s reply is even more shocking than the blighted conditions in Judah. “I am doing something, Habakkuk. I am about to use a nation even more corrupt than Judah—the Chaldeans—to cleanse My people of their wicked ways.” In stunned disbelief, Habakkuk responds, “How in the name of holiness can you do that, God?” And when God patiently answers the prophet’s question, Habakkuk responds in prayer and praise.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
Sweeping a Dirty Nation Clean Using an Even Dirtier Broom As Only God Can Do!
“The just shall live by . . . faith” (2:4).		

Habakkuk begins with a sob and ends with a song.



Your Daily Walk: Don’t be afraid to bring your hard questions to God. But be prepared for a shock when He answers them . . . and the possibility that He may not answer them at all.

From a human point of view, God’s heavenly ways don’t always seem to make earthly sense. If Habakkuk had had his way, judgment would have immediately rolled through Judah like a thunderstorm. But in God’s timing the unjust conditions would continue (and worsen) before Babylon finally conquered Jerusalem. God was not asking Habakkuk to understand all the “whys” behind His timing; He simply wanted His servant to trust restfully in His control and walk by faith.

Select a Habakkuk-like situation you are facing and list all the “why” questions you would like to ask God. Now at the bottom of the page write the words of 2:4b and 3:19 as fresh expressions of your confidence in the God who has all the answers.



Insight: A Quotable Quote from Habakkuk
 The last half of 2:4 is so significant that it is quoted three times in the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). Don’t you agree it’s a thought worth repeating?

Judgment Day Is Coming

Monday

September

21



Overview: During Judah's hectic political and religious history, reform would come from time to time. Zephaniah's forceful prophecy may have been a factor in the reform which occurred during Josiah's reign—a "revival" which produced outward change but could not remove the inward heart of corruption that characterized the leadership of the nation. Zephaniah hammers home his message repeatedly that the Day of the Lord—Judgment Day—is coming when the malignancy of sin will be dealt with. Israel and her Gentile neighbors will soon experience the crushing hand of God's wrath. But after the chastening process is complete, blessing will come in the person of the Messiah, who will be the cause for praise and singing.

Zephaniah 1-3
Heart of the Passage:
Zephaniah 1

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
God's Wrath on Judah	God's Woes on the Nations	God's Will for the Remnant
Judgment		Joy



Your Daily Walk: When it comes to responding to spiritual truth, there are three "temperatures" of individuals; *Hot* (responsive), *Cold* (rebellious), and *Lukewarm* (indifferent). God rewards the hot, reaches out to the cold, but rejects the lukewarm (Revelation 3:14-16)!

The people of Jerusalem during Zephaniah's day had become lukewarm—indifferent toward the Lord (1:12). Their problem was not a lack of knowledge about God's will, but rather a lack of willingness to do what they knew to be right.

What would Zephaniah have to say about your "spiritual temperature"? Have you in your spiritual life reached a plateau, a leveling off, a point of complacency? Are you stimulated by God's Word, or stagnant toward it? Complete this sentence: "If I knew I had to face my God and Judge tomorrow and account for my life, I would spend my time today _____." There's no time like the present to leave lukewarmness behind!



Insight: Hidden Meaning in a Hidden Name
Zephaniah's name, which means "the Lord hides," had great significance for his message. In the midst of a graphic description of divine judgment "in that day," Zephaniah inserts a note of hope for the righteous remnant. Read about it in 2:3!

The calm which puts us to sleep may be more fatal than a storm which keeps us wide awake.



22

Tuesday

September

Haggai 1-2
Heart of the Passage:
Haggai 1:1-14



Overview: Recently returned from exile in Babylonia, the people are confronted by a heartbreaking sight. Nebuchadnezzar had made a shambles of their city, including the glorious structure that was once Solomon's temple. And so the people begin the arduous task of constructing a new temple in which God's presence can dwell. The

work progresses rapidly until opposition arises. Onto the scene steps Haggai, an aged, straight-talking prophet of God who minces no words in his call to "finish what you have begun." Taking his message to heart, the people build with renewed zeal.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2			
Wrong Priorities	Wrong Perspectives	Incomplete Purity	Encouraging Promises	
	1 9	10 19	20	23
"Build the house [of God] . . . and I will be glorified" (1:8).				

Some fellows dream of worthy accomplishments, while others stay awake and do them.



Your Daily Walk: It has been well said, "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time." You will often accomplish what you set out to do, but you will rarely (if ever) accomplish that which you never intended to do.

Every person has exactly the same number of hours in the week (how many?). Why is it then that some people accomplish so much more with those same hours than others do?

Answer: *Priorities*. Achievers determine in advance what they want to do, and then tackle their goals in the order of importance.

Haggai's contemporaries built a temple in the midst of stiff opposition because that was their number-one priority. Now transfer that concept to your spiritual life. What do you want to be able to look back on when you reach the age of 20? 40? 55? 70? A deep familiarity with the Bible? A consistent prayer life? A family that is grown and walking with God? If someone were to determine your priorities by looking at the way you spent the last 168 hours, what would they decide? And what will be your priorities as you spend the next 168?



Insight: Words That Carry Clout

Five times Haggai introduces his words with the phrase, "The word of the LORD came"; four times he employs, "thus saith the LORD"; fourteen times he uses, "saith the LORD." Mark these 23 phrases in your Bible, for they give the key to the prophet's power. He was speaking for none other than the Lord of hosts.

ZECHARIAH

The temple rebuilding began amid great excitement in 536 B.C. But the early enthusiasm waned, and 16 years later, the only movement in the unfinished building was the stirring of the wind. Enter Zechariah, commissioned by God to join Haggai in motivating the workers to finish what they had begun. His message is one of consolation: The temple will be no ordinary building, but will house the Messiah. All hands to the task, for "behold, thy King cometh" (9:9).

Focus	Correctors				Directors					
Divisions	Visions of Horses and Horns		Visions of Scrolls and Chariots		To Fast or Not to Fast		Israel's Coming King and Shepherd		Israel's Coming Consolation	
	1	2 3	6 7	8 9	11 12	14				
Themes	Eight Visions				Four Sermons		Two Burdens			
	Present Problems				Future Problems					
Place	Jerusalem									
Time	While Rebuilding the Temple (520–518 B.C.)				After Rebuilding the Temple (480–410 B.C.)					



23 Wednesday
September

Zechariah 1-2
Heart of the Passage:
Zechariah 1



Overview: Zechariah, the longest of the Minor Prophets, contains a message of encouragement to the temple builders after the Exile. A younger contemporary of Haggai, Zechariah delivers a similar message in a strikingly different manner. Haggai uses sermons; Zechariah uses visions. Haggai is an exhorter; Zechariah is an

encourager. Haggai proclaims a strong message of rebuke; Zechariah brings a soothing message of restoration. Haggai is concerned with the present: "Take part and finish the temple!"; Zechariah is concerned with the future: "Take heart, Messiah is coming." The first six chapters of Zechariah's prophecy contain night visions describing Israel's fortunes and future both in Zechariah's day and the days to come.

Chapter 1		Chapter 2						
Vision of the Horses	17	Vision of the Horns	21	Vision of the Surveyor	4	5	Survey of the Visions	13
Israel's Fortunes and Future								

Buoyant and zealous, Zechariah had the soul of an artist and the eyes of a seer.



Your Daily Walk: On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=hopeless; 10=excellent), how would you rate your managerial skills in the following areas?

- _____ Getting your family to help around the house
- _____ Supervising your subordinates at work
- _____ Motivating committee members to do their jobs
- _____ Encouraging members of your Sunday school class

Not all of these situations may apply to you, but here is one that does: challenging others to follow the Lord. Zechariah's task in a nutshell was to encourage his countrymen not to "throw in the trowel" in their walk with God. You can do the same!

Look for a small but significant (and sincere) compliment you can pay to each person you encounter today. Watch how attitudes change as others see you seeking to build them up, rather than trying to tear them down. After all, we are not put on this earth primarily to see through one another, but to see one another through—and encouragement helps!



Insight: Zechariah, Alias Smith and Jones
With the aid of a Bible concordance or Bible dictionary, do some "Scripture sleuthing" to see how many different people you can find in the Bible named Zechariah. The answer will surprise you. (Hint: When you get to 20, you've only just begun.)

Visions of Priests and Olive Trees

Thursday

September

24



Overview: In his eight-part series which might be titled, "Visions to Revitalize a Nation," Zechariah uses an assortment of symbols and signs to portray the future of his people. Certain themes emerge repeatedly: the need for cleansing, the certainty of judgment, the sovereignty of God over sinful men and women. Like a candlestick in a darkened room, Israel will bear light to a darkened world, "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (4:6).

Zechariah 3-4
Heart of the Passage:
Zechariah 4

Chapter 3	Chapter 4
Vision of the High Priest	Vision of the Candlestick and Olive Trees
Zechariah's Night Visions	



Insight: The Messiah in Zechariah
There are more specific prophecies regarding the coming Messiah in Zechariah than any other Old Testament book with the exception of Isaiah. You may want to mark the following passages in your Bible for quick reference:

Reference in Zechariah

3:8
3:8; 6:12
6:13
6:13; 9:9-10
11:12-13
12:10
13:1
13:7
13:7-9
14:5, 9

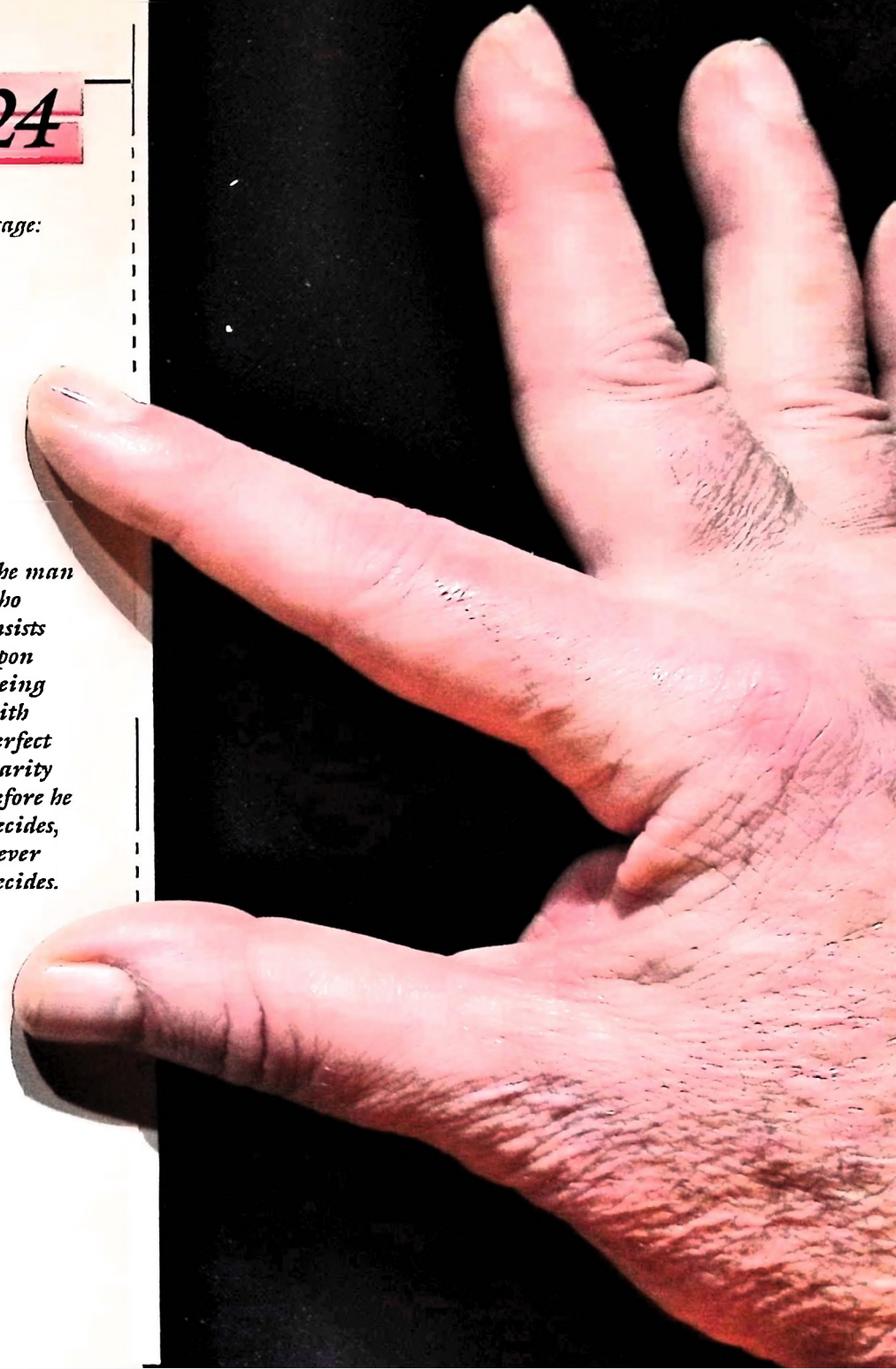
Picture of Messiah

Servant (Mark 10:45)
Branch (Luke 1:69-70)
Priest (Hebrews 6:20-7:1)
King (Matthew 21:4-5)
Betrayed One (Matthew 27:9)
Pierced One (John 19:37)
Fountain (Revelation 1:5)
Shepherd (John 10:11)
God (John 1:1)
Lord over All (Revelation 11:15)

The man who insists upon seeing with perfect clarity before he decides, never decides.



Your Daily Walk: Becoming a Christian has been likened to taking a step into the unknown . . . and landing on a Rock. There are many things about the Bible you may not fully understand. You may have many questions about points of theology. But the all-important issue you must face is simply this: Is Jesus Christ who He claimed to be? Either you will accept His claim as Messiah (as amply supported by the many specific prophecies in Zechariah), or you will reject it. But you cannot straddle the fence. What will you do with Jesus . . . today?



25 Friday
September

Zechariah 5-6
Heart of the Passage:
Zechariah 5



Overview: You'll notice a distinct change in emphasis in today's section. All Zechariah's visions so far have revolved around the nation of Israel: her temple, her future, her Messiah. But now the focus shifts to include "all the earth." (See how many times you can spot phrases like "the whole earth," "all the earth," and "through the earth.") God's program is not limited merely to His chosen people. He is the Sovereign of *all* nations. The balance of Zechariah's book represents a concentrated package of Messianic prophecies designed to encourage and motivate God's people to complete the task of erecting the temple.

Chapter 5				Chapter 6					
Vision of the Flying Roll	4	5	Vision of the Woman	11	Vision of the Chariots	8	9	Parable of the Crowns	15
Zechariah's Night Visions (cont'd.)									

Today's preparation determines tomorrow's achievement.



Your Daily Walk: Often in the pages of Scripture you will find God preparing a worker for a particular task by displaying a dramatic picture of Himself. Think back over the experiences of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-7), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1-2:1), and Moses (Exodus 3:1-8). Throughout history God has prepared the workers before He turned them loose to do the work. Armed with a fresh, clear understanding of the great God they served, His men and women then confidently marched forth to perform the task for which God had selected and equipped them.

If you're sagging in your fervor and commitment for God's work, chances are you need to stop and refocus on the wonderful character of God. Before you tackle your Sunday school lesson, Bible study, sermon notes, or other ministry preparation this week, carve out some quiet moments alone with your Lord. Read long passages from His Word; talk to Him openly and honestly about your fears and frustrations; and fall in love with Him all over again.



Insight: Behold the Man . . . The crowning of Joshua (6:9-14) prefigures the dual role of the coming Man "whose name is The *Branch*." He will be both Priest and King, and the resulting peace would spring from the union of the kingly and priestly functions in the one Person.

To Fast or Not to Fast

Sat.–Sun.

September

26/27



Overview: Two years after his night visions, Zechariah is commanded by God to deliver four messages to His people on the subject of fasting. The people are fasting in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months to commemorate events surrounding the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Now that they have returned to the land and rebuilt the city, the question naturally arises, “Should we continue to observe the fasts as before?” God’s reply through Zechariah is both sobering and comforting. The object of fasting is the key (7:5-7). It is more important how you *live* than how you *fast* (7:8-14). God’s blessing falls on those who exercise truth and love—not empty rituals (8:1-17). True fasting can take place even during feasting (8:18-23).

Zechariah 7-8
Heart of the Passage:
Zechariah 7

Chapter 7				Chapter 8			
1	Insincere Fasts	7	8	Incomplete Obedience	14	1	Complete Restoration
						17	18
							Complete Righteousness
							23
Present Problems				Future Problems			



Your Daily Walk: Have you ever been so captivated by the Lord’s presence, so absorbed by His Word or engrossed in talking with Him, that you skipped a meal? Then whether you knew it or not, you were fasting!

Today’s section gives God’s commentary on fasting. At its heart, fasting is more an *attitude* than an *action*. You can go days without food and never be fasting if your motive is wrong (remember the hypocrites in Matthew 6:16-18?). Conversely, you can be in an attitude of true fasting even as you enjoy a banquet!

Using a good Bible concordance, take an expedition to discover what else the Bible has to say about fasting. (You’ll discover that David, Hezekiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jesus, and many others fasted.) Notice especially the reasons *why* these individuals fasted. Then ask God what the role of fasting should be in your life.



Insight: Giving Credit (or Placing Blame) Where It’s Due
Here is a tricky question with a significant answer: Who was responsible for scattering the nation of Israel in judgment? According to Zechariah 7:8-14, there is a three-part answer. God initiated the judgment (7:14); God’s enemies executed the judgment (7:14); but God’s people are charged with the ultimate responsibility for the judgment because their sins were the underlying cause (7:11-13).

The prophets of God were fearless men who believed that, with God, one was always a majority.



Israel's Coming King and Shepherd

28

Monday

September

Zechariah 9–11
Heart of the Passage:
Zechariah 9



Overview: In an amazingly specific series of prophecies, Zechariah foretells Israel's immediate future. Israel's neighbors would be defeated by an invading force while Israel would be preserved to the day of her coming Messiah. He would arrive on the colt of a donkey, coming to defend

His people and defeat His enemies, as He had promised. Tragically, He would be rejected by the people and betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. In His place false shepherds would emerge to scatter the flock and lead His people astray.

Chapter 9			Chapter 10	Chapter 11
Coming Calamity 1 8	Coming King 9 17	Messiah's Redemption	Messiah's Rejection	
Judgment and Justice			Salvation and Suffering	

The prophets laid bare the moral and spiritual condition of the nation.



Your Daily Walk: Does God have limitations? Is there anything God cannot do? A seminary student, wrestling with those difficult questions, posed the problem to his professor in the form of a riddle: "Professor, can God make a rock so big that He cannot pick it up?" To which the teacher wisely responded, "Yes . . . and then He would pick it up anyway."

God is infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing, almighty. But He does have limitations—self-imposed restrictions which He has placed on His own activity. For example, He will never act contrary to His promises; He will never guide contrary to His written Word; and He will never release individuals from the consequences of (and responsibility for) their personal choices in life.

This explains why Jesus, the fulfillment of prophecy, God's only begotten Son, the Messiah, could be rejected by Israel. God would not force the nation to accept Him if they chose instead to reject Him. But though they were free to make the choice, they were powerless to escape the consequences of that choice.

Where in your life has God made His will clear to you through His Word, parental counsel, or prayer—and yet you are resisting it? Zechariah would be the first to tell you that it is dangerous to say no to God.



Insight: Greece, a Sticky Problem for the Critics
Like Daniel (Daniel 8:21; 10:20; 11:2), Zechariah mentions a nation's rise to power (Greece in 9:13) long before it occurred. And like Daniel, he receives the critic's doubts for this supernatural insight!

Israel's Coming Consolation

Tuesday

29

September



Overview: Consolation is coming for the people of God, and Zechariah closes his prophecy with a stirring portrayal of what will happen “in that day.” God will destroy Jerusalem’s enemies; the nation will be cleansed of idols and false prophets; mountains will move; hard hearts will melt; and the Lord will be King over all the earth (14:9). What began as a vision of horror in chapters 1 and 2 ends as a vision of hope.

Zechariah 12–14
Heart of the Passage:
Zechariah 12, 14

Chapter 12	Chapter 13	Chapter 14
“Jerusalem Shall Be My Strength”	“The Lord Is My God”	“The Lord Shall Be King”
Deliverance	Delight	Dominion



Your Daily Walk: If you had to select the three strongest men in the Bible, whom would you pick?

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____

Chances are, the names you listed above are examples of physical strength. Perhaps you chose men like Samson . . . or David . . . or Joshua—men of might, men of warfare, men of the outdoors. But did you ever stop to think that some of the strongest men in the Bible were, from a physical point of view, some of the weakest? Daniel (whose greatest claim to fame was sitting quietly in the corner of a lions’ den); Jeremiah (who turned into a fountain of tears at the thought of his exiled people yet preached with fire and faithfulness for 40 years); Timothy (who stood toe-to-toe with heretics in spite of his young age, sickly health, and timid nature).

As Zechariah looks ahead on the prophetic calendar, he predicts, “In that day . . . the inhabitants shall be [strong] in the LORD” (12:4-5). Their strength will come, not from physical, material, or military superiority, but from their relationship to God. Is that true of you today? Regardless of your physical stamina or financial condition, you can be strong in the Lord. Place these words next to your medicine cabinet: *My strength is in the Lord of hosts*. Then every time you reach for a pill or prescription, you’ll be reminded of the strength that’s available in limitless supply!



Insight: Jerusalem in the Forefront
In chapter 14 you will find at least eight specific references to the city of Jerusalem—an important clue to the original intent of Zechariah’s visions, and to God’s program “in that day.”

*Let us pray,
not for
lighter
burdens,
but for
stronger
backs.*



Dr. Bruce Wilkinson on Powerful Living

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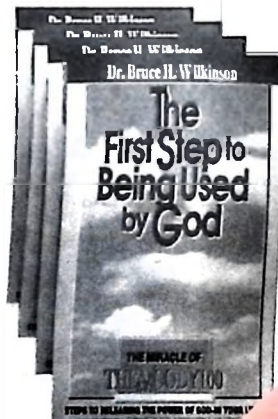
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Hard Words for Hearts of Stone

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Wednesday

September

Malachi 1-4
Heart of the Passage:
Malachi 1, 4



Overview: Malachi marks the sunset of Old Testament prophecy. Malachi the prophet and Nehemiah the builder were contemporaries, and the situations Nehemiah faced—corrupt priests, mixed marriages, neglected tithes—formed the basis for Malachi's sermons. The book is constructed

around a three-part pattern involving *accusation*, *interrogation*, and *refutation*. For example:

Accusation: "Judah hath dealt treacherously" (2:11).

Interrogation: "Yet ye say, 'Wherefore?' " (2:14).

Refutation: "Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously" (2:14). Can you find more examples in the book?

Arrogant insensitivity shows that the nation has hit rock bottom spiritually. The people have become so sin-hardened that God's proddings no longer prick their consciences. With his intense, convicting words, Malachi ushers in 400 years of silence which will finally be broken when John the Baptist emerges to proclaim, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
Sins of the Priests	Sins of the People	Payday of the People	Coming Day of the Lord
Questions and Answers			Invitation and Warning

Malachi's prophecy, like a morning dawn, brings with it the promise of a new and more glorious day.



Your Daily Walk: It is fitting that the last word of the Old Testament should be *curse*. A curse is something to be avoided—the result of a neglected command or disobedient action. Malachi brings down the curtain on the Old Testament with a final reminder that sin must be dealt with. When the New Testament opens, the scene will be set for the One who alone can cure humanity's sin sickness—Jesus the Messiah.

Close your study of Malachi with a time of prayer. If you know Christ as Savior, tell Him how much He means to you. If you don't, wouldn't now be a perfect time to put your trust in Him?



Insight: Will the Real Elijah Please Stand Up? John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy that Elijah would come as Messiah's forerunner (4:5; Matthew 17:12). And according to Malachi, another Elijah-like forerunner will precede Christ's second coming as well (4:6; Matthew 17:11).