

THE BIG READ (38)

Jesus in the Book of the Twelve (Part 2)

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The Old Testament that Jesus read contained the same 39 books as our English Bibles but was arranged in a different order.

It had three sections – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44)

The final book of the Prophets section is the Book of the Twelve, the last of the Latter Prophets.

3. The Book of the Twelve contains twelve prophetic writings that were collected and put together into one book.

The English Bible treats them as 12 separate books, but in the Hebrew Old Testament that Jesus read, it is a single book.

The twelve prophetic writings are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Three of these prophets spoke to the northern kingdom of Israel prior to the Assyrian exile: Jonah, Hosea, and Amos.

Six of these prophets spoke to the southern kingdom of Judah prior to the Babylonian exile: Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel, and Obadiah.

Three of these prophets spoke to the Judah after the time of exile was over: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

4. In the Book of the Twelve the prophetic writings do not appear in chronological order.

The reason they appear in the order they do is to sum up and stress the big message seen in the three Major Prophets, and thus provide a fitting conclusion to the Prophets section of the Old Testament.

The message of the Book of the Twelve is: 1) Israel and the nations have sinned against God. 2) Unless they repent and turn back to God they will be punished for their sin. 3) After this, God will restore a remnant of Israel and offer mercy and salvation to the nations through a coming King like David.

These three themes of sin, punishment, and mercy, are found in each of the prophetic writings that make up the Book of the Twelve.

However, these prophetic writings have been arranged in the order they have, to group them according to the particular theme addressed more intently by the writings.

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah focus on the general and specific sins of Israel and Judah. The punishment for sin is seen as something in the distant future.

Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah contain detailed promises regarding the Day of the LORD for Israel and the nations.

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi concern is mercy and restoration.

This overview will cover the final 6 of the prophetic writings.

C. The Story of the Book of the Twelve (or rather The Story of Jesus in the Book of the Twelve)

1. Whilst the themes of sin, punishment, and restoration feature in all twelve of these prophetic writings, the first six prophetic writings in the Book of the Twelve all focussed on the general and specific sins of Israel and Judah.

2. The next three prophetic writings in the Book of the Twelve focus is on the punishment for sin.

Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah all contain detailed promises regarding the Day of the LORD for Israel and the nations.

So, what do each of these prophetic writings tell us about the punishment for sin?

3. Nahum describes the punishment that is coming to Assyria because of her sin, especially her mistreatment of God's people.

"The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness."
(Nahum 1:7-8)

It breaks down into three sections.

Chapter 1: The destruction of Nineveh is decreed

Chapters 2:1-3:7: The destruction of Nineveh is described

Chapter 3:8-19: The destruction of Nineveh is deserved

4. Habakkuk shows how Judah is going to be punished because of their sin and after that, God will turn His attention to Babylon and punish that nation for its sin.

"Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling-places not their own." (Habakkuk 1:5-6)

"Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the LORD's right hand is coming round to you, and disgrace will cover your glory." (Habakkuk 2:16)

It breaks down into three sections.

Chapter 1: Habakkuk complains

Chapter 2: Habakkuk listens

Chapter 3: Habakkuk prays

5. Zephaniah highlights the punishment that is coming to all nations because of their sin.

"The great day of the LORD is near – near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a dark of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD... In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth." (Zephaniah 1:14-17, 18)

It breaks down into two sections.

Chapters 1:1-3:8: God will judge all His enemies from every nation on the Day of the LORD

Chapter 3:9-20: God will save all His people from every nation on the Day of the LORD

6. The final three prophetic writings in the Book of The Twelve focus on the salvation that will come to a remnant of Israel and the nations through a coming King like David.

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi's concern is mercy and restoration after the judgment of exile had come to both Israel and Judah.

So, what do each of these prophetic writings tell us about the restoration to come?

7. Haggai is about the restoration of the temple, as God through the prophet directs those who had returned to Jerusalem after the exile, to begin again the rebuilding work.

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured," says the LORD." (Haggai 1:7-8)

It breaks down into four sections.

Chapter 1: Be committed

Chapter 2:1-9: Be courageous

Chapter 2:10-19: Be cleansed

Chapter 2:20-23: Be confident

8. Zechariah is about the restoration of the land, as God promises to return to Israel and bless them, if they return to God.

"Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty. Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD." (Zechariah 1:2-4)

It breaks down into two sections.

Chapters 1-8: Israel's return

Chapters 9-14: God's return

9. Malachi is about the restoration of the people, as God promises to forgive those who repent, when the LORD who will be preceded by Elijah comes.

"They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not." (Malachi 3:17-18)

It breaks down into three sections.

Chapter 1:1-5: The privilege of the nation

Chapters 1:6-3:15: The pollution of the nation

Chapters 3:16-4:6: The promise to the nation

10. What message do these six prophetic writings give to God's people as they read them together?

Repent and return to the LORD as the only way to be safe when His judgment comes on Day of the LORD.

"Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger."
(Zephaniah 2:3)

D. Jesus in the Book of the Twelve

1. In Nahum, Jesus is the divine warrior who defeats His enemies for the sake of His people.

"The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies... The LORD is good a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him." (Nahum 1:2, 7)

2. In Habakkuk, Jesus who shows us how to live by faith.

"The righteous will live by his faith." (Habakkuk 2:4)

3. In Zephaniah, Jesus is the LORD whose jealous anger consumes the whole world but whose delight for His people causes Him to rejoice over them singing.

"The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger." (Zephaniah 3:8)

"The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17)

4. In Haggai, Jesus is God's signet ring, the desire of all nations, whose will construct a greater temple and lead the righteous in worship.

"I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the LORD Almighty." (Haggai 2:7)

"On that day," declares the LORD Almighty, "I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel," declares the LORD, "and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you," declares the LORD Almighty." (Haggai 2:23)

5. In Zechariah, Jesus is the King whose coming will be marked by humility, betrayal, and suffering.

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9)

"I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter" – the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter." (Zechariah 11:12-13)

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as

one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”
(Zechariah 12:10)

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the LORD Almighty. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones.” (Zechariah 13:7)

6. In Malachi, Jesus is the LORD whose coming will be preceded by Elijah.

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the LORD you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.” (Malachi 3:1)

“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.” (Malachi 4:5-6)