

DISCIPLE



REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

Study Manual

The Prophets ♦ The Letters of Paul

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RESTORATION

“See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming.”

—Malachi 3:1

15 God Will Restore Zion

OUR HUMAN CONDITION

We often lose hope when everything and everyone seem to be going against us. It is easy to become depressed and believe we have been forgotten.

ASSIGNMENT

Take each prophet at face value, separate and distinct. Listen to the unique message, even if it is limited as in Obadiah or heavily eschatological as in Zechariah. Watch Obadiah’s poetic word play on “rock,” the high places, Mount Esau, eagles’ soaring, and their nest among the stars (3-4). Joel’s promise (Joel 2:28-32) lays the foundation for Peter’s Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14-42). Malachi states God’s promise in the tithe. Zechariah’s images of the Prince of Peace and the Good Shepherd are familiar to us as later descriptions of Jesus Christ.

- Day 1 Obadiah; Amos 1:11-12; Ezekiel 35 (woe to Edom, the day of the Lord)
- Day 2 Joel 1–2 (plague of locusts, call to repentance, outpouring of the Spirit)
- Day 3 Joel 3 (judgment on the nations, future blessings on Judah)
- Day 4 Malachi 1–4 (corrupt priesthood, the coming messenger, the great day of the Lord)
- Day 5 Zechariah 9–14 (the coming king, Jerusalem’s strength, the scattered flock, future warfare and victory)

- Day 6 Read and respond to “The Word of the Lord” and “Marks of Obedient Community.”
- Day 7 Rest

PRAYER

Pray daily before study:

“Send your light and your truth;
may they lead me
and bring me back to Zion, your sacred hill,
and to your Temple, where you live.
Then I will go to your altar, O God;
you are the source of my happiness.
I will play my harp and sing praise to you,
O God, my God” (Psalm 43:3-4, TEV).

Prayer concerns for this week:

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(woe to Edom, the day of the Lord)

Day 4 Malachi 1–4 (corrupt priesthood, the
coming messenger, the great day of the
Lord)

Day 2 Joel 1–2 (plague of locusts, call to repen-
tance, outpouring of the Spirit)

Day 5 Zechariah 9–14 (the coming king,
Jerusalem’s strength, the scattered flock,
future warfare and victory)

Day 3 Joel 3 (judgment on the nations, future
blessings on Judah)

Day 6 “The Word of the Lord” and “Marks of
Obedient Community”

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THE WORD OF THE LORD

Obadiah, like a hot desert wind, blasts the people of Edom with one brief, vitriolic message. “Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom: . . . I will surely make you least among the nations; you shall be utterly despised” (Obadiah 1-2).

Who were the Edomites? Notice Obadiah often names them “Esau.” Remember Esau, the ruddy-complected, hairy twin brother of Jacob, son of Rebekah and Isaac (Genesis 25:23-28)? The Edomites are Esau’s descendants (36:1), making their home in the rocky hills southeast of the Dead Sea and on the western edge of the Arabian desert. Their fortress capital, nestled high in the hills, was Teman (Tema), which means “rock,” near today’s Petra (rock) in southern Jordan. Teman (Obadiah 9), a caravan oasis, was on the “incense road,” linking Damascus and India to Egypt and the Mediterranean.

What was Edom’s sin? Uncaring toward kin in time of trouble! Even though the kinship was strained across the centuries, still, they shouldn’t have pounced on Judah when invaders from the north ravaged Jerusalem (10-12). Worse, they gloated over Judah’s misfortune, joined in the looting, even captured some runaways and gave them over to the enemy (13-14). Damnable behavior for blood relatives, claimed Obadiah, deserving the wrath of God. Where did this prophet get his understanding of blood responsibility and fair play?

When have you been guilty of uncaring attitudes toward relatives in time of trouble?

The prophecy borders on being a nationalistic diatribe against one of Judah’s enemies. But it is broadened by a sense of justice, “You’ll get what’s coming to you,” and by the sure knowledge that God judges all the nations of the world, not just Judah.

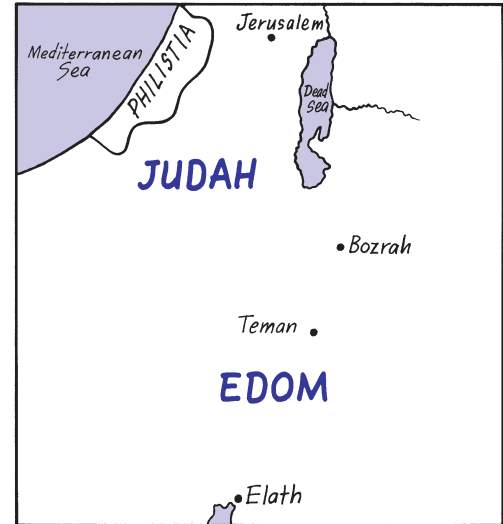
What difference does it make to you in your faith to know that every nation stands under the judgment of God?

A Time to Turn

Joel had the heart of a farmer, the soul of a poet, and the spiritual sensitivities of a priest. A person who loves the soil grieves when “the seed shrivels under the clods” (Joel 1:17-18). As the locusts devour the vegetation, he weeps:

“Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, but after them a desolate wilderness” (2:3).

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS



The enmity between Judah and Edom stretched from the time of Saul (before 1000 B.C.) through the Exile. Edom was sometimes under the control of Judah, sometimes an independent state with a king of its own. Obadiah’s oracle indicts Edom for pride and for rejoicing over the ruin of Judah.

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Joel sings like a poet. Read aloud his description of the locusts attacking like a foreign army (1:4; 2:4-11).

“Like warriors they charge,
like soldiers they scale the wall” (2:7).

Joel’s spiritual perceptions have helped people of faith in all ages.

“Rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (2:13).

The vision of a man ripping his clothes in repentance drives the spiritual point home. The prophets were not so interested in outward forms as they were in inner attitudes.

What response or action is called for by the phrase “rend your hearts” (Joel 2:13)?

Notice that Joel includes female and male, old and young, slave and free in his prophecy of the day of the Lord, a remarkable early insight into the universality of the Spirit of God: “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh” (2:28-29).

Joel connected the destruction wrought by the locusts to the coming day of the Lord, and he used the plague of locusts as a call for repentance. But even then, when people saw the hand of God in all natural phenomena, they were inclined to pray for rescue rather than for forgiveness.

Do we not today, in times of sickness, tragic natural disorders, and impending death, pray for rescue? What would it mean for us today to hear Joel’s cry to mend our ways in the face of natural calamity?

Even amid the swarming locusts, Joel promises a better day (2:21-24). But he goes deeper:

“I will repay you for the years
that the swarming locust has eaten” (2:25-27).

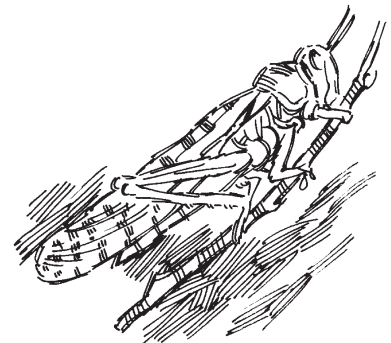
People of faith have been blessed by the promise that God will bring a blessing out of tragedy.

Describe a personal experience when God has restored for you “the years the locusts have eaten.”

God Will Restore

Joel lived probably during the time of the great Persian Empire (539–331 B.C.) when relative peace pervaded the land. The frightful foretelling of the great Assyrian and Babylonian

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS



Joel interpreted the plague of locusts as God’s judgment.

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invasions was all in the past. Now Joel, perhaps a prophet of the Temple, has liturgical interests. He wants the people to love God and not lose hope in the future. Little Judah languishes in the backwaters of history. Joel envisions the day when God will “restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem” (Joel 3:1). He hints at preparation for war and judgment, but his emphasis is on renewed strength and vitality. Everyone will know that “the LORD is a refuge for his people” (3:16).

The locusts will be gone, the enemies vanquished. Joel faithfully promises the final victory of God in earthly terms. He even uses military terms to underline God’s power of judgment. “Prepare war, / stir up the warriors” (3:9).

The judgment will take place in “the valley of Jehoshaphat” (3:2, 12), “the valley of decision” (3:14), probably a symbolic name for some place around Jerusalem. Readers are surprised to see Micah’s vision of peace—“they shall beat their swords into plowshares” (Micah 4:3)—turned upside down by Joel:

“Beat your plowshares into swords,
and your pruning hooks into spears” (Joel 3:10).

But what seems to be a call to holy war becomes instead a time of God’s judging all the nations.

The Great Day of the Lord

The word of the Lord to Malachi demands serious and sincere worship. The Temple has been rebuilt. The priests are in place. The city has a governor under Persian authority. Malachi wants worship to be done properly.

The law of Moses demanded only perfect animals for sacrifice. Would people actually cheat God by giving inferior gifts—blind, sick, or lame animals? Such practices were forbidden by the Law. “When anyone offers a sacrifice of well-being to the LORD, in fulfillment of a vow or as a freewill offering, from the herd or from the flock, to be acceptable it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it” (Leviticus 22:17-21).

How might we be tempted to cheat when we give gifts to God today?

Even when giving is voluntary, when we don’t have to donate at all, how do we find ways to give less than we pretend?

What are some ways God might show rejection of our offerings? Or are we unable to consider such an idea?

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Malachi is severe on the priests, insisting that they practice integrity and that their lips guard knowledge. If they do not speak the truths of the covenant, they cause others to stumble (Malachi 2:4-9). Similarly, in what ways might those of us who teach and preach be judged more strictly than others?

Divorce is not often mentioned by the prophets, but God says through Malachi, “I hate divorce. . . . So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless” (2:16). The call to faithfulness permeates Malachi’s prophecy—faithfulness to the covenant God, to the covenant community, and to the covenant of marriage. We know divorce often does harm to the couple, to children, to families, and to the church. What is being done in your congregation to strengthen marriages?

A messenger will prepare the way of the Lord (3:1). Often the messenger is symbolized by Elijah. In Malachi, the messenger will cleanse the priesthood first. He will be like “a refiner’s fire,” purifying the community in preparation for the Lord (3:1-3).

Malachi is a part of the prophetic tradition demanding that people return to the Lord. True worship, key to that return, includes not robbing God. “But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ ” (3:8). The answer: by failing to bring the full tithe into the Lord’s storehouse. Seldom in Scripture does God ask to be put to the test in keeping the Law (and the tithe, like all the rest, was part of the covenant). But look at the challenge: “Put me to the test . . . ; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing” (3:10).

When have you put God to this test? What were the results?

Malachi concludes his prophecy by announcing that Elijah will come “before the great and terrible day of the LORD” and “will turn the hearts of [you would expect him to say of people to God, but no] *parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents*, so that I [God] will not come and strike the land with a curse” (4:6, italics added; see Deuteronomy 5:16). Such are the ways of God!

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

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Zechariah 9–14

Zechariah 9–14, probably written by disciples of Zechariah, is composed of oracles, remembrances, and visions to fortify or balance Zechariah 1–8. We understand these passages best if we think symbolically. For example, the list of traditional enemies means all the enemies of God.

Zechariah 1–8 speaks of God’s victory in concrete terms—the return of Israel to Jerusalem, the victory of God in praise on Mount Zion. But that didn’t happen. People were becoming discouraged; they did not see signs of God’s ultimate kingdom. So Zechariah begins to see “end times.” God is the Great Warrior who will redeem Israel (9:13-14). Enemies of God will be destroyed (9:1-6). Some Gentiles who love the Lord will be saved (9:7). God, who has fought against Israel because of its sins, now turns to fight for Israel (9:16). God will powerfully win the final victory. This oracle makes Israel “prisoners of hope” (9:12).

The Messiah King

In this bewildering maze of prophecy stands a glorious messianic passage. Rejoice! Rejoice!

“Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he” (Zechariah 9:9).

We are ready to hear that. The prophets have been honoring kings and princes; Judah is on the rise; the governor is praised as the “signet ring” of God (Haggai 2:23). But wait. What is this strange, upside-down phenomenon? He comes “humble and riding on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). The messianic oracle shows a peaceful king, not like the greedy, haughty rulers of an earlier Judah. Now the peace of God will come as a servant king, a shepherd king so humble that he rides the lowliest beast of burden, his feet nearly touching the ground. How the ways of the world are reversed by the ways of God. God, mighty warrior, will conquer with a Messiah servant, humble and just. Jesus, in a calculated effort to interpret his servant kingship, lived out this prophecy by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. What a picture of messianic humility in Zechariah! What an act of messianic humility in Jesus Christ!

Blood of My Covenant

God or the representative of God will be pierced (Zechariah 12:10). Blood will flow. The house of David will mourn. All Israel will mourn. Blood, for the Jews, meant life, the sanctity of life, life linked to the Lifegiver. Zechariah refers to “the blood of my covenant with you” (9:11). It will “set your prisoners free.” A sacrifice of blood on the altar as a guilt offering was life crying out to the Lifegiver for peace of soul. Such was the experience on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The great Suffering Servant passage in Isaiah 53 declares that innocent suffering is an expiation for the sins of others (Isaiah 53:5, 12).

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

Early Christians saw the messianic king riding on a donkey when Jesus entered Jerusalem. They also understood “the blood of my covenant” declared by Zechariah, which would “set . . . prisoners free” as the blood of the crucified Christ poured out to free men and women from their sins. For Christians, Jesus on the cross fulfills the innocent blood sacrifice of Isaiah 53:5, ushers in the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31, and pours forth a river of grace to the depths of the earth’s need (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Will the messianic shepherd be well received? No! The flock will not follow. The shepherd breaks his staffs into pieces (Zechariah 11:7-14). The wage they offer him—thirty shekels of silver—was the price of a slave (11:12-13).

What is Zechariah saying? Sin is deeper than imagined; it has a near stranglehold on the world. Why has the kingdom of righteousness not come? Because of incomprehensible human resistance. So these latter chapters of Zechariah respond to earlier dreams that had dissipated. Do not abandon hope. God is mightier even than sin. God will finally triumph.

MARKS OF OBEDIENT COMMUNITY

A faith community is a hope-filled community. The Spirit has come down so that our young see visions and our old dream dreams. Both daughters and sons give testimony of God’s love and power. We praise God, not because life is easy but because God is faithful.

Despair is everywhere. Many young people sing songs of death, take drugs, commit suicide. Some people have lost purpose; some see only closed doors. Many people have lost all hope.

What about our fellowship keeps us from this sadness?

How can we effectively offer the source of our hope to others?

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE

Trace the tithe through the Scriptures. Notice its spiritual and material elements.

Use the maps in your Bible to locate the Negeb and the Shephelah. See what you can learn about them in a Bible atlas or dictionary.

NOTES, REFLECTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

Obedient community lives hope-filled, Spirit-filled, vision-guided because God is faithful.

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REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

Teacher Helps

The Prophets ♦ The Letters of Paul

15 God Will Restore Zion

GATHERING AND PRAYER

(5 minutes)

VIDEO SEGMENT 15

(20 minutes)

Presenter: Thomas L. Hoyt, Jr.

Prepare to View Video

Listen for information about Obadiah, Joel, Malachi, Zechariah and their influence on New Testament teaching.

View Video

Summary of video content:

The New Testament writers used the Jewish Scriptures to expand, explain, and defend their own belief in and about Jesus.

The “day of the Lord” helps shape the concept of the “kingdom of God.”

This day brings judgment and disaster but also salvation.

The sign of the new age initiated in Jesus was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

According to Malachi, the expected Messiah will bring justice to the poor and equity for the meek.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he fulfilled the kingship prophecy of Zechariah 9:9.

Discuss After Viewing Video

What did the New Testament writers see in the prophecies of Obadiah, Joel, Malachi, and Zechariah to help them explain their beliefs about Jesus?

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

(50 minutes adults) (35 minutes youth)

Several items from the context portfolio relate to information in Scripture and the study manual: the *Historical Context* chart; the maps *Geographical Regions and Travel Routes*; *Prophets: Eighth, Seventh, Sixth Centuries B.C.*; and *The Persian Empire*. Alternate the items among groups so persons can make connections between their study and the information on the items.

In pairs or groups of three, work through the daily Scripture and notes one book at a time and respond to the related questions on study manual pages 118 (Obadiah), 119 (Joel), and 120–21 (Malachi).

Malachi contains questions about God’s relation-

ship with his people. In groups of three, read the questions and God’s response: Malachi 1:2-5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10-16; 2:17–3:5; 3:6-12; 3:13-15. Then as a group talk about whether God’s response would be the same or different if *we* asked the questions.

In groups of four, compare the tone and outlook in Zechariah 1–8 and 9–14. How have expectations about the coming of the kingdom of God changed in the last chapters? What lessons can be drawn from Zechariah 9–14 for today?

BREAK

(10 minutes)

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

(40 minutes adults) (20 minutes youth)

Scripture selection: Joel 2:1-27

Ask group members to close their eyes and listen for sounds, smells, sights, tastes, and touches as you read the passage aloud. Then ask them to read the passage silently and work individually to list information that came to them through the senses. Talk through the passage and the lists with a partner. Discuss this question: What differences in feelings were you aware of as the different information came to you through your senses? What new understandings did you gain from this Scripture? (See using all the senses in Bible study, pages 57–61 of *Teaching the Bible to Adults and Youth*.)

MARKS OF OBEDIENT COMMUNITY

(20 minutes)

Obedient community lives hope-filled, Spirit-filled, vision-guided because God is faithful.

Read “Our Human Condition” silently. Then read the mark of obedient community together. Talk in pairs about how God’s faithfulness makes the difference between the two experiences. Identify signs that your faith community is hope-filled, spirit-filled, and vision-guided. Then join another group to discuss the two questions under “Marks of Obedient Community.”

CLOSING AND PRAYER

(5 minutes adults) (10 minutes youth)

Turn to Lesson 16 and check assignments. Write down prayer concerns. Close with a song or prayer.