MB013 Old Testament Survey, Part 3

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MICAH: WHO IS LIKE GOD?

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and his message was similar. His name easily means “Who is like Jehovah?” What a responsibility and challenge in life! The theme of the book is God Likeness.

Part 1 of Micah describes the failures of his nations of Judah and Israel, lack of Godliness. God provides all they need so why do they despise (or ignore) Godliness? Chapters 4 and 5, part 2 describe a Godly nation, looking forward to the coming of Christ the Messiah. The book ends with part 3, God pleading with the nation.

Micah tells of the coming destruction in a hundred years when Assyria will demolish the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria). He names cities, their shame and tears. Micah exposes s cancer in Jerusalem among rulers and religious leaders. Authorities in state and in church are held by God to be responsible to him. Not all authorities have positions or offices. Some lead by influence. All are responsible to a higher authority.

In Micah 4 we read of peace that comes only after the last days when Christ rules in hearts and minds.

It shall come to pass in the latter days

that the mountain of the house of the Lord

shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

and shall be raised up above the hills;

and peoples shall flow to it,

and many nations shall come, and say:

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

to the house of the God of Jacob;

that he may teach us his ways

and we may walk in his paths."

*For out of Zion shall go forth the law,*

and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. {{Mic 4:1-2 RSV}

He shall judge between many peoples,

and shall decide for strong nations afar off;

and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

neither shall they learn war any more;

but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,

and none shall make them afraid;

for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. {Mic 4:3-4 RSV}

Micah speaks of the Messiah.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,

who are little to be among the clans of Judah,

from you shall come forth for me

one who is to be ruler in Israel,

whose origin is from of old,

from ancient days. {Mic 5:2 RSV}

And then in 5:3

Therefore he shall give them up [the nation of Israel] until the time. {Mic 5:3a RSV}

They shall be desolate, the promise given to all and seen through the mighty works of the apostle Paul to the gentiles.

And then come the chapters of pleading.

"O my people, what have I done to you?

In what have I wearied you?

Answer me! {Mic 6:3 RSV}

God tells his people what he seeks more than sacrifice at alters.

He has showed you, O man, what is good;

and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness,

and to walk humbly with your God? {Mic 6:8 RSV}

These words tell us the path to God likeness. Ritual may be necessary. But above ritual, to be God like is to be fair and kind and humble. I think this may well be how God judges the many people today and throughout history who have never known even the name Jesus.

We must remember God’s assurance to his rebellious people in Micah’s day:

He does not retain his anger for ever

because he delights in steadfast love.

He will again have compassion upon us,

he will tread our iniquities under foot.

Thou wilt cast all our sins

into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:18-19 RSV

NAHUM: THE TERRIBLE WRATH OF GOD

Nahum reveals God’s anger. A hundred years after Nineveh turns to God in response to God’s warning and plea through Jonah, God fiercely reproves the king of Nineveh when he surrounds Jerusalem. Nahum, meaning “consolation or comfort” reassures Judah.

The Lord is a jealous God and avenging,

the Lord is avenging and wrathful;

the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries

and keeps wrath for his enemies.

The Lord is slow to anger and of great might,

and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. Nahum 1:2

The saints in the days of persecution after Jesus, perhaps in the last days persecution, also cry out for God’s vindication:

Revelation 6:10

And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

God in anger, and disappointment I would believe, looks toward the Assyrians who have returned to their former evil ways and now threaten and attack God’s people in

Judah. God, per his nature, is slow to anger, but the people of Nineveh have repented from their repentance. “All the Hebrew words for wrath or anger are brought together in these six verses. The words are: jealous, vengeance, wrath, anger, indignation, fierceness, fury. All of them describe the anger of God.” -lecturer

In the middle of chapter 1 God directs his anger specifically against Sennacherib, the king of Assyria in Nineveh. In Isaiah 37:36-38 we read, “and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennach′erib king of Assyria departed, and went home and dwelt at Nin′eveh. And as he was worshiping … his god, … his sons slew him with the sword.”

The men arising early in the morning were Judeans who had known nothing of the action of God overnight against the Assyrian army of 200 thousand. Judeans didn’t die to avenge God. This victory for Judah was entirely God’s gift to them. God had avenged himself against Assyrian corruption and violence in the face of his grace a hundred years before. God’s grace is not to be ignored or reviled.

Nahum 1:15 had earlier told of these happenings although perhaps vaguely. Nahum 2:3-5 further tells of the destruction of Assyria by Babylon. God even tells how Nineveh will fall.

The river gates are opened,

the palace is in dismay; {Nahum 2:6 RSV}

And the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus gives us this story.

There was an old prophecy that Nineveh should not be taken till the river become an enemy with the city. And in the third year of the siege, the river being swollen with continual rains overflowed every part of the city and broke down the wall for twenty furlongs. Then the king [of Nineveh] thinking that the oracle was fulfilled and the river became an enemy of the city, built a large funeral pile in the palace and collected together all his wealth and his concubines and his eunuch, burnt himself and the palace with them all. And the enemy entered at the breach that the waters had made and took the city.

Apparently Nineveh superstitiously surrendered without putting up much of a fight. And I assume God directed the flood according to his own timing.

Nahum describes the desolation of Nineveh. It becomes a place

where the lion brought his prey,

where his cubs were, with none to disturb? {Nahum 2:13b RSV}

Only recently have archeologists disturbed the empty field beginning to unearth the city hidden for centuries.

Nahum concludes with God's condemnation of Nineveh’s harlotries and witchcraft. God had often protested Israel’s and Judah’s harlotries, which I understand to be a mixed worship of both God and Baal or other gods of the nations around them. God had invited Nineveh to become a favored nation through Jonah’s preaching. The king at the time had led his people to repentance. But probably, like Israel and Judah, Nineveh had never abandoned old pagan worship practices and loyalties. They had probably blended new with old and in time reverted mostly to the old and I assume sensual worship of their old gods. Blending of true with false worship is the primary harlotry God abhors. Adding sexual desire into religious worship adds to the abhorance.

God’s anger comes along with his love. We jealously guard what belongs to us. It used to be that a husband could kill his wife’s lover and not be convicted of a crime, often not charged with a crime. She belonged to him. Society doesn’t see the same personal sort of ownership today and perhaps shouldn’t. The idea of the comparison is that jealousy is not synonymous with envy. I don’t envy when I already possess. I am envious when I want what is yours; I am not jealous for what is yours. God is a jealous God.

I the Lord your God am a jealous God. Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9

God does not sin in his jealousy. He does vindicate his own when they are abused and persecuted. We can count on his righteous vindication when we belong to our God. God’s love is not so paper thin that he easily surrenders his own to evil doers. He rescued us at the cross. And he promises the ultimate rescue when he resurrects us at his second coming. He judges evildoers and claims his own who accept his redemption.

HABUKKUK: HISTORY IS IN GOD'S HANDS

The name Habakkuk means “embraces” and his book brings comfort. The perennial problem everyone faces in life involves the question, Why God? I don’t understand. We experience this personally and this is a problem non-believers throw at God and believers.

The results of a survey asking non-Christian students around our country found that the number one problem they had with God was "How can a just or loving God allow men to suffer? Why would God create us and then allow disease and starvation and all those other terrible things?"

Habakkuk faced a time of national corruption and distress in a supposedly religious nation filled with violence, hatred, and evil. Much like America, often claiming to be a Christian nation, today faces mass shootings, public nude marches, rampant divorce, Christian nationalism accompanied with racial and ethnic hatred and occasional violence. Habakkuk cries out

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,

and thou wilt not hear?

Or cry to thee "Violence!"

and thou wilt not save?

…

the wicked surround the righteous,

so justice goes forth perverted. {Hab 1:1-4 RSV}

He is a man of God asking, Where are you, God? And to this God replies,

I am rousing the Chaldeans,

…

They gather captives like sand.

At kings they scoff,

and of rulers they make sport.

They laugh at every fortress,

Hab 1:6-11 RSV

Chaldeans were Babylonians, not yet a great nation, still dwarfed by Assyria. God tells Habakkuk that he is already empowering the Chaldeans who will ruthlessly ascend to dominance and act for God to discipline or punish Judea.

This of course can’t sooth Habakkuk who is himself a Judean. He wants peace and God promises captivity. We don’t always dare ask God, Why! Because we might fear God’s reply.

Isaiah 55:8

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

When Habakkuk meditates on the eternity and holiness of God, he breathes a sigh of relief and writes in chapter 1, verse 12, “*We shall not die*.” He sees the coming of the Chaldeans, not to destroy God’s people but to “chastise” them.

Thou who art of purer eyes than to behold evil

and canst not look on wrong,

why dost thou look on faithless men,

and art silent when the wicked swallows up

the man more righteous than he? {Hab 1:13 RSV}

God can’t let his people wallow in living faithless, wicked ways. God will act to wake his people up. His people will recognize their evil in the mirror of even greater evil among the Babylonians against them. Habakkuk understands only dimly but faithfully stands by to see God in action.

I will take my stand to watch,

and station myself on the tower,

and look forth to see what he will say to me,

and what I will answer concerning my complaint. {Hab 2:1 RSV}

We sometimes have to wait on the Lord.

Psalm 27:14

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord.

In Isaiah 25:8,9 we read of the very end time, the glorious time.

He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken.

9 It will be said on that day, “Lo, this is our God; ***we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”***

God tells Habakkuk what he’s told won’t happen soon. And God assures Habakkuk he will protect the faithful.

"Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fall,

*but the righteous shall live by his faith." {Hab 2:4 RSV}*

“These words are quoted in the New Testament in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. This is the word that lit a fire in the heart of Martin Luther, "The righteous shall live by faith." Not by circumstances or by observations or by reasoning, but by faith in what God has said will happen.” -lecturer

We can live for God in faith (even in the Old Testament in the old covenant) or we can live for self. We have these two choices. Consequences attach to our choice.

In the last chapter, Habakkuk reminds God,

in wrath remember mercy. {Hab 3:2 RSV}

He doesn’t argue, he doesn’t philosophize. He rests his confidence in the hope of God’s continuing mercy. When we don’t understand, we can rest assured in God’s mercy and grace. He remembers and recounts past historical evidences of God’s mercy to his people. Habakkuk remembers instances where God has intervened in human history.

ZEPHANIAH: THE DAY OF THE LORD'S WRATH

Zephaniah’s prophecy is of God’s judgment. He starts writing in chapter 1:

"I will utterly sweep away everything

from the face of the earth," says the Lord.

"I will sweep away man and beast;

I will sweep away the birds of the air

and the fish of the sea.

I will overthrow the wicked;

I will cut off mankind

from the face of the earth," says the Lord.

"I will stretch out my hand against Judah,

and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;

and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal [the false god of the peoples around Israel]

and the name of the idolatrous priests;

In Zephaniah 1:7-9 he speaks of consecrated guests on the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, the officials and the king's sons, foreign honorees, everyone standing in the master’s house. This is not like Abraham and Issac when God provided a ram. This reminds me a bit of the day Sampson brought the palace down upon the Philistines and himself. This is God’s Old Testament verse of destruction upon all false worshippers, the vain and conniving, and the violent found in Rev 19:17-20a RSV

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast.

This great supper of the Lord, this day of vengeance described in Zephaniah and Revelation isn’t the only action of God, the only supper on that day. Earlier in chapter 19 of Revelation we read of another supper.

5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

…

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And then we immediately read of the alternate supper of judgment where all the fowls were filled with the flesh of those invited to this horrible supper foretold by John and Zephaniah.

Many argue against the judgment of God. The God of the Bible is a loving God. And he is in fact a loving God. Jesus tells the parable of the king who invited the gangs and homeless people to the wedding supper. He provided new, fine garments proper for the occasion. When one of these unlikely guests refused to wear the fine garment provided he was thrown out. Jesus didn’t pretend to be non-judgmental. He forgave the adulteress brought before him and told her to sin no more. He did not tell her a high sex drive excuses sin. Revelation as a book of the Bible is filled with God’s judgment, which may well be why preachers often refrain from preaching on it.

“The very love that moves the heart of God to pour himself out over the centuries in an unceasing effort to awaken man to his need and to hear the call of grace, is the same love that at last prompts him to eliminate those who refuse all the province of his grace, and identify themselves with that which is opposed to his will and to his work among men.” -lecturer

Zephaniah speaks of vengeance and destruction into chapter 3. And then what does he do? His voice changes.

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;

shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,

O daughter of Jerusalem! {Zeph 3:14 RSV}

The Lord, your God, is in your midst,

a warrior who gives victory;

he will rejoice over you with gladness,

he will renew you in his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing

as on a day of festival. {Zeph 3:17-18a RSV}

"I will remove disaster from you, ... {Zeph 3:18b RSV}

Our God of judgment and vengeance has always prepared a remnant among his people. There is always a remnant who remain loyal to God. We read

Revelation 6:10

And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth.

This remnant sometimes directly suffers persecution. Other times they suffer the agony of watching more or less helplessly as the arrogant and sometimes violent sins of the world assault our sense of right. We weep when children and spouses suffer physical, mental, and sexual abuse. We give alms to the homeless, some cast out of their homes at young ages, others damaged by alcohol and illegal drugs they can’t resist. We see and hear misrepresentations of the gospel in politically charged churches. There’s so much more sin we weep about. We cry, How long?”

God told Elijah there was a remnant of 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. God rejoices in Zephaniah’s time there will yet be a remnant in Israel. “At that time I will bring you home, {Zeph 3:20a RSV}” I wonder if this line in this concluding verse might refer to the same wedding supper of the Lamb in the first feast of Revelation 19.

HAGGAI: SOME WORDS TO DISCOURAGED CARPENTERS

Haggai came as a prophet after the captivity in Babylon. He’s a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah. They found the city of Jerusalem still in ruins, the walls around the city battered down, and the temple utterly destroyed. With permission from the king to rebuild the temple, they restored the foundation and began building the walls of the temple, albeit a smaller temple. Then they quit and left it partially finished for fifteen years.

This is when Haggai begins to speak, addressing the local civil leadership lead by Zerubbabel and the religious leadership, the high priest Joshua. Haggai in chapter 1 points out the difference between the unfinished temple of the Lord and the fine paneled houses of these men. He points out they had put their own comforts first.

Haggai asks them what good this has done for them since they live in relative poverty despite putting themselves first.

"Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warn; and be who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes." {Hag 1:5-6 RSV}

The lecturer explains the money bags with holes as inflation. Recently in the U.S. we’ve been reminded after decades about what living with inflation is like. We’ve had nearly 9% inflation recently although it is moderating some now.

Haggai suggests they obtain materials and resume rebuilding the temple “that I [God] may take pleasure in it and that I [God] may appear in my glory, says the LORD." {Hag 1:7-8 RSV}

He then again again explains their inflation:

"You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?, says the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while you busy yourselves each with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought upon the land and the hills, upon the grain, the new wine, the oil, upon what the ground brings forth, upon men and cattle, and upon all their labors." {Hag 1:9-11 RSV}

“And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the...governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month. {Hag 1:12-15 RSV}

The people responded favorably to the call of the Lord. The lecturer then quotes

"Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?" {Hag 2:1-3 RSV}

The work on the temple stopped shortly after it had again begun. The lecturer attributes this lamentation to a disillusioned old man who had seen the original temple of Solomon. Yet it seems to me that Haggai the prophet says this. The lecturer says God is quoting the people and maybe so, but in my look back at Ezra I fail to find this story. I find instead that King Darius in chapters 1 and 7-8 provided much silver and gold to Jerusalem which included the utensils stolen by Nebuchadnezzar. Maybe Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, and later Zerubbabel (unlikely) embezzled? Yes, I suppose Solomon supplied even more abundantly.

God says

So that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine." {Hag 2:7b-8a RSV}

And perhaps that’s where Ezra 7-8 comes in. Tomorrow’s troubles God will take care of tomorrow. George Mueller took in orphans in England on a shoestring and depended in faith on Just-in-Time answers to prayer for funding. I heard his story of faith in more than one sermon.

Then in Haggai 2:14-18 the people complain that working on the temple for two months hasn’t yet changed their personal financial circumstances. God withheld prosperity when they stopped temple construction. Now they’re rebuilding and nothing’s improved. What gives? they ask. They’re again doing what God wants…

God’s reply is logical but not to our way of thinking. We expect instant results. God said…

"Is the seed yet in the barn? [You plant your seed and you do not expect instant results, do you? You expect to wait until the harvest. It takes time for the seed to grow.] Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing. From this day on I will bless you." {Hag 2:19 RSV}

Give it time. I’m blessing your land. You’ll reap successfully this year.

God seems to like giving long term prophecies to these so-called minor prophets. Haggai now says of God,

Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his fellow. On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, says the LORD, and make you like a signet ring [the sign of authority]; for I have chosen you, says the LORD of hosts." {Hag 2:20-24 RSV}

Zerubbabel of the line of David never himself becomes king. Judah remains dependent on a foreign power. But God again gives a Messianic and last day prophecy equivalent to the prophecy of Daniel’s stone carved without hands that strikes the feet of iron and clay, toppling the image of prophecy and man’s kingdoms. The stone that ushers in the pure kingdom of God headed by the forever king on the throne of David. Zerubbabel although spelled differently is listed, I believe, in Matthew 1 in the lineage of Jesus.

ZECHARIAH: YOU RETURN TO ME,... I'LL RETURN TO YOU!

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet, {Zech 1:1a RSV}

The lecturer finds the topic of Zechariah’s prophecy spelled out in the names shown in this first verse of the book. “Zechariah means ‘God remembers’ and Berechiah, his father's name, means ‘God blesses"’ and his grandfather's name Iddo, means ‘At the appointed time.’ That is the theme of the book of Zechariah. It is a book of encouragement to the people of Israel.”

Zechariah, along with Haggai, ministered to the remnant who had returned to Jerusalem after the captivity in Babylon. Verse 2 describes God as the Jevehovah of hosts, of many, of the masses, of all, everyone. They may be discouraged and subjugated by a pagan King. But the Lord Jehovah reigns for them over and above the pagan king.

He reminds them of the reason for the captivity and the brokenness seen around them in Jerusalem.

"The Lord was very angry with your fathers." {Zech 1:2 RSV}

And the Lord calls for them to “"Return to me." {Zech 1:3b RSV}, promising in return "and I will return to you, says the Lord." {Zech 1:3d RSV}

Our God allows free will, something the Once Saved, Always Saved theology seems to deny. He draws us unto him but he does not bind us against our free will. He allows us to serve Baal. He also welcomes us back as does the ever seeking, ever watchful father of the prodigal son.

A study of middle eastern fathers I read about years ago, for which I no longer recall the source, found that these fathers, upon learning their son wished him to die so the son could receive the inheritance now; these fathers said they would kill such a son. No exceptions found. But the father in Jesus’ parable sold property to make his son’s evil desire possible. And this father hungered for the day he might see this son return so that he might joyfully embrace him. In Luke 5 we read of another parable where the good shepherd throws a party to celebrate finding the lost sheep. “I will return to you”, he promises.

The angel of the Lord on a horse is seen watching and caring for Israel in the valley beside the lowly myrtle shrub. Then he sees a vision of four smiths (carpenters) and four horns. Horns I believe represent powers. Powers protect the carpenters. The carpenters work seemingly alone, not seeing the divine agents among them, the powers, these horns among them. Much like the servant of Elisha saw nothing but fearsome Assyrians until Elisha prayed the Lord would open his servant’s eyes. With his eyes open, this servant saw hosts of angels and fiery chariots. I dare say the Assyrians also saw these miraculously advanced chariots of fire and had held back from attacking.

In chapter 2, Zechariah sees in vision the city of Jerusalem being measured. As the city is measured, he is told

"... 'Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and cattle in it. For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within her.''' {Zech 2:4b-5 RSV}

Everyone fears because there is no protective wall and God describes to Zechariah a land of villages inhabited not needing walls because God protects these small villages with a heaven sent wall of fire. And he promises “I will be the glory within her.” In the wilderness the lord had with his people, a cloud by day and a fire by night.\*1

If your life is empty, you need God. If you are a Christian and your life is empty, you need to return to God. It is out of the resources of God that blessings come. The man with a measuring line is simply a very descriptive symbol of the unlimited, measureless blessing that God is ready to pour out into the life of one who comes back into a relationship with him. -lecturer

Zachariah sees another vision showing the accuser Satan and Joshua the high priest. Our Advocate is present in the scene but unseen. This unseen Advocate speaks, instructing that Joshua’s filthy garments be removed and replaced with a mitre and clean clothes. A mitre is a head covering [and interestingly also a term in *carpentry* for joint cut across two surfaces to join at a corner].

The angel of the Lord then says

3:7 Thus saith the Lord of hosts; **If** thou wilt walk in my ways, and **if** thou wilt keep my charge,

then thou shalt also judge my house,

and shalt also keep my courts,

and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.

You will be honored. I think Joshua represents Israel, God’s people of all ages, in this vision, not just himself individually. God’s people will be honored, if not in this lifetime then in the lifetime to come. This is followed by these words

I will bring forth my servant the Branch.v. 8

The Branch is Jesus. I think verse 10 is perhaps significant, pointing to the time the gospel goes to all the world, both Jew and gentile.

In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.

Then we have the vision of the Spirit filled lamp stand and the olive tree. Oil always represents the Holy Spirit. The olive tree keeps the lamp burning constantly. We can live lives fed continually filled by the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls himself the light of the world. When he ascended 40 days after the crucifixion he promised the comforter. The Holy Spirit in our lives provides comfort. The builders of the temple needed comfort, inspiration, a light unto their feet and hands, a warming in their hearts.

Then paradoxically to me, there came a scroll filled with texts of curses against thieves and blasphemers. They did not yet see that God’s agents were working to defeat the troublemakers and naysayers.

After this Zechariah sees a woman in an ephah, a large basket. Wings are given to the basket and it along with the woman fly off to Babylon. A woman in prophecy represents a religion. Zechariah recognizes when she flys off that God’s judgment, this time at least, is against the false pagan idolatrous religion, not Israel as it had been in king Zecharia’s time.

In the final part of these visions, Zechariah sees four horsemen riding against the earth in judgment, must like the Apostle John reports seeing the four horsemen in Revelation. In this set of scenes we have a cleansing, the filling of the Holy Spirit (a vital promise), a putting away of evil and a final judgment against all the evil throughout the earth.

God now transitions from speaking in visions to speaking directly in chapter 7.

"Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain." {Zech 8:3 RSV}

God dwelt among Israel when he restored the house of Jacob in the wilderness. He now assures Israel of his presence as he restores Israel in Jerusalem. In chapters 7 and 8 God makes the plea for the people of Israel to be honest and faithful to him. He reminds them of his mercy and grace along with the necessity of following his high standards. He desires both worship and fair dealings among believers and among others. Law avails nothing without love and love avails nothing without law. Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. Love the Sabbath that otherwise seems to not matter. And love that neighbor that so often reports you to the homeowners’ association and too often parks in your driveway. His mercy and grace he wants us to extend to others when we *don’t feel like it*.

As he did through other prophets, God again points to the Messiah.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on an ass,

on a colt the foal of an ass. {Zech 9:9 RSV}

So far so good. But while God promised through Zechariah to dwell with his people, God then tells Zechariah that his people will yet reject him.

Then I said to them, "If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. {Zech 11:12 RSV}

How much did Judas contract for in betraying our Lord? Thirty shekels of silver. According to the law if a slave was gored by an ox, the man who owned the ox could settle the whole matter by paying his neighbor thirty shekels of silver. Here the Messiah says to these people, "All right now, look if you want me, say so, but if you do not, give me my wages. What do you think I am worth to you?" And they weighed out for his price thirty shekels of silver. -lecturer The minimum value of a slave.

God then prophesies of the anti-Christ

[That] shepherd who does not care for the perishing, or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the sound, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs.

Woe to my worthless shepherd,

who deserts the flock! Zech 11:15-16

We have a choice: Christ who is merciful or the anti-Christ that devours us greedily. The power behind the anti-Christ is Satan. He lures us temptingly according to our fallen, human flesh. God can restore us if we let him, up until judgment day, which for us could come in an unexpected moment of death.

Those restored are promised redemption in the great day of judgment.

Behold, a day of the LORD is coming, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in the midst of you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women ravished; half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives... {Zech 14:1-4a RSV}

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter. And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one. {Zech 14:8-9 RSV}

I’m unsure whether or not this refers to the “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” spoken of in verse 1 of the concluding chapter of the Bible. It brings it to my mind at least.

The concluding verse of Zechariah says

And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.

I wonder. Does that refer to the merchants Jesus drove from the temple? From what I understand, this part of the temple was the place meant for gentiles that moneychangers stole to do business in.

The KJV replaces “trader with the people group Canaanite”. If so, the above is not so. But I would believe this to mean Canaanites who believe are accounted righteous by faith and thus now a part of Israel, God’s people. There are no distinctions of persons. It was, with little doubt Canaanites (Samaritans) who peopled the area when the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon. Biblegateway seems to show a slight preponderance of interpretation using trader or merchant in this text. A large number of the 60+ versions do instead say Canaanite.

MALACHI: THINK UPON HIS NAME

Malachi is contemporary to Nehemiah who led the last recorded group back to Jerusalem from Babylon and rebuilt the city walls.

"Behold, I send my messenger [in Hebrew that would be "Behold, I send Malachi"] to prepare the way before me, ..." {Mal 3:1a RSV}

"... and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant ..." {Mal 3:1b RSV}

Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets came 400 years before John the Baptist, both messengers preparing the way for the Messiah.

It was the work of the Lord Jesus on the closing night of his ministry to take wine and bread with his disciples and holding the cup up to say, "This is my blood of the [new] covenant." (Matt. 26:28) The messenger of the covenant is the Lord Jesus himself. -lecturer

“I have loved you” God says. To which the people respond, “Huh?” God then points to Esau and his descendants compared to Jacob and the people he’s talking to. God points out he showed no favor to Esau (I have hated Esau), but to Israel’s fathers and forefathers he showed himself favorably many times in history. These people of Malachi’s day needed reminding of their prosperous, favored history.

God’s hate puzzles us. A number of English translations on biblegateway say instead “I rejected Esau.” Jacob envied the birthright promise. Envy is a sin, of course. Esau had only greed for the wealth of his father Issac. Jacob desired the covenant to be inherited from Issac, originally gifted to Jacob’s grandfather Abraham. Jacob may have understood the Abrahamic covenant with God so well that he glimpsed the better promise:

Hebrews 8:6

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

God despised Jacob’s sin but he loved Jacob. He rejected Esau’s indifference. God says of many of us in the last days, “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” Revelation 3:16 Indifference is a sin found in the church even today.

In Malachi 1:6 God charges the priests with despising his name. How so?

"By offering polluted food upon my altar." {Mal 1:7a RSV}

“When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that no evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that no evil? Present that to your governor; ..." {Mal 1:8a RSV}

You bring what has been taken by violence…" {Mal 1:13a RSV} (stolen?)

Showing sacrilege such as this shows such disrespect that it breaks the commandment against taking the name of God in vain. We’re to “love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart” but they observed ritual only and that carelessly. I’d imagine their mind was on the football game rather than worship.

God through Malachi points out a big problem with indifferent worship. It is infectious.

"But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction, ..." {Mal 2:8a RSV}

God then points to other sins of his people, people in the church.

1. Complaints against God. 2:13
2. Unfaithfulness to “your wife by covenant” 2:14
   1. “What does [God] desire? **Godly offspring**. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth.
3. ‘For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel.’” {Mal 2:15-16a RSV}

I read much on Twitter from people arguing for once saved, always saved. God addresses his people in Malachi’s day saying

You have wearied the Lord with your words. {Mal 2:17a RSV}

"How have we wearied him?" {Mal 2:17c RSV}

By saying, "Every one who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD," {Mal 2:17d RSV}

God can’t watch us continually doing evil without remorse and repentance and see us at the same time wearing his robe of righteousness, being good while rebelliously choosing to do evil.

Christians can’t ask “Where is the God of justice?" {Mal 2:17f RSV} and at the same time reject Godly standards. This isn’t easy when the world around us judges sin and hate differently from God. We can even find ourselves on the wrong side of the law if we fail to use the “right” pronouns in Michigan if a recently House passed law also passes the Senate and is signed into law.

God offers the same opportunity through Malachi he has repeatedly offered.

"Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts." {Mal 3:7b RSV}

But the people rejoin,

“Wherein shall we return?” Mal 3:7

They think they’ve done all that’s *required*, returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. They think on the surface level, geographically. They obey rigidly with hardened, cold hearts. They no doubt think, we already abstain from the pleasure of the sensuous pagan religions around us. We sit in our homes on the Sabbath day bored out of our minds doing absolutely nothing. We’re living the stringently obedient life you require. We can’t imagine hugging our hardcore, rigid, ethereal vaporous unseen God any tighter than we already do. Give us some space. I’m sure they weren’t happy to hear God’s next words about tithes and offerings.

Again, the Lord finds a remnant who honor him.

Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another; the LORD heeded and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and thought on his name. {Mal 3:16 RSV}

"They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him." {Mal 3:17-18 RSV}

Like other prophets, Malachi is shown God’s victory in the last days.

"For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall born them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings." {Mal 4:1-2a RSV}

"You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. {Mal 4:2b-3 RSV}

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, ... {Mal 4:4a RSV}

Interesting that in the midst of these last few verses of Malachi, these last few verses of the Old Testament, these few verses reminding us of the ultimate victory of Christ graphically ending the entire Bible that God has Malachi write the words

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, ... {Mal 4:4a RSV}

God concludes the scriptures that Jesus taught from with these poignant words. The book pours out God’s feelings. Before Babylon he grieved because his people, his church turned away from his law to become like the churches, the religions around them. Now in Malachi God grieves because his people turn away from the graciousness of the law and chisel it into handcuffs binding them to a God they know they need but whom they also resent.

Among Christians we seem to have extremes, once save always saved, no amount of sin after being saved can keep you from heaven, a sort of Christian hedonism. On the other hand are the legalists that ostensibly earn their way into heaven through obedience and good works.

And any halfway path is one of indifference. It’s difficult to thread your way through modern Christianity. There is a way, but it isn’t often understood and I don’t here try to explain it.

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1. How has this module helped your studies?

Much like the servant of Elisha saw nothing but fearsome Assyrians until Elisha prayed the Lord would open his servant’s eyes. With his eyes open, this servant saw hosts of angels and fiery chariots. I dare say the Assyrians also saw these miraculously advanced chariots of fire and had held back from attacking.

I think the stunning miracle followed the servant’s experience. Elisha prayed that the Assyrians be blinded, he led them inside Israel’s Capitol city, advised Israel’s king to feed these mighty soldiers (instead of killing them, which was the king’s natural instinct), and to send this enemy army back to their home country. *And after this kindness to their enemy, Israel experienced peace.* [Of course this general and his men, I believe, had seen these fiery chariots.]

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\*1 I recall visiting the Adventist Village historical site in Battle Creek, Michigan. In this small house in which Ellen White lived in the 1800s the docent told a short story. She told of Ellen White writing late at night in the one upper story bedroom. She told of reports of towns people looking up and seeing this upper room brilliantly lighted during this time of candles and kerosine lamps without electricity.

I find questions 1, 2, and 4 to be closely equivalent.

2. What new lessons have you learned?

The concluding verse of Zechariah says

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3. Your critical evaluation on the topic. We mean what is the shortcoming you see in the text, your suggestions for improvement.

And attributes this lamentation to a disillusioned old man who had seen the original temple of Solomon. Yet it seems to me instead that Haggai the prophet says this. The lecturer says God is quoting the people and maybe so, but in my look back at Ezra I fail to find this story. I find instead that King Darius in chapters 1 and 7-8 provided much silver and gold to Jerusalem which included the utensils stolen by Nebuchadnezzar. Maybe Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, and later Zerubbabel (unlikely) embezzled? Yes, I suppose Solomon supplied even more abundantly.

The lecturer in my opinion should have explained where he got the discouragement and work stoppage. I think I’ve heard of it before but didn’t find it now.

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Wow. Old Testament Survey is a huge process. It’s taken me three months and I’ve written way more than you as the professor will want to read.

New Testament may possibly be shorter but it has fewer stories and presents more straight forwardly as theology. It may be just as long and difficult.

4. How does this lesson help you?

Micah 7:18-19 RSV is a promise to you and to me:

He does not retain his anger for ever

because he delights in steadfast love.

He will again have compassion upon us,

he will tread our iniquities under foot.

Thou wilt cast all our sins

into the depths of the sea.

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