

## Reading the Old Testament, Week 6 Essay

Bex Mann

October 26, 2020

1. I listened to two hours of the Bible on the Dwell app.
2. I read 100% of the required reading and took notes from it.
3. I watched 100% of the assigned videos from both The Bible Project and Hill & Walton.

This week's reading and study continued themes of accusation and warning of judgment and destruction, mixed with hope for a bright future made possible through the Messianic King from David's line. The Lord used prophets to beseech His people to turn away from idolatry and unjust before the world they knew collapsed around them, leading to exile, despair, and dire circumstances. Injustice, hardened hearts, hypocrisy, and idolatry fill the pages of these books. It is hard to miss the parallel of the ancient Israelites with ours today. These messages from God to His people are vivid, poetic, hard to swallow, and humbling for the modern reader as they illuminate the core of the human condition. We are all so easily lead astray from our first love and so quickly consumed by what we can see with our own eyes, our very souls permeated by the powers of the world.

The faithfulness and patience of God to remain true to his promises and compelled by his character to move in mighty ways for the fulfillment of his purposes in the world are evident in each book. God's desire to purify, justify, and bring restoration of even the most sinful people and places shows his sovereignty and his goodness. There is no one like him. He stands alone in his righteousness and is worthy of our wholehearted pursuit. I had not expected an overview of the prophets to convict my heart or intersect with my current life so profoundly. I almost could not keep pace, because after each book I felt I needed to set down my pen and paper and simply reflect on the brokenness and rebellion present in my own heart, and then to draw near to God's heart through silence and solitude. My own personal repentance was brought to bear through this week's study, and I am grateful for it.

Amos accuses Israel of breaking their covenant with God and highlights how their own insistence on idolatry has ushered in heaps of injustice and even neglect for the poor among them. Amos is sent by God to Bethel to announce the warning that with a great call from God comes great responsibility and without faithfulness, there will be great consequences (The Bible Project, May 7, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4&feature=emb_logo)). Therefore, prepare for the day of the Lord is coming and with it justice. Amos compels the people to embrace true worship of the true God which leads to true righteousness.

Obadiah is the smallest account in the Old Testament and was written to Israel's relative Edom. Obadiah announces Edom's downfall to Babylon, which is a picture of how God will eventually bring down all rebellious and violent nations that oppose him (The

Bible Project, May 7, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4ogCrEoG5s>). . Edom will be erased from history after God brings his judgment upon them.

Jonah is “a subversive story about a rebellious prophet who despises God for loving his enemies” (The Bible Project, April 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLlabZc004c>). We see in this book that forgiveness is not always easy and those whose hearts will repent can not always be seen by humans. God knows our hearts and he calls each person to turn from their sinful ways and come to Him. Jonah was so prejudiced against the people of Ninevah that he rebelled against God’s calling on his life. He rejected the message God gave him to share because the compassion of God felt too far-reaching and too underserved. Jonah is angry at God and God questions the justification for his misplaced anger. The vastness of the mercy of God is displayed through this book. It is a cautionary tale for every reader who is tempted to presume God’s heart, intentions, and compassion.

Micah announces all of God’s covenant promises made to Abraham for all nations to find blessings by a faithful God through this family line will still be fulfilled. God delights in his covenant commitment with the Israelites and his justice is coming to create a pathway for a new future for Israel on the other side of their sin and destruction. The book of Micah brings accusation and hope.

Nahum is a gloomy book that highlights the tragic and oppressive nature of human suffering. This book is a collection of poems announcing the downfall of Ninevah and serves as an example of how God is continually working in and through all ages of history and how his purposes will prevail in the end (The Bible Project, May 11, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y30DanA5EhU>). The enemies of God will not reign forever. God is grieved by the brokenness and will respond by his goodness and justice. The call of this book is to humble oneself before God and surrender to his justice.

Habakkuk is written during the final decades of the southern kingdom and addresses the injustice and idolatry pervasive in this world. While it concludes with praise and hope, with trust and joy, Habakkuk spends the book lamenting the evil continually present. Habakkuk questions why and how this continues to happen and how God allows it and delays his hand of power and might to respond. God will appear in power and he will hold every nation accountable. He has not lost sight of the plot and he will avenge what has been taken and lost. He will restore what is broken, but it will require a journey of faith in the waiting.

Zephaniah is written during the reign of King Josiah and at a time when Israel is simply too far gone. The day of the Lord’s judgment is coming and it is the end of the world as they know it. This book includes apocalyptic images and pictures and highlights God’s consuming fire burning against evil to purify, not destroy. God will restore Jerusalem and the people will call upon the name of the Lord to save them. God is full of justice and love and his presence will once again live among the people, causing them to flourish in peace.

Haggai centers around the people coming back from exile and rebuilding the temple. Its pages remind the reader that as God's purposes unfold our choices matter; our obedience to his call is part of how God's plan is fulfilled. God is faithful and he will do what he sets out to do, but he invites his people to participate in his work. In the book, there are repeated calls to covenant faithfulness, to true repentance to true humility, and purity of heart and hands. The temple is being rebuilt and this is a fresh start, but one that reveals misplaced priorities among the people. God will send his spirit to an even greater degree to be with them, among them, and working through him as descendants of David.

Zechariah, through dreams and visions, poetry, and prophecy, exhorts the people to discontinue repeating the mistakes of their ancestors and to repent and turn back (The Bible Project, August 1, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_106IfO6Kc0&feature=emb\\_rel\\_pause](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_106IfO6Kc0&feature=emb_rel_pause)). Life is hard and expectations are high; is the messianic king coming very soon? The call is for renewal among the people as they live into the covenant relationship established by God and submit to becoming the kind of people who are faithful to the God who has been faithful to them. The promise of the Messiah coming is also conditional on whether or not the people want to live in alignment with God or live as their ancestors did. God pours out his spirit, repentance is present, like a river of life. Hope and restoration come as God's people are faithful.

Malachi is written one hundred years after the return of the Israelites from exile. People are living in Jerusalem once again and the temple is rebuilt, but even though prophetic hopes are high, poverty and unjust continue to prevail. This book is filled with disputes, claims met with disagreements, and followed-up with responses. These explore the ugly truth that the heart of God's people remains as hard as ever and they are now suspicious of God's love and faithfulness to them. Faithfulness and divorce are themes explored. The last book of the Torah and the prophets inspires faith and demonstrates how the holy scriptures tell a unified story God is writing; one that points to a bright, bold future in which all things are restored, and ushering in the fulfillment of all of his promises to his people and his blessing to all (The Bible Project, August 4, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPGShWZ4Jvk>).

This second section of prophetic scripture was a lot to absorb in one week, but the unity and prevailing themes become clearer when a sweeping overview is assimilated. This part of scripture is lesser-known to me, and what I thought I knew of Jonah felt incredibly small compared to what I studied in our reading and lectures. I have grown to see myself in the historic narrative of the Israelites but have failed to place myself inside the story of God's prophetic words; his accusations, his call to repentance, his warnings to turn away and turn back, his unwavering commitment to justice and love in the fulfillment of his covenant relationship.

I am sure there are people in each decade who study this section and feel it aptly applies to current culture, but it must be said again; the world we are living in with heightened political fractures, immigrant oppression, and injustice, idolatry, political

alliances, racial tensions, and violence over lingering unresolved conflict is pressing in on us and requires us to look honestly at our hearts, priorities, and actions. Amos and Jonah are the two books I feel require further study. God has called me to do things for him and I know I've run away or resisted or banked on it not working. I do not want to live in disobedience. God will get his way and I want to work with his purposes and not against them in my arrogance. Amos prayed and interceded with the people of God and it mattered! I know the enemy wants me to believe that when circumstances look dire my prayer will not matter.