

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The Twelve

An adult Bible study of the Minor Prophets • an introduction and twenty-three sessions

INTRO	Reading the Twelve as One Book	Joel 2 • Luke 24
SESSION 1	Married to a Harlot	Hosea 1-3
SESSION 2	Out of Egypt I Called My Son	Hosea 4-11
SESSION 3	I Will Ransom Them from the Grave	Hosea 12-14
SESSION 4	The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh	Joel 1-3
SESSION 5	Let Judgment Run Down as Waters	Amos 1-6
SESSION 6	The Booth of David Rebuilt	Amos 7-9
SESSION 7	The Pride of Edom	Obadiah
SESSION 8	The Sign of the Prophet in the Deep	Jonah 1-2
SESSION 9	A Greater than Jonah	Jonah 3-4
SESSION 10	Thou Bethlehem Ephratah	Micah 1-5
SESSION 11	Who Is a God Like Unto Thee	Micah 6-7

By Larry Herzog Jr. • companion to The Twelve, volume four of The Things Concerning Himself

Free for congregational use • larryherzogjr.com • Ordinary Means

SESSION 12	The Lord Is Good, a Stronghold in Trouble	Nahum
SESSION 13	The Just Shall Live by His Faith	Habakkuk 1–2
SESSION 14	Yet Will I Rejoice in the Lord	Habakkuk 3
SESSION 15	He Will Rejoice Over Thee with Singing	Zephaniah
SESSION 16	The Desire of All Nations	Haggai
SESSION 17	The Branch, My Servant	Zechariah 1–6
SESSION 18	Thy King Cometh, Lowly	Zechariah 7–9
SESSION 19	The Thirty Pieces of Silver	Zechariah 10–11
SESSION 20	They Shall Look upon Me Whom They Pierced	Zechariah 12–14
SESSION 21	The Messenger of the Covenant	Malachi 1–2
SESSION 22	The Sun of Righteousness	Malachi 3–4
SESSION 23	The Things Concerning Himself	Luke 24:13–49

By Larry Herzog Jr. · companion to The Twelve, volume four of The Things Concerning Himself

Free for congregational use · larryherzogjr.com · Ordinary Means

INTRODUCTION

Reading the Twelve as One Book

Joel 2 · with Luke 24:44–49 and Acts 3:17–26

A Note to the Teacher

Thank you for leading this study. What you hold is a companion to the student book — the book itself is written for the reader who will engage the chapter, look up the passages in his own Bible, and come to class ready to discuss; this guide is written for you, the person responsible for shaping the hour. And it begins, deliberately, with the Introduction, because the Introduction is not front matter to be skimmed and skipped. It lays the track the whole volume runs on. Teach it as a full session in its own right — an hour spent here will save you ten arguments later, because nearly every wrong way to read the Minor Prophets is headed off in these opening pages.

The Twelve are read badly more often than almost any other part of Scripture. They are mined for stray verses and hung with end-times theories; they are flattened into a catalog of social slogans or a catalog of doom; they are turned into a private mysticism, each reader listening for a secret word whispered to him alone. This hour exists to set the class on a different footing before a single oracle is opened: one book on one scroll, one day of the LORD that cuts both ways, one Christ held out from Hosea to Malachi. If the class leaves with that much, the volume is already half taught.

You do not need to be a Hebrew scholar or a prophecy expert to lead this well. You need to keep the destination — Christ truly present and offered — in view, and to trust the Word to do its own work. The student book carries the detail; your calling is to walk the road and keep the company looking ahead.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The twelve Minor Prophets are one book on one scroll, tied together by the day of the LORD — and that Day has already dawned as mercy in the Lord Jesus and is still coming as judgment at his return. Teach this hour so the class stops seeing twelve scraps of doom and starts hearing one chorus singing the things concerning Christ.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read the student Introduction through twice, slowly. It is dense and load-bearing, and every later session leans on it; the two readings are not one too many.
- ◆ Read Joel 2 whole — the trumpet and the alarm, *rend your heart, and not your garments*, the Spirit poured out on all flesh — then Luke 24:44–49 and Acts 2:14–21 with Acts 3:17–26, where the apostles read the prophets as one voice foretelling these days.
- ◆ Have a whiteboard or flip chart. You will draw two things and leave both up for the whole hour: the three seasons of the Twelve (storm, dark, waiting) and the four commitments that govern the series.
- ◆ Set a Book of Concord on the table, even unopened. Its presence signals that you teach under the Confessions, not your own opinions; Article V of the Formula, on law and gospel, governs this whole volume.
- ◆ Take stock of your class's reflexes — lifelong Lutherans who have only ever heard the Twelve as examples or as threats; students from dispensational backgrounds carrying charts and timelines; readers quietly braced for forty weeks of names they cannot pronounce. This hour is for every one of them.
- ◆ Decide in advance which two or three discussion questions you will use, and which fifteen minutes you will protect if time runs short. The Pacing Tip below names them.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions need to be solid in your own mind before you teach this hour. Get these right and the details take care of themselves; get them wrong and no amount of historical color will save the session.

The Twelve are one book, and its key is the day of the LORD.

In the Hebrew Bible these were never twelve separate pamphlets but a single scroll — the Book of the Twelve — copied as a unit and counted as one book among the prophets, the way Isaiah or Jeremiah is counted as one. That is not a curiosity for scholars; it is an instruction for readers. The signs of the single composition are written into the books: the roar that closes Joel — *the LORD will roar from Zion* — opens Amos, as though one prophet caught up the words of the other; Hosea's broken marriage at the start is named again as the scroll nears its end. Running under the whole is one Hebrew word, *chesed* — steadfast love, covenant faithfulness, the love that keeps faith even with the faithless. Teach the class to hear a chorus under one Conductor, not a scrapbook to be picked through.

The day of the LORD is law and gospel in one phrase — and it is fulfilled in Christ in two stages.

The phrase that ties the scroll together is *yom YHWH* — the Day of the LORD — and the single most important thing to grasp is that it cuts both ways. Amos says *the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light* (5:18); Joel, looking at the same Day, says *whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered* (2:32). One Day, two edges — wrath upon the proud who will not turn, rescue for the lowly who call. That is the law and the gospel pressed into a single phrase. And the Day is fulfilled in Christ in two stages: when the Lord Jesus read at Nazareth he proclaimed the *acceptable year of the LORD* and stopped, mid-sentence, before *the day of vengeance* (Luke 4). The Day has dawned as grace in his first coming and is still coming as judgment at his return. We live in the long, bright middle of it. So every Day-of-the-LORD passage is read already-and-not-yet — never as a date on a calendar.

We read the Twelve by the four commitments — and we will not turn them into an end-times program.

The four commitments carried since Genesis hold here too: Christ is genuinely present and not merely predicted (*was Christum treibet*, what presses Christ upon us); law and gospel are distinguished throughout; typology is kept on apostolic guardrails; and the saints are seen as the real, complicated men they were. The third commitment works hardest in the Twelve — and hardest of all in Zechariah and Malachi, the favorite quarry of every end-times speculator. Hold the line kindly and firmly: the Day of the LORD is the Day of Christ. *The LORD shall be king over all the earth* (Zech. 14:9) means the reign of the crucified and risen Lord and the ingathering of the nations into his Church — read, as the apostles read Amos's rebuilt *booth of David*, through Acts 15, not as a geopolitical forecast or a real-estate program. Anchor every Messianic reading in the New Testament's own citations, and read the rest as the kingdom of the risen Christ.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan below assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely for your setting; the Pacing Tip that follows tells you what to protect if the hour runs short.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:12	Icebreaker: “What have the Minor Prophets been to you?” (see Teaching Notes)
0:12–0:24	One book, not twelve scraps — the scroll, the three seasons, the day of the LORD
0:24–0:40	The day of the LORD — double-edged, two horizons, fulfilled in Christ
0:40–0:52	The four commitments and how to read a prophet
0:52–0:58	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Hosea 1–3 and Session One

Pacing Tip

This hour wants to become a lecture; resist it. If time runs short, protect two things: the day of the LORD as law and gospel (the Amos-and-Joel pair) and the anti-checklist point at the close (*The Things Concerning Himself*). Those two make the whole volume make sense. The three-season map can be drawn in ninety seconds, and the four commitments can simply be named and posted — they will be applied, week by week, all volume long.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes below follow the movements of the student Introduction. They are not a transcript to read aloud; they are the background that lets you teach freely.

A Word Handed On

Isaiah handed the class forward. At the close of the previous volume the prophet named some of these witnesses before we had read a line of them — the son called out of Egypt, the Spirit poured out, the fallen booth raised, the strange sign of Jonah, the little town of Bethlehem, the lowly king and the pierced Shepherd, the rising Sun. The thread is already in their hands. The move to name out loud is this: the whole Old Testament has been, from Genesis to here, one long testimony to one Person. On the Emmaus road the risen Lord did not comfort two heartbroken disciples first

with feelings; he opened the Scriptures, and *beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself* (Luke 24:27). That sentence is the title of the series and the key to the Twelve. Peter read the prophets the same way in Solomon's porch, sweeping his hand across the whole witness: *all the prophets... have likewise foretold of these days* (Acts 3:24).

A Useful Phrase for Class

"The apostles did not treat the prophets as a lucky pile of predictions that happened to come true. They treated them as one long sermon that had always been about the Lord Jesus — and they were right to, because the risen Lord told them so himself on the Emmaus road. We mean to read the Twelve exactly that way."

One Scroll, Not Twelve Scraps

The first thing to unlearn is the name. *Minor* means short, not slight — a comment on length, not on weight. As the student book puts it, Obadiah is twenty-one verses long; it is not twenty-one verses unimportant. The Christ shown forth in these books is no minor Christ, and the gospel offered in them is no minor gospel. Then the structural point: in the Hebrew Bible these were one book on one scroll, gathered with care so the whole would say more than the sum of its parts. Help the class hear the seams — the roar passed from Joel to Amos, the marriage of Hosea answered near Malachi — and the single deep current of *chesed* running beneath them all. We are not meant to flip through twelve unrelated tracts mining each for a verse; we are meant to hear one twelve-voiced composition.

Three Centuries on One Map

Draw the map; it is the single kindest thing you can do for a class that feels lost in faraway kings and empires. The Twelve span roughly three hundred years and fall into three seasons. The storm: the Assyrian crisis of the eighth century — Hosea and Amos to the northern kingdom in its last corrupt years before Assyria swept it away in 722, Micah to the south, Jonah sent astonishingly into the enemy's own capital. The dark: the Babylonian threat and exile — Nahum singing the fall of the very Nineveh Jonah saw spared, Zephaniah and Habakkuk and Joel under the gathering shadow. The waiting: the return — Haggai and Zechariah stirring the discouraged remnant to rebuild, Malachi rebuking a people grown cold and pointing them forward. Across all three, empires rise and fall like waves; but the real actor on the page is never Assyria or Babylon

or Persia. It is always the LORD, the hidden God who rules the nations as the masks behind which he does his own work.

A Word About the Whiteboard

Draw three columns — Storm, Dark, Waiting — and drop the twelve names in as you name them. Students who feel intimidated relax the moment they can see the shape. You are not asking anyone to memorize dates or to settle a scholar's quarrel; you are giving them a frame to hang each book on, so that when you reach Nahum or Haggai in two months they will already know which season they have walked into.

The Day of the LORD

Slow down here; this is the spine of the volume. *Yom YHWH* sounds through nearly every book like a bell rung over and over, and it is double-edged — the Amos-and-Joel pair (darkness, and yet *delivered*) is the cleanest single picture of law and gospel anywhere in the Old Testament. Show the class that the Day works on two horizons folded together, the way a man on the plain sees a near hill and a far mountain without the valley between: the real judgments within history — Nineveh fell, the north was carried off — are true rehearsals of the last great Day. And the Day has a gracious purpose hidden inside it: the *shuv* — the turning home — it calls for, and the remnant it preserves. The fire refines the faithful few; it does not consume them. This is the theology of the cross: the wrath in these books is God's strange work, his *opus alienum*, the mask he wears to drive us out of false securities and into his mercy — never the bottom of his heart. The God who roars from Zion is the same God who, in the fullness of time, let himself be pierced upon Zion's hill.

The Four Commitments, and How to Read a Prophet

Name the four commitments and post them, then give the class the three plain counsels that follow. First, read whole oracles, not stray verses — a prophet is a preacher, not a fortune-teller, and must be heard out; we follow each book from accusation to promise. Second, keep the near and far horizons in view at once: we do not have to choose between reading these books as real history and reading them as prophecy of Christ. This matters most with Jonah, whom the Lord Jesus treats as real history — *the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment* (Matt. 12:41), which they could hardly do had they never existed — even as he makes Jonah's three days in the deep a sign of his own three days in the grave. Third, and most important: every judgment in these books is rolling toward the gospel. The great prophetic verb is *shuv* — to turn, to return, to repent — and the prophets call for that turning not to crush their hearers but to bring them home.

Guarding the Table from the Charts

When someone brings end-times machinery to Zechariah or Malachi, you do not need to fight — you need a rule, said kindly and repeated. We anchor every Messianic reading in the New Testament's own citations, and we read the rest as the reign of the risen Christ and the ingathering of the nations, not as a calendar or a map. The rebuilt *booth of David* that Amos saw is read by the apostles, gathered at Jerusalem, of the Gentiles being brought into the Church (Acts 15:13–18). That single move is the pattern for the whole volume.

The Things Concerning Himself

The Christ-cluster is dense and gathers force as the volume goes on — Hosea's ransomed grave, Joel's poured-out Spirit, Amos's rebuilt booth, Jonah's sign, Micah's Bethlehem, Habakkuk's verse of the Reformation, Zechariah's Branch and lowly king and pierced One and stricken Shepherd, Malachi's messenger and rising Sun. The apologetic weight of all that is real, and a believer should feel it: Bethlehem named seven centuries early, the exact price of betrayal foreseen, the piercing described before the Roman spear was forged. But land the class somewhere deeper than a checklist. The gospel of the Twelve is not only predicted; it is preached. The fountain Zechariah saw *opened... for sin and for uncleanness* (13:1) is the fountain of the font; the pardon Micah marvels at is the pardon spoken in the absolution. The Christ of the Twelve is not a figure to be admired across a distance — he comes to your class in word and at his table to forgive their sins and raise them up at the last Day. That, and not a tidy list, is why we read them.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear in this hour, with language ready so that none of them catches you flat.

“Isn't finding Christ in every prophet just reading the New Testament back into the Old?”

A fair and important question, and the answer shapes the whole series. The prophets certainly spoke real words to real people in real crises, and we will honor that at every step. But Luke 24 will not let us stop there. The risen Lord rebukes the disciples for failing to see what was already in Moses and the prophets — he does not say a meaning has now been added; he says it was there all along and they were slow of heart to believe it. We are not inventing readings; we are following the apostles' own.

“Aren’t the Minor Prophets mostly about social justice — God’s anger at how the poor were treated?”

There is fierce social comment in Amos and Micah, and we will not soften it; the God of the Twelve cares, terribly, how the helpless are used. But notice what that justice talk is doing — it is law, the word that accuses and does not save — and the books do not stop there. Reduce the Twelve to a catalog of social mottoes (or, just as easily, to a catalog of doom) and you have lost the gospel that is their whole point. The law in these books is doing its proper work: breaking the secure, so that the gospel can raise the broken.

“What about end-times prophecy? Don’t Zechariah and Malachi predict a rebuilt temple, a rapture, the restoration of Israel?”

This is the most common detour, and one gentle rule keeps you out of the ditch: anchor every Messianic reading in the New Testament’s own citations, and read the rest as the kingdom of the risen Christ and his Church. *The LORD shall be king over all the earth* (Zech. 14:9) is the reign of the crucified and risen Lord, not a geopolitical forecast. When Amos’s rebuilt *booth of David* comes up, show the class Acts 15, where the apostles read it of the nations being gathered in. The Day of the LORD is the Day of Christ; that conviction will carry you safely through every hard chapter ahead.

“If they really matter, why are they called ‘minor’?”

Minor means short, not small. It is a comment on the length of the books, not on their weight. Obadiah is twenty-one verses long, and not one of them is unimportant. The Christ shown forth here is no minor Christ, and the gospel offered is no minor gospel. Say it once at the start and keep saying it through the volume: minor in size is not minor in the Savior.

“These books are so full of judgment. How is any of this gospel?”

The judgment is real, and we will not pretend otherwise — but it is never the last word. It is the law doing its work, breaking the proud so the gospel can raise the broken. The thunder always rolls toward mercy: Joel’s terrifying trumpet gives way in the same breath to *turn ye even to me with all your heart... rend your heart, and not your garments: for he is gracious and merciful* (2:12–13). Teach the class to hear the judgment fully, and then to hear where the judgment is headed.

Leading the Discussion

The student Introduction closes with six questions. You will not use all six in one hour; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the public, given text and the Christ it shows

forth — not on private impressions, and not on casting your students as prophets. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — Expecting Christ, not only lessons

The natural opener. It invites story rather than doctrine and lets the class confess old reading habits without embarrassment, because it assumes everyone has them. If discussion is slow to start, answer it yourself first, briefly and honestly — name a prophet you only ever heard moralized.

Question 3 — The day of the LORD as law and gospel

The theological center of the set, and the best single diagnostic of whether the hour landed. The Amos-and-Joel pair — darkness, and yet *delivered* — is the two words of God in one phrase. If you have time for only one question, choose this. A pair-share works well: two minutes with a neighbor, then a few answers aloud. Make sure they land on it — faith in Christ sets the believer on the side of the delivered remnant.

Question 4 — Near and far horizons; Jonah as history and sign

This one guards against a false choice. The Lord Jesus treats Jonah as real history and as a sign of his own three days (Matt. 12:40–41), and both are true at once. Do not let the class conclude that honoring the history costs them the Christ, or that finding the Christ means waving off the history. The God who acts in the near event is the same God who fulfills the far promise.

Question 6 — Promises preached, not only predicted

The gospel landing. Press the class past the apologetic thrill of fulfilled detail to the gift held out now — Zechariah's fountain is the font; Micah's marvel at pardon is the absolution. Keep it on the given means and off any manufactured inner feeling: the question is not what a reader senses in himself, but what God hands the whole Church in word and sacrament.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply — or a student asks for recommendations — the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ◆ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets* (Luther's Works, American Edition, vols. 18–20). Luther lectured on nearly all of the Twelve, and he reads them with exactly the *was Christum treibet* eye this series follows.
- ◆ The Formula of Concord, Article V (Epitome and Solid Declaration), on law and gospel. Short, clear, and load-bearing for the whole volume; the Kolb/Wengert edition and the Concordia Reader's Edition are both accessible to laypeople.
- ◆ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. The classic Lutheran treatment; the opening theses alone will serve this hour, since the Twelve are one long exercise in telling the two words apart.

Commentaries

- ◆ R. Reed Lessing's *Concordia Commentary* volumes on Amos, Jonah, and Zechariah — confessional, christological, and unusually readable for a technical series.
- ◆ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House). Written for laypeople and squarely in our tradition; a fine companion to keep at your elbow.
- ◆ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia). Keep it open for its book introductions and its cross-references to the New Testament citations that anchor our readings.

Devotional

- ◆ Pray the Day-of-the-LORD texts back as the church's own — Joel 2:12–13 for repentance, Joel 2:32 and Zechariah 13:1 for assurance.
- ◆ Read Acts 2 and Acts 3 alongside Joel before you teach. Hearing Peter preach the prophets as already fulfilled is the best single preparation for teaching them so.

A Final Word

You are about to lead a class through twelve prophets and three centuries — through the storm of Assyria, the dark of Babylon, and the long waiting after the return — and you are beginning, rightly, not in Hosea but on a road outside Jerusalem on Easter afternoon. That is the right beginning, because it is his. The risen Lord himself set the itinerary: he opened the Scriptures and showed his disciples *the things concerning himself*, beginning at Moses and all the prophets.

Do not be anxious about the unfamiliar names and the faraway empires. The disciples on the road were not scholars either; what they needed — and what your class needs — was not expertise but the Scriptures opened toward Christ. Keep the destination in view, trust the Word to do what the Word does, and let the student book carry the detail week by week. Your calling is to walk the road with your class and keep the whole company looking ahead.

And when an hour goes thin — when discussion stalls, or a question stumps you, or you drive home unsure you served them well — remember that the gospel of the Twelve runs precisely through compromised, ordinary, often resistant lives, because it runs through ours the same way. The same Lord who opened the Scriptures on the Emmaus road opens them still, and he has promised that his word will not return to him empty. Begin where the book itself begins: with a prophet, a marriage, and a love that will not let go.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION ONE

Married to a Harlot

Hosea 1–3 · with Romans 9:25–26 and 1 Peter 2:10

A Note to the Teacher

This is the hardest and most tender story in the Twelve, and the volume opens here on purpose. The book itself begins with a marriage and a betrayal, because the gospel is most personal exactly where it is most painful. Your task this hour is not to soften the story but to lead the class slowly through it, letting it wound before it heals.

Two cautions frame the hour. Do not turn Hosea into a tidy object lesson, as though God merely handed his prophet a sermon illustration at no cost — Gomer was a real woman, the daughter of a real man named Diblaim, and the marriage cost Hosea everything a betrayed husband is ever made to pay. And do not be prurient or squeamish with the language of the bedroom: neither linger where Scripture only points, nor sanitize the book into something safe and bloodless. The rawness is the whole point, because the pain of a betrayed marriage is the very thing God chose to picture his own.

Keep the destination in view from the first minute: this story ends in a wedding. The three dreadful names are real law and must land as law — but they are not where the hour stops. It stops at *I will betroth thee unto me for ever*, and at a harlot bought back off the slave block and given a new name. Lead toward the gospel, and let the class arrive there with you.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Hosea is the gospel in its rawest, most personal form: the LORD commands his prophet to marry a woman who will betray him, to keep loving her, and to buy her back off the slave block — because

that is exactly how the LORD loves a faithless people, and how he loves your class. Teach the hour so it wounds before it heals, and lands not on the dreadful names but on the new one — *Ammi*, my people.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Hosea 1–3 twice, slowly and whole, with your Bible open — the marriage commanded, the three children with their dreadful names, the wife wooed back, the prophet sent to buy his own wife off the slave block. Then read Romans 9:25–26 and 1 Peter 2:10, where Paul and Peter take Hosea's reversed names and lay them on the Church.
- ◆ Settle the names in your own mind so you can say them without fumbling: *Jezreel* (God sows), *Lo-ruhamah* (not pitied), *Lo-ammi* (not my people) — and the great reversal, *Ammi* (my people).
- ◆ Read Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* on the “joyous exchange,” and the First Commandment in the Large Catechism — whatever the heart clings to and relies on is its god. Both stand directly behind this chapter.
- ◆ Decide your tone for the marriage language in advance. A steady, sober naming serves the class; nervous joking and squeamish skipping do not.
- ◆ Know who is in the room. Some of your students carry betrayals of their own — a wandering spouse, a broken family, a private shame — and this chapter will reach them. Teach it as gospel held out, never as a club swung.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide what you will protect if the hour runs short. The Pacing Tip below names it.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. The chapter is full of vivid detail, but the detail serves these three, and if these are clear the hour will hold its shape.

The book is a marriage made into gospel — chesed for a faithless bride.

God's first word to Hosea is not a sermon to preach but a marriage to suffer (1:2). Hold on to the cost of it: the covenant of God runs through actual, complicated, wounded lives, not through the smiling figures of a children's felt board. Under the whole book — and under the whole volume — runs one Hebrew word, *chesed*, steadfast love and covenant faithfulness, the love that keeps faith even with the faithless. Hosea's ruined marriage is a window thrown open straight into the wounded heart of God; teach it as a wound, not a pageant.

The three names are the law; the betrothal is the gospel — and the gospel is declarative.

Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi read the marriage vow of Sinai backward (*I will be your God, and ye shall be my people*), and that verdict stands over every one of us apart from grace. Then comes the climax: *I will betroth thee unto me for ever... in righteousness* (2:19). The righteousness is not something the bride produces before the wedding can proceed; it is the gift the Bridegroom brings and clothes her in — a righteousness from outside herself, draped over her shame like a wedding gown over rags. This is justification, and it is declarative: the verdict of "righteous" comes first, spoken by the word of the Bridegroom, and the new life follows from it. It is Luther's joyous exchange — the King marries the harlot, takes her debts and her death, and gives her his righteousness and his crown.

The redemption points to the cross — on the apostles' warrant, not our allegory.

Hosea buys his wife back *according to the love of the LORD* (3:1), and the New Testament itself draws the line from this marriage to us and to Christ. Paul and Peter rename us with Hosea's own reversed names (Romans 9:25–26; 1 Peter 2:10), and Peter names the price of our redemption as the precious blood of the Lord Jesus (1 Peter 1:18–19). Follow that apostolic lead and you will not go wrong. You need not allegorize every detail — the half-homer of barley is not a code to crack — but the slave-block bought back is the cross, because the apostles read our redemption exactly so.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan below assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect if the hour runs short.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:10	Icebreaker: "Why might God preach through a marriage instead of a sermon?" (see Teaching Notes)

0:10–0:22	A strange command and three dreadful names — the law (Hosea 1)
0:22–0:35	The lovers, the door of hope, the betrothal — righteousness given (Hosea 2)
0:35–0:48	Bought back from the slave block; Paul and Peter rename us (Hosea 3)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Hosea 4–11 and Session Two

Pacing Tip

If time runs short, protect the two gospel peaks: the betrothal (2:19–20) and the slave-block redemption (3:1–2). Compress the historical setting and the catalog of the lovers if you must, but do not end the hour in the law — do not stop at the three dreadful names. The class must leave at *Ammi*, not at *Lo-ammi*.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Setting and the Strange Command (1:2)

Set the scene in a few strokes. Hosea preached to the northern kingdom in its last comfortable decades under Jeroboam the Second — boom years of full barns, expanding borders, and busy sanctuaries. The economy was strong and the religion was thriving, and that is exactly what made the rot so hard to see: a fat and successful people was sure it had earned heaven's favor and could keep one foot in the LORD's temple and the other in the shrines of Baal. Into that settled prosperity God sent a man with a scandalous marriage, because nothing less than scandal could break the comfortable certainty that all was well. Name the shock of 1:2 and let it land: the first word God speaks to his prophet is not a message to preach but a marriage to enter — and a marriage he himself promises will end in betrayal.

A Word on Handling the Marriage

You will set the tone for the whole hour in the first five minutes. Name the marriage plainly and soberly — do not joke it away to break the tension, and do not hurry past it as though it embarrassed you. Hosea does not flinch from the language of lovers and nakedness and shame, and neither linger there nor scrub it out. As the student book puts it, to file the edges off Hosea is

to lose the gospel in it.

Children with Dreadful Names (1:3–9)

Gomer bears three children, and the LORD names each one, and every name is a sermon of judgment hung around a child's neck. The first is *Jezreel* — the valley where Israel's kings had spilled rivers of blood; the name means *God sows*, and it carries both threat and, buried in it, a seed of hope, for what is sown may yet come up. The second is a daughter, *Lo-ruhamah*, “not pitied.” The Hebrew root is the word for a mother's womb-deep compassion — the tenderness that aches over its own child — and the LORD takes that very word and puts a *no* in front of it. The third, another son, gets the most terrible name of all: *Lo-ammi*, “not my people.” At Sinai the LORD had made the whole relationship in seven words — *I will be your God, and ye shall be my people* — and now that vow is read backward over a newborn boy. This is the law, spoken as starkly as the law can be spoken.

A Useful Phrase for Class

“Imagine calling your daughter in for supper, and her name itself means No-Mercy. That is what the law sounds like when it finally stops being polite. The people had presumed on God's patience for generations — and now they are told the patience has run out. Hold that weight — because the same God who named her *Lo-ruhamah* will, before the chapter is done, promise to call her *Ruhamah*, pitied, again.”

The Lovers, the Gifts, and a Door of Hope (2)

Israel chased the Baals — the fertility gods of her neighbors — while still keeping the festivals of the LORD, one foot in the temple and one in the shrines. The sharpest line is 2:8: she *did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil*; she carried the LORD's own gifts to her idols. Luther's First Commandment is the key that unlocks it — whatever the heart clings to and relies on, that is its god. Then the turn (2:14–15): the LORD does not write her off but allures her into the wilderness, and makes the Valley of Achor — the valley of *trouble* — into a *door of hope*. Mercy reaches her not by lowering the standard but by coming down to where she is.

I Will Betroth Thee Unto Me For Ever (2:16–23)

This is the gospel peak of the chapter; slow down and let it open. *Betroth* is a wedding word — the word for a fresh engagement, full of the joy of a first marriage, not a grudging, teeth-gritted reconciliation. *For ever* — and this marriage will not fail again, because its permanence rests on

his faithfulness, not on hers. The dowry is the gospel in miniature: he betroths her *in righteousness... in lovingkindness... in faithfulness* — not qualities she must manufacture before the wedding, but the very gifts he brings and drapes over her shame. And it ends *and thou shalt know the LORD* — the deep, personal knowing of a marriage, the one thing Israel most lacked. The reversal is complete: *Lo-ammi* becomes *Ammi*, my people; *Lo-ruhamah* becomes *Ruhamah*, pitied. The names that were law are spoken again as gospel.

A Useful Phrase for Class

“Luther put it best in *The Freedom of a Christian*: the soul is a poor, wicked harlot, and Christ is the rich and royal Bridegroom who marries her anyway — and in that marriage, everything passes between them. Her sins, her debts, her death become his; his righteousness, his life, his glory become hers. She wakes up married to a King, her debts paid and a crown on her head, having brought nothing to the wedding but her need. That is what it means that he betroths her in righteousness.”

Bought Back from the Slave Block (3:1–5)

Chapter three is the shortest of the three and, in some ways, the costliest. The command is harder than the first: *Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel* (3:1). Gomer has done exactly what God foretold — gone after her lovers — and somewhere in that ruin she has fallen into slavery, sold off, become another man's property. Hosea is told not to forgive her from a safe distance but to go down to the place where she is being sold and buy his own wife back — *for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley* (3:2). Sit with the indignity of it: a husband stands at the slave market and counts out good money to purchase the woman who left his bed, when the law would have backed him in washing his hands of her. This, says the LORD, is *according to my love*.

Handling the Price

The fifteen pieces of silver is half of thirty — and thirty was the going price of a slave (Exodus 21:32), the very sum that would one day be weighed out to betray a greater Husband. It is a resonance the text invites, and worth naming. But keep the weight where the apostles put it: our redemption was bought not with silver at all, but *with the precious blood of Christ* (1 Peter 1:18–19). Don't allegorize the barley — do preach the blood.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Did God really command his prophet to marry a prostitute? Isn’t that beneath God?”

He really did, and the marriage was real. God does the shocking thing because nothing gentler could break through a comfortable, religious nation that had explained its sin away. And the scandal is not God stooping beneath himself; it is God stooping to picture, in a man’s ruined marriage, the betrayal he himself endures from his people — and the love with which he keeps them anyway. Name the shock; do not apologize it away.

“Was Gomer just a symbol, or did this actually happen?”

It happened. She was a real woman, the daughter of a real man named Diblaim, with real vows, real children, and real, tearing pain. The Lutheran realism we will need all volume long begins right here: the covenant runs through actual, complicated, wounded lives, not the smiling figures of a felt board. To treat Gomer as a mere symbol is to rob the story of the very cost that makes it gospel.

“How do I handle the bedroom language with a mixed adult class?”

With sober plainness. Do not be prurient, lingering where Scripture only points; and do not sanitize it into something safe and bloodless, because the rawness is the point — the pain of a betrayed marriage is what God chose to picture his own. Name what the text names, without dwelling, and move steadily toward the gospel. A calm tone from you gives the class permission to take the story seriously rather than nervously.

“Aren’t we over-reading the details — ‘God sows,’ the barley, the half-homer?”

Read the names the way the text itself glosses them — Scripture tells you what Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi mean — and follow the apostles where they lead (Romans 9; 1 Peter 1-2). But you do not need to crack every grain of barley into a symbol. The load-bearing claims here are the ones the New Testament makes: we are the renamed people, and the bride was bought back at the price of blood. Anchor there, and let the smaller details stay quietly themselves.

“If God betroths Israel ‘for ever,’ how do we square that with all the judgment?”

Hold them as law and gospel, not as a contradiction. The judgment is real, and it falls on a people who will not turn; the betrothal is the gospel held out to the same people, wooed home when they had no claim. The comfort of *for ever* is precisely that the marriage rests on his faithfulness and

not on theirs — which is why it can survive what theirs could not. It is a promise to be believed by the faithless who are drawn back, not a riddle about who can and cannot fall away.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions. You will not use all six; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth — and, as question three already signals, off anyone's private struggles. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — Why preach through a broken marriage

The natural opener. It invites reflection rather than doctrine and lets the class feel why God chose a lived sermon over an argument — some truths cannot be preached, only lived where the people can watch. If discussion is slow to start, answer it yourself first, briefly and honestly.

Question 4 — Betrothed in righteousness: declarative justification

The theological center of the set, and the best single diagnostic of whether the gospel landed. Make sure the class sees that the righteousness is *given*, not grown — Luther's joyous exchange, not a slow rehabilitation. A pair-share works well: two minutes with a neighbor, then a few answers aloud.

Question 5 — Renamed Ammi: the comfort that the name comes from God

The most personal question in the set. Let the class hear their own new name spoken over them. Keep it on the given word — *not my people... but now the people of God* — and not on a feeling they must work themselves up to. The comfort is precisely that the renaming comes from outside us.

Question 6 — The slave-block and the cross

The gospel landing. Draw the line the apostles draw: the bride was bought back not with silver but with blood (1 Peter 1:18–19). Press the class past admiration of the scene to the difference it makes in daily life to know yourself a wife bought back, not a slave grudgingly kept on.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ◆ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Hosea* (Luther's Works, American Edition, vol. 18). Luther reads the marriage straight through to the gospel.
- ◆ Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*. The “joyous exchange” passage is the single best commentary on Hosea 2:19 ever written.
- ◆ The Formula of Concord, Article III (the righteousness of faith) with Article V (law and gospel). Hosea 1–3 is a working model of both at once.

Commentaries

- ◆ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia). Keep it open for its notes on Hosea and its cross-references to Romans 9 and 1 Peter 2.
- ◆ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House). Lay-accessible and squarely in our tradition.
- ◆ For more depth, the classic treatment of Hosea in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets* — older, thorough, and christologically alert.

Devotional

- ◆ Pray Hosea 2:19–20 and 1 Peter 2:9–10 back as your own renaming — from *Lo-ammi* to *Ammi*, from no mercy to mercy obtained.
- ◆ Read or sing “Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness” (*Schmücke dich*), the church's own wedding hymn at the Supper, where the soul comes as the bride to the Bridegroom's table.

A Final Word

You are opening the volume on the hardest and tenderest story in the Twelve, and you are right to begin here, because the book itself does. Lead it slowly. Let the three names land as law before you reach for the gospel; a story meant to wound before it heals is spoiled by hurrying to the comfort.

But do reach the gospel, and land there. The hour does not end at *Lo-ammi*; it ends at *Ammi*, at a betrothal *for ever*, and at a harlot led home from the slave market. Some in your class will know in their bones what it is to be betrayed, and some will know what it is to be the betrayer. To both, this chapter says the same thing: the LORD buys back what he could justly have abandoned, and he does it according to his own love.

And that love has a name and a face. The same LORD who told Hosea to love his faithless wife came at last as the Bridegroom who loved his faithless bride to the death, and bought her not with silver but with his own blood. When the hour goes thin, remember that you are not selling the class a moral — you are handing them a new name, written over them in Baptism and spoken again in the absolution. Begin there, and let the long road of the volume begin.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TWO

Out of Egypt I Called My Son

Hosea 4–11 · with Matthew 2:13–15

A Note to the Teacher

Session One gave the class the marriage; this session gives them the long argument inside it. Hosea 4 through 11 is a sustained indictment — the courtroom scene in which the LORD, the wronged Husband, lays out his case against a faithless people. It is hard going, eight chapters of charges, and you should not pretend otherwise. But it is not gratuitous: every charge is the law doing its proper work, and the whole weight of it exists to make one cry in chapter eleven land with its full force.

Two things to hold all hour. First, the indictment accuses us, not only Israel; resist any drift toward hearing it as a tour of someone else's failures. Second, keep chapter eleven in view from the first minute. The book does not end at the verdict — it turns, astonishingly, into a nursery, and then into the deepest glimpse the Old Testament gives us of the heart of God. Lead the class toward that turn, and the hard chapters become bearable because they are going somewhere.

And know where the typological heart lies. When the evangelist says the infant Christ fulfilled *out of Egypt have I called my son*, he is not playing loose with Hosea; he is reading the Old Testament the way the risen Lord taught his disciples to read it. The failed son is answered by the faithful Son. Have that clear in your own mind, and the hour has a spine the indictment cannot break.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Eight chapters of airtight indictment exist to set up seven words in chapter eleven — *How shall I give thee up?* The failed son called out of Egypt is answered by the faithful Son called out of Egypt,

the Lord Jesus, the true Israel who gets right what the nation got wrong. Teach the law so that it accuses, and land the hour where Hosea lands it: on mercy winning inside the heart of God.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Hosea 4–11 in one sitting, so you feel its weight. Watch two things as you go: how often the LORD names what Israel lacks — truth, mercy, the knowledge of God — and how his anger keeps breaking open into grief.
- ◆ Read Matthew 2:13–15, where the holy family flees to Egypt and is called back, and the evangelist hears Hosea 11:1 fulfilled in the child. Sit with the question: what does it mean that the history of a faithless people is taken up and made good in a faithful Son?
- ◆ Settle the lawsuit image in your mind: chapter four opens with a *rib*, a formal courtroom complaint. We have left the bedroom of chapters one through three for the courtroom — but it is the same betrayal under examination.
- ◆ Have the catechism's "fear, love, and trust" ready. It is the best short definition of the *knowledge of God* Israel had lost — not missing facts, but a broken trust.
- ◆ Decide in advance how you will keep an hour of indictment from crushing the class. The answer is in the Pacing Tip: do not end in the courtroom.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and pick the one you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. The chapters are dense with charges, but the charges serve these three, and if these are clear the indictment will not lose its way.

The indictment is the law at work — and it reads against us, not only Israel.

The lawsuit charges that there is *no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land* (4:1) — and those are precisely the three gifts the betrothal of chapter two had promised to restore. The break is not a private spiritual deficiency; it spills into the streets, until *swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery* break out and *blood toucheth blood* (4:2). When a people loses

the knowledge of God it does not become merely irreligious; it becomes inhumane — the vertical break always works its way out into a horizontal ruin. Do not let the class hear this as a tour of Israel's faults. The same law that destroyed a people *for lack of knowledge* (4:6) reads its verdict over every heart that trusts itself.

Hosea 11:1 is fulfilled in the true Israel — and Matthew tells us so.

In its own setting, *when Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt* (11:1) looks back to the Exodus: Israel is God's son, his firstborn, called up out of Egypt to be the faithful child who would love and obey his Father. And Israel failed, comprehensively, as the whole indictment has just shown. So God sent another Son, the true and faithful One, the Lord Jesus, who is carried down into Egypt and called up out of it, who passes through the water and into the wilderness — but where the first son grumbled and chased idols, this Son trusts and obeys to the end, meeting each temptation with *it is written*. He is the true Israel, retracing his people's whole history and getting it right. This is no loose proof-texting; it is the christological logic of the Old Testament, and the apostle, not our imagination, is the one who draws the line (Matthew 2:15).

“How shall I give thee up?” is gospel — and the cross is how.

The lawsuit is airtight and the verdict deserved, and just where the sentence should fall, God turns the question in upon himself: *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?... mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together* (11:8). It is mercy at war with judgment inside the heart of God — and mercy winning, grounded not in Israel's deserving but in God's own being: *for I am God, and not man* (11:9). But notice what Hosea does not say: he never tells us how a holy God can decline to execute the sentence justice demands. That question hangs unanswered over the chapter. The cross is the answer. God did not set his justice aside; he satisfied it himself, giving up his own Son in the place of the failed sons — so that mercy did not bypass judgment but passed straight through it.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:10	Recap of the marriage (Session One); set up the lawsuit
0:10–0:24	The lawsuit and what Israel lacks — truth, mercy, knowledge (Hosea 4–8)

0:24–0:36	Out of Egypt: the Lord Jesus as the true Israel (11:1; Matthew 2:15)
0:36–0:48	The nursery and “How shall I give thee up?” — mercy winning (Hosea 11)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Hosea 12–14 and Session Three

Pacing Tip

This is a long indictment, and you cannot cover every charge — do not try. Protect two things: the Out-of-Egypt typology (the Lord Jesus as the true Israel) and 11:8 (*How shall I give thee up?*). If the class drowns in the lawsuit, they will miss that the whole point of the indictment is to make the mercy of chapter eleven land. Whatever you cut, do not end the hour in the courtroom.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Lord's Lawsuit (4:1–3)

Chapter four opens like a summons to court: *the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land* (4:1). The word is *rib*, a formal lawsuit, and the wronged Husband now stands as the wronged party laying out his complaint. The charge sheet is devastating in its brevity — no truth, no mercy, no knowledge of God — and the LORD lays the blame first not on the people but on the shepherds who should have fed them: *my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge* (4:6). The priests had stopped teaching; worse, they had grown fat on the people's sin. It is a sobering word for every age, ours not least: when those charged with the word fail to teach it plainly, the people perish not for want of religion but for want of knowledge, starved at a table that should have been spread for them.

A Morning-Cloud Repentance (6:1–6)

Chapter six gives a flash of what looks like hope: *Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us... in the third day he will raise us up* (6:1–2). On its face it is the very logic of the gospel — the God who wounds is the God who heals, and death is the prelude to resurrection. But the Lord exposes how shallow the turning is: *your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away* (6:4). Real enough at dawn, with no root by noon. And the heart of the chapter is the line the Lord Jesus would later quote against scrupulous religion: *I desired mercy,*

and not sacrifice (6:6). No amount of ritual substitutes for the *chesed* and the knowledge of God the Lord actually wants.

Handling the “Third Day”

Hosea’s *in the third day he will raise us up* (6:2) sounds the resurrection note, and the church has long heard it there. Teach it as a genuine resonance within the pattern Scripture breathes — Paul says the Christ rose *the third day according to the scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:4) — but be honest about the guardrail: no apostle cites Hosea 6:2 chapter-and-verse for the resurrection. So name the pattern (the God who tears in order to heal does exactly that, in person, in a borrowed tomb) without claiming a direct prediction. That care is the difference between typology and overreach.

Sowing the Wind (7–8)

Keep these chapters brisk; their force is cumulative. Israel plays the nations off one another, runs to Egypt and to Assyria for help instead of to her God, and bows to the calf of Samaria. The verse to carry away is 8:7 — *they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind*. Sin is not a tidy transaction with a fixed cost; it is a seed that comes up multiplied, and a people that plants faithlessness harvests a storm it cannot control. Name the principle and move on; the chapter is the wind-up for the pitch that comes in chapter eleven.

The God Who Taught Them to Walk (11:1–4)

Here the courtroom dissolves and we are suddenly in a nursery. The LORD stops speaking like a prosecutor and starts speaking like a parent remembering a child’s first steps: *when Israel was a child, then I loved him*. The image shifts from husband and wife to father and son, and the tenderness deepens — Israel drawn up out of Egypt like a foundling rescued and adopted, loved when it was small and helpless and could give nothing back. Then one of the most affecting pictures of God in all of Scripture: *I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms... I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love* (11:3–4). Here is the Lord on his knees, holding a toddler’s hands and teaching him to walk — and the cords by which he led his people were not the ropes and goads a man uses to drive cattle, but *cords of a man*, the gentle leading-strings of love.

Out of Egypt I Called My Son (11:1; Matthew 2:15)

Now take up that first line of the chapter and follow it where Matthew insists it goes. The pattern runs deeper than a single verse, and the Gospels trace it on purpose. Like Israel, the Lord Jesus comes up out of Egypt; like Israel, he passes through the water, for at his baptism in the Jordan the Father’s voice declares him the beloved Son; like Israel, he goes out into the wilderness — but

where Israel wandered forty years and fell to every temptation, he fasts forty days and refuses the very idolatries Israel embraced. He is reliving Israel's story line by line and writing in the obedience the first son never wrote. This is the comfort buried in the typology, and it is worth saying plainly to the class.

A Useful Phrase for Class

"Israel was God's son, called out of Egypt to be the faithful child — and Israel failed. So God sent another Son to walk the same road and get it right. The Lord Jesus is the true Israel, the faithful child Israel never was. And that is the gospel for every failed son and daughter in this room: God provided the obedient Son we are not, and by faith we are hidden in him. His record is counted ours."

How Shall I Give Thee Up? (11:8–11)

This is the climax, the deepest glimpse the Old Testament gives into the heart of God. Where the sentence should fall, God cries out like a parent who cannot do the thing justice demands — *how shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* — and mercy wins. *I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger... for I am God, and not man.* And the chapter does not end in the bare withholding of wrath; it ends in homecoming: *they shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion... and I will place them in their houses* (11:10–11). The same voice that thundered judgment now roars like a lion to call his scattered children home — and they come, trembling but coming. Mercy here does not merely spare; it gathers, and settles the rescued in their own houses. Every promise of homecoming in the prophets is finally this one: the Lion of the tribe of Judah calling his own out of every far country into the Father's house.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

"Isn't Matthew misusing Hosea? Hosea 11:1 is plainly about the Exodus, not a prediction of the Messiah."

It is about the Exodus — and that is exactly why it is about Christ. Israel is the son called out of Egypt to be faithful, and Israel failed; the Lord Jesus is the Son called out of Egypt who succeeds, retracing the nation's path and redeeming it from the inside. Matthew is not pulling a verse out of

context; he is reading the pattern the whole Old Testament was built on, the way the risen Lord taught at Emmaus. We follow the apostle's lead, not our own cleverness.

“Hosea 6:2 says ‘in the third day he will raise us up.’ Is that a prophecy of the resurrection?”

The church has long heard the resurrection in it, and rightly senses the pattern — the God who tears in order to heal. But hold the guardrail honestly: no apostle quotes Hosea 6:2 by name for the resurrection, the way Matthew quotes 11:1. So teach it as a true resonance within the pattern Paul calls *according to the scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:4), not as a one-to-one prediction. Naming the difference keeps your typology disciplined and your class trusting.

“How is eight chapters of judgment ‘gospel’? It is relentless.”

The relentlessness is the law doing its proper work — breaking the comfortable certainty that all is well — and it is not the last word. The whole indictment is the dark backdrop against which 11:8 blazes out. If the class feels the weight of the charges, they are feeling exactly what they must feel to be undone by *how shall I give thee up?* The thunder is real, but it is rolling toward mercy.

“If God ‘will not execute the fierceness of his anger’ (11:9), did he just drop his justice? Doesn’t sin matter?”

Sin matters infinitely, which is why Hosea cannot tell us how God does this — he leaves the question open. The New Testament closes it: God did not waive his justice; he bore it himself. The fierceness of that anger was not canceled but carried, poured out on the faithful Son in the place of the faithless sons. Mercy did not go around justice; it went through it, at the cross.

“This is heavy material. How do I keep the hour from simply crushing people?”

By pacing toward the gospel and landing there. Let the indictment accuse, but do not linger so long in chapters four through eight that there is no time for chapter eleven. The nursery (11:1–4) and *how shall I give thee up?* are meant to carry the hour's weight; spend your minutes there. And keep the comfort personal: the faithful Son was given for failed sons, and the class is hidden in him.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth, and off anyone's private legalisms. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 2 — Religiously busy, yet lacking the knowledge of God

A strong opener, because it disarms. The *knowledge* Israel lacked was not facts but the trusting, covenantal knowing of God — the catechism's fear, love, and trust. Let the class wrestle with how a person, or a whole congregation, can be busy with religion and still be a stranger to God. Answer it gently; the question implicates all of us.

Question 4 — Mercy, not sacrifice

The Lord Jesus quoted *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice* against the scrupulous religion of his day. Press the class on where we are exact about the outward forms while growing cold toward mercy — but keep it off naming anyone's private failures. The goal is to see what it looks like for a church to desire *chesed* over performance.

Question 5 — The true Israel, and the failed son hidden in him

The theological center, and the most personal question in the set. Matthew reads the Lord Jesus as the faithful Israel who succeeds where the nation failed. Let the class feel the comfort: God provided the obedient Son we were not. Keep it on the given Christ — we are hidden in him — and not on a feeling of obedience we must produce.

Question 6 — The cross answers Hosea's unanswered question

The gospel landing. Hosea shows mercy triumphing but never says how a holy God can do it. Draw the line to the cross: God did not set his justice aside but satisfied it himself, giving up his Son in our place. This is the question the whole session has been building toward; let it land last.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ◆ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Hosea* (Luther's Works, vol. 18). Luther is especially strong on the tenderness of chapter eleven.
- ◆ The Augsburg Confession, Article III, with the Small Catechism's explanation of the Second Article — the Son given up for us is how *how shall I give thee up?* is answered.
- ◆ The Formula of Concord, Article V, on law and gospel. Hosea 4–11 is a sustained exercise in the law that drives toward the gospel.

Commentaries

- ◆ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia). Keep it open for its notes on Hosea 11 and the Matthew 2 cross-reference.
- ◆ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House). Lay-accessible and confessional.
- ◆ For more depth, the treatment of Hosea in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ◆ Pray Hosea 11:8–9 alongside the Small Catechism's Second Article — the mercy that wins in God's heart is the mercy that won at the cross.
- ◆ Meditate on the Lord Jesus' baptism and temptation (Matthew 3–4) as the obedience of the true Israel, walking Israel's road and getting it right on our behalf.

A Final Word

You are leading a long, hard stretch of indictment — eight chapters in which the LORD names everything Israel lacks. Do not flinch from the law; let it accuse, and let the class hear that the charge sheet reads against us too. An hour that softens the lawsuit will have nothing for the mercy to answer.

But the indictment is not the destination; it is the dark backdrop. Lead the class to chapter eleven, where the courtroom becomes a nursery and the prosecutor becomes a Father on his knees teaching a toddler to walk — and then to 11:8, where mercy wins inside the heart of God. Spend your best minutes there.

And tell them the thing Hosea could not. How can a holy God say *I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger*? The cross. God did not drop his justice; he bore it, giving up the faithful Son in the place of the failed sons, so that the history of a faithless people is taken up and made good in one faithful Son — and we are hidden in him. Begin Session Two in the courtroom; end it in the Father's house.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION THREE

I Will Ransom Them from the Grave

Hosea 12–14 · with 1 Corinthians 15:54–57

A Note to the Teacher

After three sessions in Hosea — the marriage, the lawsuit, and now the self-destruction — you arrive at the book's great turn, and it is all gospel. The first two chapters of this session (twelve and thirteen) are still hard going: Israel feeding on wind, trading in deceit, ruined by the very prosperity it trusted. But you are climbing toward two of the brightest summits in the whole prophetic range — a grave ransomed (13:14) and a love freely given (14:4) — and you should let the class feel the ascent.

Two things will carry the hour. First, the book's logic is that the people's ruin is entirely their own and their rescue is entirely God's — *thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help* (13:9). Keep that line in front of you; it is the law and gospel of the whole session pressed into nine words. Second, the chapter ends by handing the people the very words of their return (14:2), which means the hour ends not in striving but in the gift of repentance itself. Lead toward that, and the heavy opening pays off.

And know that the typological key is, once again, handed to us by an apostle. When Paul flings Hosea's words at the conquered grave in 1 Corinthians 15, he settles a verse the Hebrew leaves open, and he tells us how to read it. Have that clear, and you will teach 13:14 as the resurrection promise it is, without overreaching or apologizing.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The book that opened with a faithless bride and a string of dreadful names ends with a grave ransomed and a love freely given — *I will ransom them from the power of the grave and I will love them freely* — and even the repentance that receives it is God's own gift, the words of return placed in his people's mouths. Teach the hour so the class leaves on the gospel summit, not in the wind of chapter twelve.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Hosea 12–14 in one sitting — the last controversy, the self-destruction of a people who forgot God when they were full, and then the great turn: the ransom from the grave, the call to take words and return, the promise of a love freely given.
- ◆ Read 1 Corinthians 15:54–57, where Paul takes Hosea's words and flings them as a taunt at the conquered grave. Sit with the question the student book asks: what does it mean that the LORD not only commands his people to return, but hands them the very words to say?
- ◆ Fix 13:9 in your mind — *thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help*. It is the cleanest law-and-gospel verse in Hosea, and the spine of the session.
- ◆ Notice the liturgical echo before you teach it: Hosea 14:2 (*take with you words... take away all iniquity*) is the pattern of confession and absolution your class lives every Sunday. Have that connection ready.
- ◆ Be ready for the grammar question on 13:14. Some translations read it as a threat, not a promise; know in advance that the apostle settles it, so the question does not throw you.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. The session has a heavy first half and a glorious second, and these three keep the two halves in their proper relation.

Hosea 13:14 is the resurrection promise — and Paul, not our preference, settles it.

Be honest with the class that the Hebrew of 13:14 can be read more than one way; the grammar will bear a threat (death's plagues *summoned against* a hardened people) as well as a promise. But

we are not left to settle it on our own. In the great resurrection chapter, Paul reaches for these very words and turns them into a shout of triumph over the conquered enemy (1 Corinthians 15:54–55). The apostle hears Hosea 13:14 as gospel — and that settles it for us. This is the typology guardrail working in plain sight: the New Testament tells us how to read the Old. And the promise was kept not by a decree spoken safely from heaven but by God going down into the grave he meant to plunder — the Lord Jesus entered death, lay in its power through the Sabbath, and rose the third day as the firstfruits, drawing the sting out of death forever for all who are joined to him by faith.

The book's turn is sheer grace — “I will love them freely” is justification by grace alone.

Hold 13:9 and 14:4 together. The ruin is entirely the people's own — *thou hast destroyed thyself* — and the help is entirely God's — *but in me is thine help*. Then the summit: *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely* (14:4). The Hebrew behind *freely* means “of my own free will,” as a free gift, with no price extracted and no merit required. That single adverb is the whole of justification by grace alone, set to music. And watch the order, because it preaches: the healing and the free love come first (14:4), and only afterward does Ephraim renounce his idols (14:8). The new life flows from the grace; it never earns it. Guard the class against ever reversing that order.

Even our repentance is God's gift — confession and absolution are Hosea 14:2 in the life of the church.

The most easily missed mercy in the chapter is that God supplies the very words of return: *take with you words... say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously* (14:2). He does not merely command repentance and leave his people to scrape together a confession on their own; he writes the prayer out and puts it in their mouths. The church has never stopped living off that mercy. Every Sunday, when the congregation is led in the words of confession and then hears the absolution spoken in the stead and by the command of Christ, it is doing exactly what Hosea 14 describes — taking words the Lord himself has given and turning them back toward him, and receiving the pardon those words ask for. Even our returning is his gift before it is our act.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome

0:05–0:10	Recap of Hosea so far; set up the book's great turn
0:10–0:22	Feeding on wind; Jacob who clung; "thou hast destroyed thyself" (12–13)
0:22–0:36	I will ransom them from the grave — 13:14 and 1 Corinthians 15
0:36–0:48	Take with you words; I will love them freely (14)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Joel 1–3 and Session Four

Pacing Tip

The first half is the wind-up; the second half is the pitch. If time runs short, compress chapters twelve and thirteen to the single verse that matters most — *thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help* (13:9) — and protect your minutes for the ransom (13:14) and the free love (14:4). Whatever you cut, the class must leave on the gospel summit, not in the wind.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

Feeding on Wind (12:1–8)

Ephraim *feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind* (12:1) — a perfect picture of idolatry, a man chasing the hot desert wind, opening his mouth to swallow it, and ending with nothing in his belly but air and grit. The human heart was built to be filled by God, and it will try to fill itself with anything else. And the emptiness hardens into something uglier: Israel has *become a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand* (12:7). The word for *merchant* is literally *Canaan* — the people the LORD meant to displace — and Hosea is saying Israel has become Canaanite, a trader with rigged scales. Notice the line the class needs: the broken first table always works its way out into broken dealing with the neighbor. A people that cheats God will cheat its neighbor; the vertical fracture becomes a horizontal fraud.

The God Who Found Jacob at Bethel (12:3–6)

Hosea reaches back to Israel's father, Jacob, who is both the nation's root and its mirror. Jacob was the grasper — he took his brother by the heel in the womb — but the turning point of his life came when he stopped grasping and started clinging: he *wept, and made supplication* and so prevailed (12:4). The lesson the prophet draws is pointed: Israel is called not to grab but to cling.

The only wrestling with God that ends in blessing is the wrestling that holds on for mercy and will not let go until it is blessed.

A Useful Phrase for Class

“Jacob did not win his blessing by overpowering God; he won it by refusing to let go — weeping, clinging, hanging on for mercy. That is the only kind of wrestling with God that ever ends in blessing. We do not prevail with God by being strong; we prevail by holding on to him when we are weak.”

Thou Hast Destroyed Thyself (13:1–11)

Chapter thirteen is the darkest stretch — the calf-worship, the sin heaped on sin, a people who forgot God the moment they were full. And in the middle of it stands the verse that is the spine of the whole session: *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help* (13:9). Teach it slowly, as law and gospel side by side. The destruction is entirely ours — no excuse, no shared blame, no fate to point to. And the help is entirely God's — not a contribution to add to our effort, but the whole of our rescue. Blur that line in either direction and the gospel collapses: make the ruin partly God's and you slander him; make the help partly ours and you lose it.

I Will Ransom Them from the Grave (13:14)

And then, with no warning, in the middle of a chapter of judgment, the most audacious promise in the book: *I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction*. The grave is Sheol, the pit that swallows everyone and gives nothing back — and the LORD declares he will reach down into it and ransom his people out, then rounds on death like a champion taunting a beaten foe. The very things that destroy us, he will destroy. Death itself will be put to death.

Handling the Grammar of 13:14

A student with a study Bible may notice that some translations render 13:14 as a threat — God summoning death's plagues *against* Israel — rather than a promise. The Hebrew grammar will bear that reading, and you should not pretend otherwise. But the question is settled for us: Paul takes these very words as a shout of triumph over the conquered grave (1 Corinthians 15:54–55). Where Scripture's own inspired interpreter reads a verse as good news, we read it as good news too. Say that plainly, and the grammar question becomes a chance to teach the guardrail itself — the New Testament tells us how to read the Old.

Take with You Words (14:1–3)

The book makes its final appeal, and it is tender beyond anything the thirteen chapters of indictment would lead us to expect: *O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God* (14:1). *Return — shuv* — one last time, the great homecoming word. And then the Lord does something so gracious it is easy to read past: he supplies the very words. *Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously* (14:2). He writes the prayer out and puts it in their mouths. This is the pattern of confession and absolution set into the life of the congregation: God supplies the words of repentance, and then God supplies the very pardon those words ask for.

I Will Love Them Freely (14:4–9)

Heaven answers the prayer it had taught, and the answer is the gospel summit of the whole book: *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely* (14:4). Every word is grace — the disease cured, the backsliding healed at the root, the love poured out *freely*, of God's own free will. The harlot bride, the failed son, the self-destroyed people: all of it is answered here. Then the cascade of garden images — dew, lily, deep root, corn, vine, fragrance — the flourishing that grace produces, not a grim, gritted reformation but a living thing. And the book closes on a wisdom note: *the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them* (14:9). The whole of Hosea is finally an invitation to walk that road — home.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“My study Bible reads 13:14 as a threat, not a promise. Which is right?”

Both readings fit the Hebrew — that is honest to say. But the question is not left to us. Paul lifts these very words into the resurrection chapter and turns them into a taunt over the defeated grave (1 Corinthians 15:54–55), reading them as pure gospel. The apostle is Scripture's own inspired interpreter, and where he reads good news, so do we. The grammar opens the door; the New Testament tells us which way to walk through it.

“Did the Lord Jesus really go down into death and the grave, or is that just poetic?”

He really died, was buried, and lay in the grave through the Sabbath, as the creed confesses. He did not abolish death from a safe distance; he entered it, took its poison into his own body, and rose the third day as its conqueror — the firstfruits of all who sleep. The descent is not defeat but

victory: the strong man enters the strong man's house and carries off the keys. That is why a believer's grave is a ransomed grave, not merely an escaped one.

“If God says ‘I will love them freely,’ do repentance and turning from sin even matter?”

They matter enormously — but in the right order. The love is free; it is not the wage of our turning. And the turning is real; it flows out of the love. Watch the chapter itself: the healing and the free love come in 14:4, and Ephraim renounces his idols only in 14:8 — grace first, then the putting-away of idols. Reverse that and you make the gospel a reward for reform. Keep it in Hosea's order and you have the gospel.

“Isn't it a stretch to find our confession-and-absolution liturgy in Hosea 14?”

It is not the liturgy that is in Hosea, but the pattern the liturgy follows — and that pattern is unmistakably there. God hands his people the words of their return (14:2) and then grants the pardon those words request. Confession and absolution are simply that same mercy set into the congregation's life: the same God who supplied Israel's prayer supplies ours, and answers it with his Son's own pardon. Continuity, not anachronism.

“Why does Hosea keep going back to Jacob? Why drag Genesis into it?”

Because Jacob is Israel's father and Israel's mirror. The grasper who schemed and stole became the man who *wept, and made supplication* and prevailed only by clinging. Hosea holds him up to say: be Jacob who clings, not Jacob who grabs. The whole call of the chapter — *turn, and cling, and wait* — is Jacob's own story offered back to his children as the way home.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 3 — “Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help”

The single best law-and-gospel diagnostic in the session. Work the verse slowly: the destruction entirely ours, the help entirely God's. Ask what goes wrong when we blur the line in either direction. If the class gets this verse, they have the whole gospel of Hosea in nine words.

Question 4 — Paul's taunt over the ransomed grave

The resurrection comfort, and the most pastoral question in the set. Paul's use of 13:14 settles its meaning; press the class on how it changes grief at a graveside to know the grave has been

ransomed, not merely escaped. Many in the room have stood at such a graveside; let the answer reach them there.

Question 5 — The prayer God gives versus the prayer we are tempted to pray

A sharp and clarifying question. The prayer God supplies asks him to *take away iniquity* and *receive us graciously*; the prayer we are tempted to pray asks for another chance to do better. Let the class feel the difference — one casts itself on mercy, the other on a fresh resolve. Even our returning is his gift.

Question 6 — Healing before the renunciation of idols

The gospel-order landing. Ask why the free love comes before Ephraim puts away his idols, not after. Draw out how *I will love them freely* guards us against ever crediting our sanctification to ourselves. This is the question that sends the class home with the order of grace fixed in mind.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Hosea* (Luther's Works, vol. 18), especially on the great turn of chapters thirteen and fourteen.
- ♦ The Formula of Concord, Article III (the righteousness of faith), with the Small Catechism on Confession. Hosea 13:9 and 14:2 are these articles in prophetic form.
- ♦ Luther's Easter hymn *Christ lag in Todesbanden* — a sung commentary on a grave entered and conquered, the very note Paul strikes from Hosea 13:14.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia). Keep it open for its notes on Hosea 13–14 and the 1 Corinthians 15 cross-reference.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House). Lay-accessible and confessional.
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Hosea in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ◆ Pray Hosea 14:2 as your confession and 14:4 as the absolution spoken back to you — the words of return and the pardon they ask, both given by God.
- ◆ Read 1 Corinthians 15:54–57 aloud at the next graveside or funeral you attend. Hosea's ransom is the church's last word over the dead in Christ.

A Final Word

You have led the class through three hard chapters of Hosea, and now you arrive at the book's great turn, where everything resolves into gospel. Do not rush the bad news of chapters twelve and thirteen — the wind, the deceit, the self-destruction are real — but teach them as the climb they are, knowing that 13:14 and 14:4 wait at the top.

Land the class on the two gifts that crown the book: a grave ransomed and a love freely given. And do not skip the small, astonishing mercy of 14:2 — that God even hands his people the words of their return. Every Sunday's confession and absolution is that verse lived out, which means your class already knows this grace; you are only naming where it began.

The same LORD who promised to be death's plague went down into the grave and came up its conqueror, and he loves your class freely — of his own free will, with no price extracted from them, because he is the kind of God who pours out love. Tell them the book ends not with a threat but with a road: *the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them*. Walk your class down that road, and on to Joel.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FOUR

The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh

Joel 1–3 · with Acts 2:14–21 and Romans 10:13

A Note to the Teacher

Joel is a short book with an enormous reach. It begins in a field stripped bare by locusts and ends at the last judgment of the nations, and along the way it gives the church two of its most treasured texts — *rend your heart, and not your garments* and *I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh*. This is the session where the Day of the LORD, which the Introduction set before the class as the thread that ties the Twelve together, finally takes center stage. Joel is its prophet above all the others.

The danger here is getting lost in the locusts. The plague is real and devastating, but Joel does not dwell on the entomology; he reads the swarm as a sermon, a smaller judgment sent to wake a sleeping people before the great Day arrives. Teach the plague quickly and let it do what Joel means it to do — sound the alarm. Then spend your best minutes on the three gifts that answer the alarm: a heart God himself turns, a Spirit poured out on all flesh, and a door marked *whosoever*.

And keep the apostles close. Peter stands up at Pentecost and says of the Spirit, *this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel*; Paul takes Joel's *whosoever shall call* and makes it the open door of the gospel to the whole world. The New Testament is again our guide. With Acts 2 and Romans 10 in view, you will teach Joel as a book whose great day has already dawned.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Joel reads a locust plague as the herald of the Day of the LORD — and against that terrible Day sets two gifts: the Spirit poured out on all flesh, fulfilled at Pentecost, and a single open door, *whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered*. Teach the alarm so the class trembles,

and then the door so they run through it.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read the short book of Joel in full — all three chapters — and watch how a plague of insects opens out into the great and terrible Day of the LORD.
- ◆ Read Acts 2:14–21, where Peter declares the outpoured Spirit *this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel*, and Romans 10:13, where Paul makes Joel's promise the open door of the gospel to all who call.
- ◆ Recall the Introduction's teaching on *yom YHWH* — the Day of the LORD, double-edged (terror for the impenitent, salvation for the remnant) and working on two horizons at once. Joel is the book where that thread runs thickest.
- ◆ Have the catechism's Third Article ready — the Holy Spirit *calls, gathers, enlightens* the whole church by the gospel. Joel 2:28 is that article in prophetic form, and it guards the class against seeking the Spirit apart from the word.
- ◆ Note that Joel 2:12–13 is the church's ancient call to repentance — the Ash Wednesday text. Your class may know it without knowing where it comes from.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Joel ranges widely, but these three hold the book together.

The Day of the LORD is the spine of the book — and the locusts are its herald.

Joel reads the plague not as random misfortune but as a word from God, a summons delivered on six million wings, a smaller judgment sent to wake a sleeping people before a far greater one arrives. The locusts are a sermon, and their text is the phrase that tolls through the whole book like a bell: *the day of the LORD is at hand* (1:15). It is double-edged and it works on two horizons folded together, the way a near hill and a far mountain rise behind one another. The cosmic signs

Joel names — *the sun... turned into darkness, and the moon into blood* (2:31) — mark the seriousness of the hour, not a date to be calculated; the darkness that fell at the cross, the upheavals of the whole age between the advents, and the final shaking are all gathered in them. Read the Day christologically and seriously, never as a calendar.

“Rend your heart” grounds repentance in grace — and Pentecost answers Moses’ wish.

The Day’s answer is not *flee* but *turn* — *shuv*, come home — and the turning God asks is inward and real: *rend your heart, and not your garments* (2:13). But mark the order with care, because everything hangs on it. God does not say, turn so that I may become gracious; he says, turn *for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness*. The motive for repentance is not to make God kind but that God is already kind. And the gift held out to a turned people is the Spirit: *I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh* (2:28). What in the old covenant rested on a few — a Moses, a David, a prophet — is poured out on the whole people, the very thing Moses once wished aloud (*would God that all the LORD’s people were prophets*, Numbers 11:29). Moses wished it; Joel saw it promised; Pentecost delivered it. This is the priesthood of all believers — the Spirit the greatest prophet could only long for now given to the least Christian, in the word and at the font.

“Whosoever shall call” is the open door — and the Name is the Lord Jesus.

Against all the terror of the Day stands the promise that is the open door of the entire gospel: *whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered* (2:32). Not whosoever is worthy, not whosoever has kept the law, not whosoever belongs to the right nation — whosoever calls. The Day that no one can abide turns out to have a single door, wide enough for anyone with nothing to bring but a cry. And Paul tells us whose name it is: he takes Joel’s *name of the LORD* and reads it as the name of the Lord Jesus (Romans 10:13). The apostle applies the covenant Name itself to Christ — which means that to call on the Lord Jesus is to call on God, for he is himself the LORD. The deity of Christ is not a later doctrine imposed on the text; it is the apostle’s own reading of Joel.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:10	The locust plague as a summons — reading hard providences (Joel 1)
0:10–0:22	The Day of the LORD is at hand; rend your heart, not your garments (1–2)

0:22–0:36	I will pour out my Spirit — Pentecost and the priesthood of all believers (2:28)
0:36–0:48	Whosoever shall call; the valley of decision (2:32; 3)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Amos 1–6 and Session Five

Pacing Tip

If time runs short, do not linger in the locust field. Compress chapter one to its point — the plague is a sermon — and protect three things: *rend your heart* (and why the order matters), *I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh*, and *whosoever shall call*. Those three are the gospel of Joel. The valley of decision can be summarized in a sentence: the decision there is God's verdict, not ours.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

When the Locusts Came (1:1–20)

Joel begins not with a vision or a genealogy but with a catastrophe — four waves of devouring insects, each finishing what the last had begun, until nothing green is left in the land (1:4). He summons the whole nation to mourn, group by group, in a rhythm almost liturgical: the drunkards to wake and weep, the farmers to be ashamed, the priests to gird themselves in sackcloth. And the loss Joel feels most keenly is the one at the altar: *the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God* (1:13). When the locust has eaten everything, even the worship of God falls silent for lack of grain to bring. Do not let the class hurry past this as someone else's farm trouble; Joel reads the plague as a word from God, a wake-up call, and asks whether they have ever seen its like.

The Day of the LORD Is at Hand (1:15–2:11)

Now the phrase that ties the whole Book of the Twelve together sounds at full volume: *the day of the LORD is at hand* (1:15). In Joel's hands the locust plague becomes the herald of that greater Day — an advancing army, an unstoppable darkness, the heavens trembling. The chapter ends with the question the whole session turns on: *the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?* (2:11). Let that question land and stay unanswered for a moment. The law must be

allowed to do its proper work — to make the class feel that no one can stand — before the gospel that follows can be heard as gospel at all. Grace offered to people who have never trembled at the Day is grace they will not value.

Rend Your Heart, and Not Your Garments (2:12–27)

And the answer the Lord gives to *who can abide it?* is not *flee* but *turn: turn ye even to me with all your heart... and rend your heart, and not your garments* (2:12–13). In that culture a man tore his clothes as a public sign of grief, and it was easy enough to rip a robe while leaving the heart whole. The Lord cuts through the gesture and asks for the heart itself. And he gives the reason — *for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness* — reaching for the oldest confession of God's character in all of Scripture, the words spoken to Moses on the mountain. The mercy that follows is lavish: not only pardon but restoration, *I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten* (2:25). God does not merely forgive the wasted years; he gives them back.

A Useful Phrase for Class

“Watch the order of Joel 2:13. God does not say, ‘Turn, so that I will become gracious to you.’ He says, ‘Turn, because I am already gracious.’ Two repentances can look identical from the outside — the same tears, the same words — and be opposite at the root. One turns to make God kind; the other turns because he already is. Only the second is the gospel's repentance, and it is the only kind that lasts.”

I Will Pour Out My Spirit (2:28–29)

Here Joel's prophecy lifts off the ground of his own century and reaches forward to the morning that changed the world: *I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids* (2:28–29). In the old covenant the Spirit came upon particular people for particular tasks; Joel sees a day when the Spirit floods the whole people like water on a parched field. Mark whom the outpouring reaches — sons and daughters, old and young, and, most strikingly in that world, the menservants and maidservants, the lowest in the household, the ones with no standing. The gift will not be the private possession of a priestly elite; it will be the common inheritance of every believer. This is the priesthood of all believers, and it is the answer to Moses' old wish that all the LORD's people might be prophets.

Handling the Spirit and the Word

A class hearing about prophecy, dreams, and visions may wonder whether Joel promises new revelations today. Steer gently but firmly: notice how Peter says the prophecy is fulfilled — not in private raptures but in his preaching Christ from the open Scriptures (Acts 2:16–17). The point of Joel 2:28 is the universality of the Spirit (every believer has him), not a program of fresh revelation. The Spirit comes to us in the means of grace — the word, Baptism, the Supper — not in the weather of our own hearts. That is the catechism's Third Article, and it is great comfort: we need not chase an inner experience to be sure we have the Spirit.

Whosoever Shall Call (2:30–32)

Joel's vision carries cosmic signs — wonders in the heavens, the sun darkened, the moon turned to blood — but their point is not to fuel speculation about dates; it is to mark how serious and how near the great Day is. And then, set against all that terror, the open door of the entire gospel: *whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered* (2:32). After the locusts, after the army, after the darkened sun and the unanswerable *who can abide it?*, here is the answer, and it could not be simpler or wider. The trembling sinner who has nothing to bring but his cry is delivered, on the spot, by calling on the Name. Paul widens it past Joel's first hearers to the whole world (Romans 10:13) — and tells us the Name is the Lord Jesus.

The Valley of Decision (3:1–21)

The last chapter turns to the other edge of the Day — the judgment of the nations that trampled the people of God. The LORD gathers them into a valley he names Jehoshaphat, which means *the LORD judges*, and there he renders his verdict: *multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision* (3:14). Handle that phrase with care, because ears trained by a certain kind of preaching may hear it as the place where sinners decide for God — the great altar call of history. That is not Joel's meaning. The Hebrew pictures the sharp threshing-sledge that cuts and separates, and the decision in view is God's, not man's: the valley where the Lord sits to render his decisive verdict and parts the nations as a farmer parts wheat from chaff. The multitudes are not gathered there to make up their minds; they are gathered to hear his. Our only safety on that Day is not the firmness of a choice we once made but the Name we have called upon.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Peter says Pentecost fulfilled Joel — but the sun didn’t turn to blood and the world didn’t end. Did the prophecy really come true?”

It did, and the two horizons explain how. The Spirit was poured out at Pentecost — that part Peter points to directly. The cosmic signs belong to the whole stretch of the last days that Pentecost opened: the darkness at the cross, the upheavals of this age, and the final shaking still to come. Peter can say *this is that* because the last days began at Pentecost and we are living in them. It is not a failed prediction but an opened one, still unfolding toward its close.

“Does ‘your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions’ mean we should expect new prophecies and dreams today?”

The promise is about the reach of the Spirit — that he falls on all flesh, every believer, not a chosen few — not a program of fresh revelation. Notice how Peter cashes it out: in preaching the Lord Jesus from the Scriptures, not in private ecstasies. The Spirit comes to us where God has promised to put him — in the word, Baptism, and the Supper — and not in the changing weather of our feelings. That keeps us from anxiously hunting an inner sign, and roots our assurance in the means of grace.

“What is the ‘valley of decision’? Is that where people decide to follow God?”

Understandable, given how the phrase gets used — but no. The decision there is God’s verdict, not a sinner’s choice; the Hebrew pictures a threshing-sledge separating wheat from chaff. This matters, because the gospel never rests our salvation on the strength of our own deciding. The Day belongs to the Lord, the verdict is his, and our safety is the Name we have called upon — the One who decided, before the foundation of the world, to be our refuge.

“Joel reads a locust plague as God’s message. Should we read natural disasters today as God’s judgments on particular people?”

Joel does teach us to hear God’s summons in hard providences — every calamity is a call to *rend your heart*. But be careful not to go further than the text and assign specific disasters to specific sins; the Lord Jesus himself refused that move when the tower of Siloam fell, turning it instead into a call for all to repent (Luke 13:4–5). The right response to any calamity is never to diagnose your neighbor, but to turn to God yourself.

“If ‘whosoever shall call’ will be saved, doesn’t that make salvation depend on us — and where does that leave God’s grace?”

The calling itself is the gift. The same Spirit Joel promises is the one who moves a trembling sinner to call on the Name at all. So the door is genuinely wide — no one who calls is ever turned away — and yet no one calls except by grace. Do not pit the open invitation against the gift of faith; hold both. The only ones outside the *whosoever* are those who will not call.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 2 — “Who can abide it?” and the work of the law

A strong opener. Ask why the law must be allowed to make us feel that no one can stand before the gospel can be heard as gospel. Press the second half too: what happens to grace when it is offered to people who have never trembled at the Day? This question sets up the whole hour.

Question 3 — Turning because God is already gracious

The theological center. Two repentances can look identical from the outside and differ entirely at the root — one turning to make God gracious, the other because he already is. Let the class sit with the difference; it is the difference between law-driven and gospel-driven repentance, and it changes everything about how we hear *rend your heart*.

Question 5 — The Spirit in the word, not the weather of our hearts

The means-of-grace landing. Joel’s Spirit is poured out, and Peter shows it at work in the preached word, not in private raptures. Draw out why it is good news that the Spirit comes to us in word and sacrament rather than in our shifting feelings — it means our assurance does not rise and fall with our moods.

Question 6 — The Name is the Lord Jesus

The christological landing. Paul reads Joel’s *name of the LORD* as the name of the Lord Jesus (Romans 10:13). Ask what it means for the deity of Christ that the apostle applies the covenant Name to him — and how wide the *whosoever* really is. The only ones shut out are those who refuse to call.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Joel* (*Luther's Works*, vol. 18), strong on the Day of the LORD and the outpoured Spirit.
- ♦ The Augsburg Confession, Article V, on the means of grace — the Holy Spirit is given through the word and sacraments, *not* apart from them. This is the guardrail for Joel 2:28.
- ♦ The Small Catechism, the Third Article with its explanation — “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe... but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel.” Joel 2 in catechism form.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia). Keep it open for its notes on Joel 2 and the Acts 2 and Romans 10 cross-references.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House). Lay-accessible and confessional.
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Joel in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ♦ Pray Joel 2:12–13 as the church's Lenten call to repentance — and hear in *he is gracious and merciful* the reason you may turn at all.
- ♦ Read Joel 2:32 alongside your own Baptism, where the Name was put upon you, and the absolution, where you are delivered again every time you call.

A Final Word

You are teaching the prophet of the Day of the LORD, and a short book with an enormous reach — from a swarm of locusts to Pentecost to the last judgment of the nations. Do not get lost in the field; the plague is a sermon, and its text is the Day. Let the alarm sound, let the class feel the weight of *who can abide it?*, and then turn them toward the gifts that answer it.

Land the class on the two great gifts Joel holds out: the Spirit poured out on all flesh, and the open door of *whosoever shall call*. Tell them that what Moses only wished for is theirs — they have the Spirit, in the word and at the font — and that the Name they call upon is the name of the Lord Jesus, who is himself the LORD.

And tell them where the Day's safety lies: not in the firmness of a decision they once made, but in the Name they have called upon — the One who decided, before the world was, to be their refuge. When the great and terrible Day comes, the trembling sinner with nothing to bring but a cry is delivered, on the spot, by calling on that Name. Teach the locusts; preach the door. Then on to Amos.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FIVE

Let Judgment Run Down as Waters

Amos 1–6 • with Matthew 23:23

A Note to the Teacher

Amos is the most quoted and the most misused of the Twelve, and that double fact should shape how you teach this hour. The verse everyone knows — *let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream* — is regularly torn loose from its book and made a banner for justice as a thing apart, as though God would take social reform in place of faith. Your hardest and most important task is to teach the verse whole: God demands the justice that a living faith produces, never justice in the place of faith.

The other half matters just as much. If it is a deadly error to offer God justice as a substitute for faith, it is an equally deadly error to claim a faith that bears no fruit and call it living. Amos indicts a worship scrupulous about ritual and ruthless toward the poor — people who keep every feast and crush every debtor. The Lord Jesus indicts the very same religion in this session's New Testament text, and tells us the cure: do the weightier matters, *and* do not leave the other undone (Matthew 23:23). Both, not either.

And do not let the thunder bury the gospel. Three times in a single chapter, to a people under sentence, the Judge who roars from Zion says, *Seek me, and ye shall live*. That open door is the heart of the hour. Keep it in view from the start, and the woes become bearable because the class can see where they are headed.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Amos turns the nations' verdict on the covenant people — *you only have I known... therefore I will punish you* — and exposes a worship that keeps every feast and crushes every debtor; but the cure is not justice in place of faith, it is the river of justice that a living faith pours out. Teach the woe so the class feels it, and the open door — *Seek the LORD, and ye shall live* — so they walk through it.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Amos 1–6 — the oracles that circle in on the surrounding nations and then close, shockingly, on Israel herself; the fivefold lament *yet have ye not returned*; the warning that the Day of the LORD is darkness, not light; and the great cry for justice to run down like waters.
- ♦ Read Matthew 23:23, where the Lord Jesus indicts the same scrupulous-ritual, neglected-justice religion — and says *these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*. That single line is the balance the whole session needs.
- ♦ Settle the central interpretation in your own mind before you teach: God does not despise ritual because deeds matter more (that is just another works-righteousness). He despises faithless worship, and the missing fruit of justice is the proof the faith was dead.
- ♦ Have the Augsburg Confession's teaching ready — that God is honored not by works performed to earn his favor, but by faith that receives his mercy and then bears fruit. It is the key to Amos 5.
- ♦ Note the Joel-to-Amos seam: *the LORD will roar from Zion* closes Joel and opens Amos (1:2). The Twelve are one book, and the class met this roar last session.
- ♦ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Amos is easy to misread in two opposite directions, and these three keep the hour on the road between them.

Amos turns the verdict on the covenant people — election is accountability, not exemption.

Amos lets Israel cheer as the oracles circle the surrounding nations — Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab — and then springs the trap, turning the same verdict on Judah and Israel

themselves. It is the oldest work of the law: *thou art the man*. And he states the principle outright: *you only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities* (3:2). Note the *therefore*. Israel expected “I have known you, therefore I will spare you”; God says “I have known you, therefore I will hold you to account.” To be baptized, to sit under the word, to bear the name of God’s people — these are immense gifts, but they are not a charm against the law. The God who knows us most intimately is precisely the God to whom we are most accountable.

God hates faithless worship — but the cure is faith, not a swap of one work for another.

In the name of the LORD, Amos says the unthinkable: *I hate, I despise your feast days... Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs* (5:21–23). This is not God rejecting worship as such — he himself commanded the feasts. It is God rejecting worship offered as a substitute for faith and a cover for injustice, the religion of people who sing the psalms on the Sabbath and sell the poor for a pair of shoes on Monday. Here a confessional ear must hear precisely. He does not despise the feasts because rituals are bad and good deeds are what really count; that would only trade one works-righteousness for another. The deeper point is the one the Augsburg Confession makes about all true worship: God is honored not by works performed to earn his favor, but by faith that receives his mercy. Israel’s feasts were rejected because they were faithless — offered by hearts that tried to manage God rather than trust him.

“Let judgment run down” is the fruit of faith — and a living faith really does produce it.

The famous verse — *let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream* (5:24) — longs for *mishpat* (justice) and *tsedaqah* (righteousness) to flow not as an occasional trickle but as a river that never runs dry. But do not tear it loose and make it a banner for justice apart from faith; that is exactly the social-slogan misreading the Introduction warned against. Cut the river off from its spring — faith in the God who forgives — and you have not the kingdom of God but mere human moralism, which saves no one. And yet the opposite error is just as deadly: a faith that never produces justice, that is *not grieved for the affliction of Joseph* (6:6), is not living faith at all. The Lord Jesus holds both together exactly: *these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone* (Matthew 23:23). The river of justice is the unmistakable mark that faith is alive — never its substitute, and never optional.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:12	The herdsman of Tekoa; the oracles that close on Israel (1–2)
0:12–0:24	You only have I known; yet have ye not returned (3–4)
0:24–0:30	Seek the LORD, and ye shall live — the open door (5:1–15)
0:30–0:44	The Day is darkness; God hates faithless worship; let judgment run down (5:18–24)
0:44–0:50	At ease in Zion — comfort that deadens (6)
0:50–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Amos 7–9 and Session Six

Pacing Tip

The center of gravity is 5:18–24 — the Day as darkness, the rejected worship, and the river of justice. Protect those minutes, and protect the balance: justice as the fruit of faith, never its substitute, and never optional. If time runs short, compress the oracles of chapters one and two to their punchline (*thou art the man*) and do not skip *Seek the LORD, and ye shall live* — the class must not leave Amos without the open door.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Herdsman of Tekoa (1:1–2)

Of all the unlikely men God called, Amos may be the unlikeliest — not a priest, not a prophet's son, not a member of any guild, but a herdsman from Tekoa who dressed sycamore figs for a living, a layman with dirt under his fingernails and no credentials but the call of God. And the LORD took this southern shepherd and sent him north to tell the most prosperous nation of the age that its prosperity was a death sentence. He dates his book to two years before a great earthquake — the ground itself would soon confirm his warning. The lesson worth naming: prosperity is no proof of God's favor, and a booming economy can sit directly atop a fault line about to give way. And the book opens with a sound a shepherd knew — *the LORD will roar from Zion* (1:2) — the very roar that closed Joel, now opening Amos. The Twelve are one book.

Handling Amos's Call

A class may be tempted to make Amos's lay calling a template — "God uses ordinary people, so any of us might be the next prophet." Honor the dignity of the layman (God did pull a herdsman from the flock, and his words are Scripture still), but guard the line: Amos's call was direct, particular, and his own. *I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son* (7:14) rebukes the notion that God speaks only through the credentialed — it does not commission every reader as a freelance prophet. We are not Amos; we are the people to whom his word is preached, and that is a high enough place to stand.

For Three Transgressions, and for Four (1:3–2:16)

Amos works a brilliant rhetorical trap. He pronounces doom on the surrounding nations — *for three transgressions... and for four* — and you can hear Israel cheering each verdict on its enemies. Then, with the crowd warmed up and nodding along, he wheels the same formula onto Judah, and finally onto Israel herself, and the cheering stops. The judgment they were so glad to see fall on others falls hardest on them.

A Useful Phrase for Class

"Amos gets Israel to applaud God's justice — as long as it is aimed at somebody else. Then he turns it around: 'thou art the man.' That is the oldest work of the law, and it is the work we resist most. We love a judgment that lands on the people we already disapprove of. The law has not yet done its work in us until it lands on us."

You Only Have I Known (3:1–8)

Israel's ready defense was its election — surely the chosen people were shielded from judgment. Amos turns the argument inside out (3:2): being known by God is not a license to sin with impunity but a calling that brings the greater responsibility. The household that has heard the most owes the most. This is a word the visible church needs in every age, and not least a comfortable, church culture that assumes its religious heritage will count in its favor at the last. And Amos felt the weight of having to say it: *the lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?* (3:8). He did not choose this errand; the roar compelled it.

Yet Have Ye Not Returned (4:1–13)

Chapter four is a grim litany. Five times the LORD recounts a calamity he sent — famine, drought, blight, pestilence, the sword — and five times comes the same refrain: *yet have ye not returned unto*

me (4:6–11). The refrain reveals the heart behind God's severe providences: every hardship was a summons home, a knock on a bolted door, and every time Israel took the blow and missed its meaning. The chapter ends with the sober summons that follows from a lifetime of ignored summonses: *prepare to meet thy God* (4:12).

Seek the LORD, and Ye Shall Live (5:1–15)

After the thunder, chapter five opens as a funeral dirge over Israel — and straight into that grief the Lord drops a word of pure invitation, repeated like a refrain of mercy answering the refrain of judgment: *Seek ye me, and ye shall live* (5:4); *Seek the LORD, and ye shall live* (5:6); *Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live* (5:14). Three times, seek and live. Into a society under sentence, God holds out the open door he always holds out. The Judge who roars from Zion is, in the same breath, the God who pleads to be sought. And Amos names where the sought-after justice must show — *establish judgment in the gate* (5:15), the town's courtroom, where the poor were routinely robbed by bribed judges. Justice in Amos is never an abstraction; it is the debtor, the gate, the pair of shoes.

Let Judgment Run Down as Waters (5:18–24)

Now the heart of the session. First Amos shatters a comfortable illusion: his hearers longed for the Day of the LORD as their vindication, and he answers, *the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light* (5:18) — the very double edge the Introduction set before the class. There is no escaping the Day by claiming the right pedigree; flee the lion and you meet the bear. Then the unthinkable word that God hates their worship (5:21–23), and finally the cry the whole chapter has built toward: *let judgment run down as waters* (5:24). Teach it with both guardrails up. It is not justice offered in place of faith — cut from its spring it is mere moralism. And it is not optional fruit — a faith that produces no justice is dead. The river of righteousness is the natural overflow of a heart that has sought the Lord and found him gracious.

Handling the Most Misused Verse in Amos

When 5:24 comes up — and it will — say plainly what it is and is not. It is not a charter for a gospel of social improvement that has quietly dropped faith in the God who forgives; that is the misreading the Introduction warned against, and it saves no one. Nor is it a verse a comfortable Christian may wave off because “works don’t save.” The Augsburg Confession holds the balance: faith alone receives mercy, and living faith cannot help but bear fruit. The Lord Jesus said it in one breath — do the weightier matters of judgment, mercy, and faith, *and* do not leave the other undone (Matthew 23:23). Keep the river joined to its spring, and let it flow.

At Ease in Zion (6:1–14)

The sixth chapter holds up the mirror one last time, and the face in it is comfort: *woe to them that are at ease in Zion... that lie upon beds of ivory... that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments* (6:1, 4–6). It is the good life by every standard the world recognizes, and there is no obvious atrocity in the list. Their sin is subtler and, Amos suggests, more dangerous: *but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph* (6:6). They feast while the nation rots, and they feel nothing. That is the peculiar peril of ease — not that comfort is itself a sin, but that comfort can deaden the soul to everything outside its own padded walls. The question Amos presses is not “are you comfortable?” but “are you grieved for the affliction around you?”

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Isn’t Amos the Bible’s social-justice prophet — proof that God cares more about justice than about doctrine or worship?”

That is precisely the misreading to avoid. Amos does not pit justice against faith and worship; he condemns *faithless* worship and demands the justice a *living* faith produces. Cut justice loose from its spring — faith in the God who forgives — and you have mere moralism, which saves no one. The Lord Jesus refused to set the two against each other: do the weightier matters, and do not leave the other undone (Matthew 23:23). Justice is the fruit of faith, never its replacement.

“If God ‘hates’ Israel’s feast days, does that mean ritual and liturgy don’t matter — that he just wants justice instead?”

No — he commanded those feasts himself. What he hates is worship used as a cover for injustice and a substitute for faith. The point is not “ritual bad, deeds good,” which would only trade one works-righteousness for another; it is that true worship is faith receiving mercy, which then bears fruit. Keep your liturgy, by all means — but bring faith to it, and let it overflow into how you treat the debtor at the gate.

“Amos was a layman with no training. Does that mean anyone can stand up and say ‘thus saith the Lord’ today?”

Amos’s call was direct, particular, and his own, and it is not a template for freelance prophecy. What it does is rebuke the notion that God speaks only through the credentialed and comfortable — and it dignifies the calling of the lay teacher and the working believer. But the prophet’s office is

not the believer's ordinary vocation. We are not Amos; we are the people to whom his word is preached, and there is plenty of holy work in that.

“How is a book this full of judgment and woe ‘gospel’?”

The judgment is the law doing its proper work, breaking the comfortable certainty that all is well. But woven straight through the thunder is the open door: *Seek the LORD, and ye shall live*, three times in one chapter, spoken into a society already under sentence. The Judge who roars from Zion is the same God pleading to be sought. As in all the Twelve, the thunder is real, and it is rolling toward mercy.

“Amos condemns the comfortable rich. Is wealth itself the sin?”

Not comfort itself, but comfort that deadens — the people on the ivory beds were *not grieved for the affliction of Joseph* (6:6). The peril of ease is that it can wall the heart off from everyone outside its own padded comfort. The question Amos presses is not whether you are comfortable, but whether you are still moved by the affliction around you — or whether your ease has quietly made you numb.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 2 — “Thou art the man”

A strong opener. Amos lets Israel cheer the judgment of the nations and then turns it on them. Ask where we are most tempted to assume God's judgment is always aimed at someone else — the other party, the other church, the other generation. The law has not done its work in us until it lands on us.

Question 3 — Known, and therefore accountable

Work the *therefore* of 3:2. Why does being chosen and knowing the most bring greater accountability, not exemption? Press it gently toward the church, baptized people in the room — ourselves — who may quietly assume a religious heritage will count in our favor at the last. The gift is real; the presumption is deadly.

Question 5 — Worship God will not accept

The worship-and-faith landing. God hates feasts he himself commanded, when they are offered as a cover for injustice. Bring in the Augsburg Confession — God is honored by faith that receives mercy, not by works performed to earn it — and let the class see why that keeps this from becoming an attack on liturgy. The problem was never the feast; it was the faithless heart bringing it.

Question 6 — The river and its spring

The central landing of the session. Ask how a confessional reading keeps 5:24 from becoming a slogan for justice apart from faith — and why the river of justice is the fruit of faith and never its substitute. Then ask the harder follow-up: what happens to a faith that produces no river at all? Hold both errors up, and let the class feel the narrow road between them.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ◆ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Amos* (Luther's Works, vol. 18).
- ◆ The Augsburg Confession, Article XX (faith and good works), and the Formula of Concord, Article IV (good works) — living faith bears fruit, but the fruit never earns the favor. This is the key to Amos 5.
- ◆ The Apology of the Augsburg Confession on the worship of God — that the highest worship is the faith which lays hold of mercy. Amos 5:21–24 in confessional form.

Commentaries

- ◆ R. Reed Lessing, *Concordia Commentary: Amos* — confessional, christological, and unusually rich on the justice texts. The single best companion for this session.
- ◆ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Amos 5 and the Matthew 23 cross-reference.
- ◆ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House). Lay-accessible and confessional.

Devotional

- ◆ Pray Amos 5:4 — *Seek ye me, and ye shall live* — as the open door spoken to you, and ask the Lord to make your worship overflow in mercy.
- ◆ Sit with 6:6, and pray to be *grieved for the affliction of Joseph* — that your comfort would never deaden you to the need around you.

A Final Word

Amos is the most quoted and most misused of the Twelve, and your hardest task this hour is to keep one verse — *let judgment run down* — from being torn loose into a slogan. Teach it whole: God demands the justice that a living faith produces, never justice in the place of faith. The river must stay joined to its spring.

But teach the other half just as plainly. A faith that produces no justice, that feasts on ivory beds and is *not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*, is not living faith at all. The Lord Jesus said it best when he indicted the same religion Amos did: tithe your mint and cummin if you will, but do not leave the weightier matters — judgment, mercy, and faith — undone. Do both.

And do not let the thunder bury the door. Three times in a single chapter, to a people under sentence, the Judge who roars from Zion says, *Seek me, and ye shall live*. That is the gospel buried in Amos — that the God who knows us most intimately, and holds us most accountable, is the same God pleading to be sought, and giving life to all who seek him. Teach the woe; preach the door. Then on to Amos 7–9, and the booth of David rebuilt.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SIX

The Booth of David Rebuilt

Amos 7–9 · with Acts 15:13–18

A Note to the Teacher

The second half of Amos is mostly vision and confrontation — a basket of summer fruit, a plumbline held against a wall, a showdown with a royal priest — and it ends, after chapter upon chapter of unrelieved thunder, in a single astonishing sunrise. Your task this hour is to walk the class through the hard visions without losing heart, because the whole book has been climbing toward its last five verses: a fallen booth raised, and the nations gathered in.

And those last verses carry the most important guardrail in the volume. Amos's promise to rebuild *the tabernacle of David that is fallen* is the very text James stood up and quoted to settle the early Church's greatest crisis. The New Testament hands us its own reading of Amos 9, and we are not free to invent another. Have Acts 15 open beside Amos 9 all hour; it is the difference between teaching this as gospel and teaching it as a real-estate forecast.

Keep the law and gospel sharp in the visions, too. Amos's pleading turns aside judgment; the plumbline measures but cannot mend; the famine of the word is the bitterest judgment of all; and not one grain is lost in the sifting. Each vision is a small law-and-gospel lesson, and together they set up the sunrise.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Amos ends his thunder in sunrise: the LORD will *raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen* and gather in all the nations — and the apostles tell us this is happening now, in the raising of great David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus, and the ingathering of the Gentiles into the Church. Teach

the visions as law and gospel, and land the hour inside the fulfillment of Amos 9.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Amos 7-9 — the three visions and Amos's intercession, the plumbline, the clash with Amaziah, the famine of the word, the sifting in which not one grain is lost, and the rebuilding of David's booth.
- ◆ Read Acts 15:13-18, where James quotes Amos 9:11-12 to settle whether Gentiles must become Jews to be saved. This is the apostolic key to the whole session, and the guardrail against a dispensational reading.
- ◆ Fix the image of the *tabernacle of David* in your mind: not the grand palace but a fallen booth, a *sukkah*, the house of David collapsed into a lean-to — and the promise to raise that ruin.
- ◆ Have ready the difference between the law that measures and the gospel that mends. The plumbline (7:7-9) is the law in a single image.
- ◆ Recall the four-hundred-year silence after Malachi, broken at last by the Word made flesh; it gives the famine of the word (8:11) its weight.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. The visions are vivid but easy to scatter; these three hold them together and aim them at the sunrise.

The intercessor and the plumbline are law and gospel in pictures.

Twice Amos sees judgment coming and pleads — *by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small* (7:2, 5) — and twice the LORD relents. A man's intercession, grounded not in Israel's worthiness but in its helplessness, turns aside the blow; it points ahead to the Lord Jesus, who ever lives to make intercession for us. But at the third vision Amos does not plead, because one cannot argue with a measurement: the LORD stands with a plumbline against a wall hopelessly out of true (7:7-9). That

is the law — it measures exactly and mends nothing, and it is meant to be felt. We have to know we are genuinely out of plumb before we will look to the one Wall that ever hung true.

The famine of the word is the bitterest judgment — and a warning to the well-churched.

Of all the punishments Amos names, one should chill a Bible-rich people most: *a famine... of hearing the words of the LORD* (8:11). Not a famine of bread but of the word — men staggering from sea to sea seeking it and not finding it. This is the judgment most easily incurred by people surrounded by Bibles they no longer open and sermons they no longer heed. The four-hundred-year silence after Malachi, broken at last by the Word made flesh, is what a famine of the word looks like; teach the class to prize the word they so easily take for granted, lest it be taken away.

The booth of David is rebuilt now, in Christ — read by Acts 15, not by a chart.

Here is the guardrail the whole volume has promised to keep. Amos's sunrise — *I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen* (9:11) — is the very text James quoted at the Jerusalem council, and he read it as fulfilled in his own day: *that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called* (Acts 15:17). Not deferred to a future rebuilt temple, not a program for a restored national kingdom in the land, but accomplished now, in the raising up of great David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus, and the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church through the gospel. The apostles did not read Amos 9 as real estate; we will not either. The fallen booth is rebuilt in the resurrection and reign of the Son of David, and we are living inside its fulfillment.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:18	The intercession and the plumbline — law and gospel in the visions (7)
0:18–0:28	Amos and Amaziah; the famine of the word (7:10–8:14)
0:28–0:36	No escape, and not one grain lost — the sifting (9:1–10)
0:36–0:48	The booth of David rebuilt — Amos 9 and Acts 15
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Obadiah and Session Seven

Pacing Tip

Do not let the visions eat the hour. The sunrise of 9:11–12, read through Acts 15, is the destination, and the class must reach it. If time runs short, compress the plumbline to its point (the law measures but cannot mend) and protect the booth of David and its apostolic interpretation. Whatever you cut, the class must leave knowing they live inside the fulfillment of Amos 9.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

By Whom Shall Jacob Arise? (7:1–6)

Amos sees two judgments rising — a locust swarm, a devouring fire — and both times he throws himself into the breach: *O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small* (7:2). He does not plead Israel's merit; he pleads her helplessness. And both times the LORD relents. Name for the class what this is: intercession that turns aside judgment, a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus, who ever lives to make intercession for those who come to God by him. The mediator standing in the gap is no New Testament invention; here he is, in a herdsman pleading for a small and helpless people.

The Plumbline (7:7–9)

At the third vision Amos falls silent. The LORD stands on a wall with a plumbline in his hand, and against that perfect vertical the wall of Israel shows hopelessly out of true. There is nothing to plead, because one cannot argue with a measurement. This is the law in a single image: it measures exactly, it exposes precisely how far we lean, and it mends nothing at all. Let the class feel the silence — we are meant to know we are out of plumb, with no argument left, before we are pointed to the one Wall that ever hung true.

Amos and Amaziah (7:10–17)

Then a clash that still rings true. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, reports Amos to the king and orders him to take his preaching back to Judah, for *it is the king's chapel* (7:13). There it is: the sanctuary has become an arm of the state, and the prophet who disturbs the powerful must go. Amos answers with his own credentials — *I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son... and the*

LORD *took me as I followed the flock* (7:14–15). Ask the class where the church still feels the pull to be a chaplaincy to power, trimming the word to keep its patrons content.

A Famine of the Word (8:1–14)

The basket of summer fruit puns on the word for *end*: the end is come. And the worst of the coming judgments is not the sword or the drought but a *famine... of hearing the words of the LORD* (8:11) — a silence of God. Press this on a well-churched class: this is the famine a Bible-rich people is most likely to bring on itself, by neglecting the word it has in abundance until the word is withdrawn. The long silence between Malachi and the Baptist is what it looks like when heaven stops speaking; teach the class to treasure what they so easily take for granted.

No Escape, and Not One Grain Lost (9:1–10)

The last vision is terrifying — there is no hiding from the LORD, not in heaven, not in Sheol, not at the bottom of the sea. And yet folded into the threshing is a word of pure comfort: the house of Israel will be sifted *like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth* (9:9). The sieve shakes violently, but the good grain is kept. Connect it to the Lord Jesus' promise that of all the Father gave him he would lose none (John 6:39). Our safety in the shaking is not the strength of our grip on God but the strength of his grip on us.

The Booth of David Rebuilt (9:11–15)

And the thunder ends in sunrise: *in that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen... that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name* (9:11–12). The tabernacle of David is the fallen booth, the house of David collapsed into a lean-to — and the LORD promises to rebuild it in a way that gathers in the nations. Read it exactly as the apostles read it. At the Jerusalem council James quoted this verse to prove that Gentiles need not become Jews to be saved, and he read it as fulfilled then and there, in the raising of David's greater Son and the streaming-in of the Gentiles (Acts 15:16–17). The rebuilt booth is the Church of the risen Christ, and the class is standing inside it.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Doesn’t ‘I will raise up the tabernacle of David’ promise a rebuilt temple and a restored kingdom of Israel in the last days?”

That is the popular reading, but it is not the apostles’. James settled the question in Acts 15 by quoting this very verse and declaring it fulfilled in his own day — in the raising of David’s greater Son and the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church. The booth of David is rebuilt not as a building in the land but as the kingdom of the risen Christ. When the New Testament hands us its own reading of an Old Testament promise, we follow it; we do not hold the promise in reserve for a different fulfillment the apostles never saw.

“How can Amos’s prayer change God’s mind? Doesn’t God already know what he will do?”

Scripture really does say the LORD *repented* at Amos’s pleading (7:3, 6) — not because God is fickle, but because he has genuinely bound himself to hear the prayers of his people, and intercession is one of the means through which he works his will. The mediator standing in the gap is no illusion; it is a true picture of how God deals with us, and it points straight to the one Mediator who ever lives to intercede.

“What exactly is a ‘famine of the word’, and could it happen to us?”

It is God withdrawing his word — the silence of heaven — so that people seek it and cannot find it. And yes, it is the judgment a well-churched people is most likely to incur, precisely because we have so much word that we stop heeding it. The long silence after Malachi is the biblical example. The remedy is not to acquire more Bibles but to hear and treasure the word we already have, while it is still being preached.

“The last vision says no one can escape God. Isn’t that terrifying rather than comforting?”

It is terrifying to the impenitent and comforting to the faithful, like the whole Day of the LORD. For the one fleeing God, there is nowhere to hide. But for the one who belongs to him, the same inescapable God is the one who sifts the corn and lets not the least grain fall — there is nowhere you can fall out of his keeping. The terror and the comfort are the same truth read from two sides.

“Why does Amos, of all books, end so suddenly with hope after so much judgment?”

Because that is the shape of every one of the Twelve: the thunder rolls toward mercy. Amos was sent to break a comfortable certainty that all was well, and the law had to do its full, hard work first. But the last word is never the verdict; it is the booth raised, the nations gathered, the kingdom of David’s Son. The suddenness is the point — grace always arrives as sunrise after a long night.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — Intercession that turns aside judgment

A warm opener. Amos pleads on the ground of Israel's helplessness and the LORD relents. Draw the line to the Lord Jesus, who ever lives to make intercession for us — and let the class feel that the mediator standing in the gap is the heart of the gospel, not a curiosity of the prophets.

Question 2 — The plumbline that measures but cannot mend

The law-and-gospel center of the visions. Ask why it matters to feel that we are genuinely out of true before we are pointed to the one Wall that hung plumb. A class that grasps this grasps why the law cannot save and why that is good news, not bad.

Question 4 — The famine of the word

A searching question for any church class. Why is this judgment most easily incurred by people surrounded by Bibles? Let the class sit with the four-hundred-year silence and the relief of its breaking by the Word made flesh — and ask what it would mean to prize the word they already have.

Question 6 — Living inside the fulfillment of Amos 9

The guardrail landing. James read the rebuilt booth as the Church, not a future earthly kingdom. Ask how it changes things to know we are not waiting for Amos 9 to be fulfilled but living inside its fulfillment — every Gentile believer is the proof James pointed to.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Amos* (Luther's Works, vol. 18), with attention to the visions and the closing promise.
- ♦ The Book of Acts, chapter 15 — read the whole council narrative; it is the inspired commentary on Amos 9 and the charter against requiring the law for salvation.

- ◆ The Augsburg Confession, Articles V and VII, on the word and the church — the booth of David rebuilt is the one holy Christian church gathered by the gospel.

Commentaries

- ◆ R. Reed Lessing, *Concordia Commentary: Amos* — especially strong on the visions and on Amos 9 read through Acts 15.
- ◆ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Amos 9 and the Acts 15 cross-reference.
- ◆ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).

Devotional

- ◆ Pray Amos 9:11–12 and Acts 15:16–17 together — thank God that the booth of David is already rebuilt and that you, a Gentile, have been gathered in.
- ◆ Sit with 8:11 and pray for a hunger for the word you have in abundance — that it would never become a famine through neglect.

A Final Word

You have led the class through some of the hardest visions in the Twelve — the plumbline, the basket of summer fruit, the inescapable LORD — and you arrive, as Amos does, at a sudden and total sunrise. Teach the visions honestly; let the law measure and the famine warn. But know where you are going.

Land the class inside Amos 9. The fallen booth of David is not a ruin awaiting some future restoration; it is rebuilt already, in the resurrection and reign of great David's greater Son, and its rebuilding is proved every time a Gentile is gathered into the Church. James saw it happening in his own day; we are deeper inside that same fulfillment than he was.

So do not let the class leave waiting for a kingdom that has already come. The same LORD who sifts the corn and loses not one grain has raised the booth of David and gathered the nations under his name — and your class, every Gentile soul in the room, is the living evidence. Teach the thunder; preach the sunrise. Then on to Obadiah, and the pride of Edom.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SEVEN

The Pride of Edom

Obadiah · with Genesis 25:19–34 and Revelation 11:15

A Note to the Teacher

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament — a single chapter, twenty-one verses, one sustained oracle against Edom — and it is easy to treat as a footnote. Do not. To teach it well you have to begin a thousand years before it, in a tent where two brothers were born minutes apart and spent their lives at war: Jacob and Esau, whose descendants, Israel and Edom, never stopped fighting. The whole book turns on that family quarrel, and the quarrel turns out to be with God.

The book has two great movements, and you should teach them as the two they are. The first is the bringing-down of a proud nation that thought itself untouchable — *who shall bring me down?* The second, breaking in near the end, is the deliverance on Mount Zion and the announcement that closes the prophecy and reaches to the last page of the Bible: *the kingdom shall be the LORD's*. Two mountains stand against each other in this little book, and they are law and gospel set on two hills.

Keep the contrast in view all hour. Edom's mountain is the height a proud heart builds for itself and is cast down from; Zion is the hill God chose, where grace comes down to a people who could never climb. We are saved on the second mountain and never on the first — and that is the gospel buried in the Bible's smallest book.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Edom trusted its high fortress — *who shall bring me down?* — and the LORD answers that no nest among the stars escapes him; but *upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and the kingdom shall be the LORD's*. Teach the two mountains as law and gospel, and end where Obadiah and the book of

Revelation both end: the only kingdom left standing belongs to the Lord.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Obadiah straight through — it takes three minutes — and then read it again, watching for the turn at verse 17, where judgment on Esau gives way to deliverance on Zion.
- ◆ Read Genesis 25:19–34, the birth of the twins and the sale of the birthright. Obadiah assumes that whole story; the bowl of red lentil stew is in the background of every verse.
- ◆ Read Revelation 11:15. Obadiah's last clause, *the kingdom shall be the LORD's*, is the same word as the great hymn of Revelation — the goal of all prophecy.
- ◆ Have Hebrews 12:18–24 ready — the two mountains, Sinai and Zion, law and gospel. It is the New Testament's own version of Obadiah's two-mountain picture.
- ◆ Recall Luther's contrast between the theology of glory (which climbs) and the theology of the cross (which receives). Edom is the theology of glory in one nation.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Obadiah is brief, but these three open it onto the whole gospel.

The quarrel is older than Obadiah — and it is with the God who chooses by grace.

The twins struggled in the womb, and the LORD said *the elder shall serve the younger* (Genesis 25:23). The promise ran through Jacob — not because Jacob was better (he was a schemer) but because God chooses by grace. And Esau, for his part, despised the birthright, selling the sacred place in the line of promise for a single bowl of stew. So Edom's ancient grievance against Israel is, at bottom, a grievance against grace itself — against a God who gives the inheritance to the unworthy younger and not to the deserving elder. Teach the class to hear, under the family feud, the oldest offense the proud heart takes: that God saves by grace and not by merit.

Pride is the root sin — and a liar — and the theology of glory it builds will be brought down.

The oracle names the sin precisely, and it is not first violence but pride: *the pride of thine heart hath deceived thee... that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down?* (v. 3). Mark what Obadiah says pride does — it *deceives*. Pride is not only a sin but a liar; it whispers that we are safe when we are not, that we stand when we are about to fall, that the rules binding other men do not bind us. Edom's fortress in the rock is the theology of glory in stone: confidence that fortifies itself against every comer. And the LORD answers with terrible calm: *though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down* (v. 4). Christian ears should hear an older echo — *I will ascend into heaven... I will be like the most High* (Isaiah 14:13–14) — the original lie of the one who fell. Pride is the first sin, the creature's refusal to be a creature.

Two mountains — Esau and Zion — are law and gospel; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

When the light breaks at verse 17, it breaks on a second mountain: *upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness*. Two mountains now stand against each other — the mount of Esau, high and proud and brought down, and Mount Zion, the hill the LORD chose, where deliverance is given. The writer to the Hebrews draws the same two mountains: the Sinai that made Moses quake, and *mount Sion... the city of the living God* with its better-speaking blood (Hebrews 12:18–24). They are law and gospel set on two hills — man's pride climbing toward a heaven it can never reach and being cast down, and God's grace coming down to a people who could never climb and lifting them up. And the book ends at the goal of all prophecy: *the kingdom shall be the LORD's* (v. 21) — the very word Revelation sings, *the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ* (Revelation 11:15).

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:14	The ancient quarrel — Jacob and Esau, grace and merit (Genesis 25)
0:14–0:26	The pride that deceives; no nest escapes (vv. 1–9)
0:26–0:34	Violence against the brother; “as thou hast done” (vv. 10–16)
0:34–0:48	Deliverance on Mount Zion; the kingdom is the LORD's (vv. 17–21)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Jonah 1–2 and Session Eight

Pacing Tip

The turn at verse 17 is everything; protect the minutes for the two mountains and the closing clause. If time runs short, compress the catalog of Edom's crimes to its principle (*as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee*) and spend your time on Mount Zion and *the kingdom shall be the LORD's*. The class must leave on the second mountain, not the first.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

An Ancient Quarrel (the background in Genesis 25)

Begin before the book. Edom descended from Esau, the twin who came out of the womb grasping Jacob's heel, and the two nations were at war for a thousand years. The promise ran through Jacob by grace; Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of stew, despising what he could not be bothered to value. Note too the lesson in the prophet himself: *Obadiah* means *servant of the LORD*, and we know nothing else about him — the messenger is forgotten, the message endures. It is a useful corrective for an age obsessed with the platform of the preacher: the word's authority never depended on the fame of the one who brought it.

The Pride of Thine Heart Hath Deceived Thee (vv. 1–9)

Edom's homeland was a fortress of rose-red rock, cities carved into cliffs, reachable only through gorges a handful of men could hold. Living up among the eagles, Edom felt untouchable, and the feeling became a creed: *who shall bring me down?* But pride, Obadiah says, *deceives* — it blinds the very eyes that might have seen the danger coming. The LORD answers that no altitude escapes him; the God who made the stars can pluck a nest from among them with a finger. Help the class hear, behind Edom's boast, the ancient lie of Isaiah 14 — the will to climb, to exalt the self, to be as God — the root sin beneath all the others.

Thy Violence Against Thy Brother (vv. 10–16)

Edom's particular guilt was the guilt of the gloating bystander who became a predator. When Jerusalem fell, Edom *stood on the other side*, watched its brother's calamity with satisfaction, and then joined in the looting and cut down the fugitives. The verdict is exact: *as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee* (v. 15). Press the class gently here — the secret pleasure at a rival's downfall is a

sin we excuse easily and Scripture does not (Proverbs 24:17–18). And note the freedom in the verdict's form: judgment belongs to the LORD, *vengeance is mine... saith the LORD* (Romans 12:19), which means the wronged need not become Edom in order to answer Edom.

Deliverance upon Mount Zion (vv. 17–20)

And the light breaks. Obadiah lifts his eyes from the doomed mount of Esau to another mountain, and everything changes: *upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions* (v. 17). The reversal is complete — the dispossessed inherit, the victim receives back more than was looted. Teach the two mountains as the Bible in miniature: every height the proud heart builds will be brought low, and the only safety in the universe is the mountain the LORD chose for his own dwelling. On the one, man's pride; on the other, God's grace. We are saved on the second, never the first.

And the Kingdom Shall Be the LORD's (v. 21)

The book ends on a line that lifts the whole Book of the Twelve toward its goal: *and saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's*. The saviours are the deliverers God raised up on Zion — judges and kings, each small and temporary and flawed, every one pointing beyond himself to the one Savior who came up on Mount Zion, the Lord Jesus, who entered the holy city not to loot it like Edom but to die for it. The writer to the Hebrews says we who believe have already come to that Zion (Hebrews 12:22). And the final clause is the goal of all prophecy: after every Edom and Babylon and empire has set its nest among the stars and crumbled to stubble, one kingdom remains, and it is the Lord's. Luther drew the comfort out in the catechism: when we pray *Thy kingdom come*, we are not asking God to begin something that might fail; his kingdom comes of itself, and we pray only that it would come to us also.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Isn't it unfair that God chose Jacob over Esau before they had done anything — even ‘loved Jacob, and hated Esau’?”

The choice was by grace, which is exactly what offends the proud heart. God did not choose Jacob because Jacob was better — he was the schemer of the pair. And Esau was no helpless victim of the choice; he *despised* his birthright, trading the line of promise for a bowl of stew. The strong

language of love and hatred (Romans 9:13) is the Bible's way of saying God's saving purpose runs on grace, not merit — and Edom's real quarrel, like every proud heart's, is with grace itself.

“Why a whole book against one small, long-gone nation? What does Edom have to do with us?”

Edom is more than a nation; it is a portrait. The pride that says *who shall bring me down?*, the gloating that watches a brother's fall with satisfaction, the high fortress built against every reckoning — these live in every heart, not just in the clefts of one ancient rock. And the two-mountain contrast at the book's end is the whole gospel: the height we climb and are cast from, and the hill grace comes down to. Obadiah is small; what it is about is not.

“Obadiah is full of vengeance — ‘as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee.’ Is that a Christian way to think?”

Notice whose vengeance it is: *vengeance is mine... saith the LORD* (Romans 12:19). The whole point is that judgment belongs to God and not to us — which is precisely what frees the wronged from having to take it into their own hands. The danger, always, is that the victim becomes another Edom in order to answer Edom. Leaving the reckoning to God is both sobering (it is coming) and freeing (it is not ours to carry out).

“Who are the ‘saviours’ who come up on Mount Zion (v. 21)?”

The word is plural — the deliverers God raised up through Israel's history, the judges and kings who rescued his people in their need. But every one of them was small and temporary, a flawed savior pointing past himself. The line runs up to the one Savior who came up on Mount Zion, the Lord Jesus, and who now gathers deliverance and holiness on the true Zion, the city of the living God, into which he draws the nations.

“Has ‘the kingdom shall be the LORD's’ already happened, or is it still future?”

Both, on the Day's two horizons. It is already true: the Lord Jesus reigns, and we who believe *have come* to Mount Zion (Hebrews 12:22). And it is not yet complete: the kingdoms of this world have not all visibly become his, and we wait for the day Revelation sings (11:15). Luther's catechism holds both — God's kingdom comes of itself, and we pray it would come to us, and at last come in fullness.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — The promise that ran by grace, not merit

A strong opener that reaches back to Genesis. The promise ran through Jacob by grace, and Edom's real quarrel was with the God who chooses that way. Ask the class where they feel the same offense — the quiet preference for a God who rewards the deserving over a God who saves the unworthy.

Question 3 — The collapse of the theology of glory

The LORD strips Edom of every security — height, wealth, allies, wisdom. Name it for what it is: the theology of glory, confidence that fortifies itself against all comers, brought down. Ask what securities we build in place of God, and how they fare on the Day of the LORD.

Question 5 — Vengeance belongs to the LORD

A freeing question for anyone carrying a wound. Judgment is God's, not ours — *vengeance is mine* — which both assures the wronged that the reckoning is real and frees them from having to become Edom to deliver it. Let the class feel how much lighter it is to hand the case to the Judge.

Question 6 — The kingdom, and the way down

The gospel landing. Self-exalting Edom climbed and was cast down; the Lord Jesus reached the throne by the way down, humbling himself to death (Philippians 2:6–8). Ask what it looks like to come down off our own mountain and receive the inheritance as a gift — which is the only way anyone ever receives it.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ◆ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets II: Obadiah* (Luther's Works, vol. 18).
- ◆ Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, on the theology of the cross against the theology of glory — Edom is the theology of glory in one nation, and the cross is Mount Zion.

- ♦ The Small Catechism, the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer (*Thy kingdom come*), where Luther draws the comfort out of Obadiah's last clause.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Obadiah and the Genesis 25 and Revelation 11 cross-references.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Obadiah in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ♦ Pray Obadiah 21 with Revelation 11:15 — rest in the one kingdom that will be left standing, and ask that it come to you.
- ♦ Read Philippians 2:5–11 against Obadiah 3–4 — the way up that is cast down, and the way down that is exalted — and ask the Lord to bring you down off your own high places.

A Final Word

You are teaching the smallest book in the Old Testament, and its reach is the whole Bible. Two mountains stand against each other in twenty-one verses — the mount of Esau, high and proud and brought down, and Mount Zion, where deliverance and holiness are given as a gift. Teach the first mountain honestly; let the proud heart hear *who shall bring me down?* in its own voice.

But land the class on the second mountain. We are not saved on the height we climb but on the hill grace comes down to — and the writer to the Hebrews says we have already come to it, to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and to the Lord Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. The reversal Obadiah promised is the reversal we already live in.

And send them out on the last clause. After every Edom has set its nest among the stars and crumbled to stubble, one kingdom remains, and it is the Lord's. The Lord Jesus reached its throne not by climbing but by coming down all the way to a cross — and he gives the inheritance to all who will come down off their mountains and receive it. Teach the pride; preach the kingdom. Then on to Jonah, and the sign of the prophet in the deep.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION EIGHT

The Sign of the Prophet in the Deep

Jonah 1–2 · with Matthew 12:38–41

A Note to the Teacher

No book in the Twelve is more loved and more misread than Jonah. It has been turned into a children's cartoon and a fable about prejudice, a story whose fish no grown person is expected to believe. You will teach it differently, and the reason is not stubbornness but the Lord Jesus himself, who treated the account as plain history and hung the sign of his own resurrection on it. Settle that in your own mind before you walk in: we read Jonah as history on the authority of the One who is himself the Truth.

But here is the balance the hour needs. Affirm the history — and then do not spend all your strength on the fish. The great trap with Jonah is to win the argument about the fish and never arrive at the sign. The weight of the book is not marine biology; it is a man swallowed by death and brought up alive on the third day, a prophecy of the cross and the empty tomb acted out eight centuries in advance. Get the class past the fish and onto the sign.

And teach the runaway with sympathy, because he is us. Jonah fled not from fear of Nineveh but from fear that God might forgive it. The sin at the heart of this book is the wish to ration God's mercy and keep it from an enemy — and that wish is in every heart in the room.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

A disobedient prophet is cast into the deep, cries from the belly of hell *Salvation is of the LORD*, and comes up alive on the third day — and the Lord Jesus says this is the one sign he will give a sign-hungry world: the sign of his own death and resurrection. Teach Jonah as history, get the

class past the fish to the sign, and let the reluctant prophet make the willing Christ shine the brighter.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Jonah 1–2 — the call and the flight, the storm and the sleeping prophet, the casting into the deep, the prayer from the belly of the fish, and the confession *Salvation is of the LORD*.
- ◆ Read Matthew 12:38–41, where the Lord Jesus refuses every sign but the sign of Jonah and treats both the fish and the men of Nineveh as real history.
- ◆ Settle the reading question first: we hold the history of Jonah because the Lord Jesus held it, and because he bound his own resurrection to it. The type and the antitype stand or fall together.
- ◆ Have Romans 6:3–4 ready — in Baptism we were buried and raised with Christ. Jonah's descent and rising is the believer's, too.
- ◆ Decide in advance how you will get the class past the fish quickly. Affirm it, then move to the sign; do not let the hour drown in the question of the whale.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Jonah is short and strange; these three keep the strangeness pointed at the gospel.

We read Jonah as history — on the authority of the One who is the Truth.

The Lord Jesus treated the account as plain history. He spoke of Jonah's three days in the deep as the pattern of his own three days in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40), and of the men of Nineveh as real men who really repented and will really rise at the judgment (12:41) — which they could hardly do if they never existed. And he hung the announcement of his own resurrection on the reality of Jonah's. If Jonah never went down into the deep, the sign is hung on nothing, and a man does not stake his rising on a fable. The type and the antitype stand or fall together; to

dissolve the history of Jonah is to corrode the foundation under Easter morning. We hold the one because we hold the other.

The sign of Jonah is the sign of the cross and the empty tomb.

When a sign-hungry generation demanded a wonder, the Lord Jesus refused them every sign but one — *the sign of the prophet Jonas* (Matthew 12:39). The whole strange episode in the deep was a prophecy acted out in advance: the three days in the belly a picture of the three days in the heart of the earth, the coming-up-alive a picture of the resurrection. This is the theology of the cross again, the same truth the class met on the mount of Esau: God does not validate himself by the glory the world craves. To a crowd that wanted fireworks he offered an empty tomb — and the empty tomb is offered still, not as a spectacle to dazzle the curious, but as a sign to be believed by those who, like Jonah, have been to the bottom and learned that salvation comes from above.

“Salvation is of the LORD” — and the reluctant Jonah makes the willing Christ shine.

At the bottom of the sea the runaway arrives at the confession the whole ordeal was meant to teach — *Salvation is of the LORD* (2:9), the gospel in three words. The prophet who tried to manage God's mercy by fleeing it, who wanted to ration salvation and keep it from his enemies, learns that salvation is not his to dispense or withhold; it comes down from above, and the drowning man has nothing to contribute but the cry. (The Hebrew word here, *yeshuah*, is the very root of the name the angel would give the child of Bethlehem — the name that means *the LORD saves*.) And mark the difference that holds the gospel: Jonah went down into the deep unwillingly, dragged by his own sin; the Lord Jesus went down into death willingly, with no sin of his own, cast into the deep of God's judgment for the sins of others. The reluctant type makes the willing Savior shine the brighter.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:12	The word and the flight; why Jonah ran (1:1–3)
0:12–0:22	The storm, the sleeping prophet, the praying pagans (1:4–16)
0:22–0:32	Down to the bottoms of the mountains; Salvation is of the LORD (2)
0:32–0:44	Reading Jonah as history; the sign of the prophet Jonas (Matthew 12)

0:44–0:54

Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance

0:54–1:00

Closing prayer; assign Jonah 3–4 and Session Nine

Pacing Tip

Guard against the fish swallowing the hour. Affirm the history briefly and firmly — on the Lord Jesus' authority — and protect your minutes for the sign: the three days in the deep, the coming-up alive, the cross and empty tomb it pictures. If you must cut, compress the storm; do not cut *Salvation is of the LORD* or the sign of Jonah. Those are the gospel of the session.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Word and the Flight (1:1–3)

The LORD sends Jonah east to Nineveh, the great cruel capital of Assyria; Jonah books passage west to Tarshish, as far as a ship could carry him in the opposite direction. Do not let the class assume cowardice. Jonah will tell us himself in chapter four why he ran: not because he feared Nineveh, but because he feared the LORD might forgive it. He wanted to keep God's mercy penned up, rationed, away from his enemy — and so he fled the God whose mercy he could not control. That is the sin at the root of the book, and it is more uncomfortable than fear, because it is more like us.

The Storm and the Sleeping Prophet (1:4–6)

The LORD hurls a great wind, and a striking reversal unfolds: the pagan sailors cry each to his god while the prophet of the true God lies fast asleep below deck. The man with the orthodox creed — *I fear the LORD... which hath made the sea and the dry land* (1:9) — is the one in open flight from it, and the heathen are ahead of him in prayer. Name the sobering lesson: it is entirely possible to hold the right confession and live in rebellion against it, to recite the creed while running from the God it names. The sleeping prophet is a mirror a church class will not enjoy, and should not.

Cast into the Deep (1:7–16)

The lot falls on Jonah, and he knows the storm is his. His own solution is grimly right: *take me up, and cast me forth into the sea... so shall the sea be calm* (1:12). One man is thrown into the deep, the storm falls on him alone, and the others are saved. Pause here, because this is the deep logic of the gospel drawn in advance — one perishing that many might live. Jonah is a reluctant and guilty version of it; the willing and innocent fulfillment comes when another is cast into a deeper deep so that the whole storm-tossed world might be brought to calm.

Down to the Bottoms of the Mountains (2:1–6)

From inside the fish Jonah prays, and his prayer is woven of the Psalms — the words of the church put in the mouth of a man at the bottom of the world. *Out of the belly of hell cried I* (2:2); *the weeds were wrapped about my head* (2:5). He has gone as low as a living man can go, and from that lowest place the cry rises and is heard. Teach the class that there is no depth from which the believer's cry cannot reach God — Jonah prayed from a place he had no business surviving, and the prayer came up *into thine holy temple*.

Salvation Is of the LORD (2:7–10)

The prayer rises to its confession: *they that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy... Salvation is of the LORD* (2:8–9). A *lying vanity* is an idol, anything we trust to save that cannot — and the idolater, Jonah says, *forsakes his own mercy*: the mercy was there, held out, and by clutching a vanity that could not save he let go of the only thing that could. Every idol we clutch is a mercy we drop. And the runaway who ran from mercy learns at the bottom that salvation is not his to ration; it is wholly the LORD's, start to finish. The fish vomits him onto dry land — grace, even in that.

The Sign of the Prophet Jonas (Matthew 12:38–41)

Now lay Matthew beside Jonah. The religious leaders demanded a sign, and the Lord Jesus gave them only this one: *as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth* (12:40). The whole episode in the deep turns out to have been a sign hung in history eight centuries early. And mark both the likeness and the difference: Jonah went down unwillingly, for his own sin, and came up a chastened man; the Lord Jesus went down willingly, for the sins of others, and came up the conqueror of death. The sign of Jonah is the sign of the cross and the empty tomb — and it is the only sign a sign-hungry world is given.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Do I really have to believe a fish swallowed a man? Isn’t Jonah just a parable?”

The Lord Jesus treated it as history and staked his own resurrection on it — he made Jonah’s three days in the deep the very pattern of his three days in the grave (Matthew 12:40), and spoke of the men of Nineveh as real people who will rise at the judgment. The type and the antitype stand or fall together. You cannot quietly turn Jonah into a fable and keep the resurrection it points to; to dissolve the one is to corrode the foundation under Easter.

“But won’t the class get stuck arguing about the fish?”

They will if you let them, which is exactly the trap. Affirm the history once, firmly, on the Lord Jesus’ authority — and then move. The book’s weight is not the fish but the sign: a man swallowed by death and brought up alive, a prophecy of the cross and the empty tomb. Spend your strength there. Winning the fish and missing the sign is losing the book.

“Why did Jonah run? Was he simply afraid of Nineveh?”

No — and this is the uncomfortable heart of the book. He ran because he feared the LORD *might forgive* Nineveh, his enemy. He says so plainly in chapter four. He wanted God’s mercy rationed and penned up, reserved for his own people and withheld from theirs. That is a far harder sin to admit than cowardice, because every one of us has wished, at some point, to keep God’s mercy from someone we thought did not deserve it.

“How can a disobedient runaway be a ‘type’ of Christ?”

By likeness and by difference together, and the difference is half the gospel. Like Christ, Jonah went down into the deep and came up alive on the third day. Unlike Christ, he went down unwillingly, for his own sin, dragged by his own disobedience — while the Lord Jesus went down willingly, sinless, for the sins of others. The flawed type does not embarrass the antitype; it makes the perfect, willing Savior shine the brighter against it.

“Why does the book make such a point of the sleeping prophet and the praying sailors?”

To hold up an uncomfortable mirror. The man with the true creed is asleep below deck while the pagans pray; the right confession is held in open rebellion. It is a warning to every church person that one can recite *I fear the LORD* and be in full flight from him. The heathen sailors, crying out in their fear, were nearer to God in that hour than the prophet who knew his name.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — Running from a God who might forgive an enemy

A searching opener. Jonah fled because he feared mercy would reach Nineveh. Ask where we, too, wish to ration God's mercy — to keep it for the people we approve and withhold it from the ones we do not. The question implicates everyone, which is why it opens the hour so well.

Question 3 — The fish, and the sign

The methodological question, and worth raising openly. Why is it a mistake to spend all our strength defending the fish and never arrive at the sign? Let the class locate the true weight of the book — not in the marine biology but in the death and resurrection it pictures — so they will not lose the gospel defending the frame.

Question 4 — One cast in, that many might live

The gospel center. One man is thrown into the deep and the others are saved. Draw out the pattern — one perishing that many might live — and how the reluctant, guilty Jonah makes the willing, innocent Christ shine the brighter. This is the question that turns the storm into Calvary.

Question 6 — Already gone down, already brought up

The baptismal landing. The Lord Jesus made the three-days-and-rising of Jonah the sign of his own death and resurrection — and we were baptized into that descent and rising (Romans 6:3–4). Ask how it changes daily life to know you have already gone down into the deep in Christ and been brought up alive, and that the same word will one day call your body from the grave.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on Jonah* (*Luther's Works*, vol. 19). Luther loved this book and preached its gospel warmly; his treatment of the prayer from the deep is especially rich.

- ♦ The Small Catechism on Baptism, with Romans 6:3–4 — the descent into the deep and the rising are the believer's own, given in the font.
- ♦ The Apology of the Augsburg Confession on repentance — *Salvation is of the LORD* is the confession of a man who has nothing to bring but the cry.

Commentaries

- ♦ R. Reed Lessing, *Concordia Commentary: Jonah* — confessional, christological, and excellent on reading Jonah as history and as a sign of Christ.
- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Jonah and the Matthew 12 cross-reference.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).

Devotional

- ♦ Pray Jonah 2 as your own — the prayer from the bottom of the world that is still heard *into thine holy temple* — and confess with the prophet, *Salvation is of the LORD*.
- ♦ Read Romans 6:3–4 and remember your Baptism as the descent and rising you have already passed through in Christ.

A Final Word

You are teaching the most caricatured book in the Twelve, and your first task is to take it back from the cartoon. We read Jonah as history because the One who is himself the Truth read it that way and bound his own resurrection to it. Affirm that plainly — and then, just as plainly, refuse to let the fish swallow the hour.

Get the class to the sign. The whole strange descent into the deep was a prophecy acted out: three days down, and up alive on the third — the cross and the empty tomb, drawn eight centuries early. To a world demanding fireworks, the Lord Jesus offered only this, and offers it still: not a spectacle, but a buried and risen Savior, to be believed by those who have been to the bottom.

And send them home on the runaway's confession. *Salvation is of the LORD* — it cannot be earned, steered, or hoarded; it comes down from above to people who have nothing to bring but a cry. Jonah went down unwillingly for his own sin; the Lord Jesus went down willingly for ours, and in Baptism he has already taken the class down into that deep and brought them up alive. Teach the flight; preach the sign. Then on to Jonah 3–4, and a greater than Jonah.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION NINE

A Greater than Jonah

Jonah 3–4 · with Matthew 12:41 and Luke 11:30–32

A Note to the Teacher

The first half of Jonah was about a prophet who would not go; the second half is about a prophet who went, succeeded beyond any preacher's dream — a whole city repenting — and was furious about it. This is the strangest turn in the book and the most searching, because it finally tells us why Jonah ran. He fled not from fear but from knowledge: he *knew* the LORD was gracious, and he could not bear the thought of that grace reaching his enemy.

So the climax of the book is not the repentance of Nineveh but the heart of God laid open over it — *should not I spare Nineveh, that great city?* The question hangs in the air, unanswered, because it is aimed at the reader. And the New Testament answers it by setting beside the reluctant prophet one who was not reluctant at all: *a greater than Jonas is here*, the willing Savior who wept over the city he came to save.

Teach this hour with one eye on the class's own heart, because Jonah is a mirror. Every believer who has preferred to keep the gospel among people like himself, who has felt a flicker of reluctance to see mercy reach someone undeserving, is looking at his own reflection in this angry prophet under a withered vine.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Jonah confesses at last that he ran because he knew God was *gracious and merciful* and could not bear that grace reaching Nineveh — and God answers with the question that ends the book, *should not I spare Nineveh?* Teach the heart of God laid bare over a lost city, and set beside the reluctant

prophet the *greater than Jonas*, the willing Savior who came to seek and save the lost.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Jonah 3–4 — the word a second time, the city that repented, God relenting, Jonah's angry confession, the gourd and the worm, and the unanswered question that closes the book.
- ◆ Read Matthew 12:41 and Luke 11:30–32, where the Lord Jesus calls himself *a greater than Jonas* and warns that Nineveh's repentance will condemn a harder generation.
- ◆ Set Jonah 4:2 beside Joel 2:13. Both quote the same ancient creed of mercy from Exodus 34:6 — Joel to call sinners home, Jonah as a grievance. The same truth comforts the humble and offends the hard.
- ◆ Notice that the book ends on a question, not a resolution. Decide how you will leave that question hanging for the class rather than tying it off too neatly.
- ◆ Have ready the missionary thread: God's heart for the nations did not begin at Pentecost; it runs straight through Jonah, a reluctant servant sent to a Gentile city.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. The chapters are short and the story familiar; these three keep it from becoming a mere morality tale.

The same gospel that comforts the humble offends the hard.

At last Jonah tells us why he fled: *I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil* (4:2). He did not run because he doubted God's mercy; he ran because he was certain of it and could not bear that it might reach Nineveh. And mark the words — they are the great self-revelation God gave Moses on the mountain (Exodus 34:6), the most precious description of the divine character in the Old Testament. The class met these very words in Joel, set forward as the ground of all hope; Jonah cites the identical creed as a grievance.

The same truth that is the gospel itself to a humbled heart becomes, to a hard one, a thing to resent. That is a sobering diagnostic: what we do with the mercy of God reveals what we are.

“Should not I spare Nineveh?” is the heart of God laid bare.

God gives the lesson through a plant. A gourd grows up overnight to shade the sulking prophet, and a worm kills it overnight, and Jonah is furious enough to die over a weed. Then the question that has been waiting since verse one: *thou hast had pity on the gourd... and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?* (4:10–11). If Jonah’s small heart could break over a vine he neither made nor grew, how much more shall the great heart of God be moved over a city of a hundred and twenty thousand souls — the little children who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and even, tenderly, the cattle. Here is the pity of God in its full breadth, and the book ends with it hanging in the air, unanswered, aimed straight at us.

A greater than Jonah — the willing Savior beside the reluctant prophet.

The Lord Jesus took up this little book and set himself beside its prophet: *the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here* (Matthew 12:41). A pagan city repented at eight grudging words from a preacher who wanted it destroyed; how much more should those who stand before the willing Savior repent — for here is not a reluctant Jonah but the very Mercy of God in person, come to seek and save the lost. And the book searches every believer who has preferred to keep the gospel among people like himself: the mercy of God is not our private possession to guard but a flood meant to reach every Nineveh on earth — including the ones we would rather see judged.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:16	The word a second time; the city that repented; God relents (3)
0:16–0:28	Jonah’s angry confession — “I knew that thou art a gracious God” (4:1–4)
0:28–0:40	The gourd, the worm, and “should not I spare Nineveh?” (4:5–11)
0:40–0:48	A greater than Jonah — the willing Savior (Matthew 12:41)

0:48–0:56

Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance

0:56–1:00

Closing prayer; assign Micah 1–5 and Session Ten

Pacing Tip

The destination is the unanswered question and the greater Jonah, not the repentance of the city. If time runs short, compress chapter three — the city repents, God relents — and protect the prophet's confession (4:2) and God's closing question (4:11). And resist the urge to resolve the book; let *should not I spare Nineveh?* hang over the class the way Scripture leaves it.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Word a Second Time (3:1–4)

The word of the LORD comes to Jonah *the second time* — a small phrase carrying a large mercy. The God Jonah fled does not write him off; he calls the runaway again. Note that the second commission is identical to the first: God does not lower the bar for his chastened prophet, but he does give him another chance to obey it. And Jonah goes, and preaches eight blunt words of doom — the briefest, barest sermon imaginable — with no promise of mercy attached at all.

The City That Repented (3:5–10)

And the great cruel city repents — from the king on his throne down to the cattle in their stalls, sackcloth and fasting and a desperate hope: *who can tell if God will turn and repent?* (3:9). The repentance is real, and God relents. Let the class sit with the scandal of it: the worst city of the ancient world, Israel's feared enemy, turns at the barest preaching and is spared — while the covenant people, with prophet after prophet, would not. The men of Nineveh, the Lord Jesus says, will rise to condemn a harder generation.

I Knew That Thou Art a Gracious God (4:1–4)

And now the prophet's heart is exposed. The salvation of a hundred and twenty thousand souls *displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry* (4:1). He had wanted the fireworks of judgment, not the quiet of mercy. And out of his anger comes the confession he had hidden since chapter one: he fled because he knew God was gracious and feared that grace would reach his enemy.

Help the class feel how strange and how familiar this is — a believer who holds the creed of mercy perfectly and resents it the moment it falls on the wrong person.

The Gourd and the Worm (4:5–9)

God teaches by object lesson. A gourd grows up to shade the sulking prophet, and Jonah is glad of it; a worm kills it, and Jonah is furious enough to die. The whole exchange is gentle, almost playful — *doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?* — and Jonah, petulant to the last, snaps back that he does well to be angry, even unto death. He has more compassion for a weed that shaded his head than for a city full of souls. The lesson writes itself, and God is about to write it.

Should Not I Spare Nineveh? (4:10–11)

The book's final word is a question, and it is the heart of God laid bare. Jonah pitied a plant he did not make, did not grow, did not earn; *and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city?* If a small heart can break over a vine, how much more the great heart of God over a hundred and twenty thousand living souls, the little children who cannot tell their right hand from their left — and even, with what is almost a smile, the cattle. Teach the class that this is the pity of God in its full breadth: he grieves over the lost, has compassion on the helpless and ignorant, cares even for the beasts. And he leaves the question open, because it is asked of every reader who has ever wished mercy withheld.

A Greater than Jonah (Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:30–32)

Lay the Gospels beside the book. The Lord Jesus sets himself next to the reluctant prophet — *a greater than Jonas is here* — and the comparison is the key to it all. Jonah was a doom-preacher hoping for fire; the Lord Jesus is the willing Savior who wept over Jerusalem and went to a cross to save it. Jonah went to the Gentiles dragged and resentful; the Lord Jesus sends his church to all nations in love. The missionary heart of God did not begin at Pentecost — here it stands out in the open, in a book eight centuries early — and a *greater than Jonas* now carries it to the ends of the earth.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Why was Jonah angry that Nineveh was saved? Isn’t that the whole point of a prophet’s work?”

It is, which is what makes his anger so revealing. Jonah was not angry that his preaching failed but that it *worked* — that the grace he knew God possessed reached an enemy he wanted destroyed. He says so himself: he fled because he knew God was gracious and merciful. His sin is not unbelief but resentment of mercy, and it is a far more respectable sin than the ones we usually confess, which is exactly why the book holds it up.

“Did God really ‘change his mind’ and not destroy Nineveh?”

When Scripture says God *repented* of the evil he had said he would do (3:10), it is describing the relenting of a God who always deals with people according to whether they turn or not. The threat of judgment is genuine, and so is the mercy that meets repentance — that is not God being fickle but God being consistent. He had said all along that he is *gracious and merciful, slow to anger*; Nineveh’s turning simply met the mercy that was there from the start.

“Who are the people ‘that cannot discern between their right hand and their left’?”

Most likely the little children — a city full of innocents who could not yet tell good from evil. God names them last, with the cattle, to press the point home to Jonah and to us: a great city is full of the helpless and the ignorant, and the heart of God breaks over them. The God who counts even the animals in his pity is not the grim Judge the angry prophet wanted him to be.

“Why does the book end with a question instead of telling us what Jonah did?”

Because the question is not really for Jonah; it is for the reader. We never learn whether Jonah repented of his resentment, because the book wants us to answer for ourselves: *should not I spare Nineveh?* Do we share God’s pity for the lost, or do we, like Jonah, prefer some people kept outside the reach of grace? The open ending is the book’s sharpest stroke.

“How is the Lord Jesus ‘greater than Jonah’?”

In every way the book invites. Jonah preached doom and hoped it would land; the Lord Jesus preached and embodied mercy and went to the cross to secure it. Jonah went to the Gentiles unwillingly; the Lord Jesus came willingly to seek and save the lost of every nation. Jonah resented the salvation of his enemies; the Lord Jesus prayed for his executioners. Nineveh turned at the lesser preacher — how much more should we turn at the greater.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — Resenting a mercy that reaches an enemy

A searching opener. Jonah ran from a God who might forgive his enemy. Ask, without inviting anyone to name names, where we too wish to ration God's mercy — to keep it for the people we approve and withhold it from the ones we do not. The question implicates everyone gently and well.

Question 3 — The same creed, comfort and grievance

A rich theological question. The same words — *gracious and merciful, slow to anger* — are gospel to Joel's hearers and a grievance to Jonah. Ask the class what makes the difference, and let them see that what we do with the mercy of God reveals the state of our own hearts.

Question 5 — The pity of God laid bare

The heart of the session. Work the closing question — *should not I spare Nineveh?* — and let the class feel the breadth of God's compassion, reaching to children and even to cattle. Do not resolve it for them; leave it open, as Scripture does, and let it search the room.

Question 6 — A greater than Jonah, and the heart for the nations

The gospel landing. Set the willing Savior beside the reluctant prophet and ask what it means that God's heart for the nations runs all the way back through Jonah. Then turn it personal: where are we tempted to keep the gospel among people like ourselves, and what would it look like to carry it to our own Nineveh?

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on Jonah* (*Luther's Works*, vol. 19), with attention to the prophet's anger and the heart of God in chapter four.

- ♦ The Formula of Concord, Article XI, on God's universal grace and his earnest will that sinners turn and live — the theology behind *should not I spare Nineveh?*
- ♦ Exodus 34:5–7, the self-revelation of God's name and character that Jonah quotes — and resents.

Commentaries

- ♦ R. Reed Lessing, *Concordia Commentary: Jonah* — excellent on the missionary heart of the book and the greater Jonah.
- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Jonah 4 and the Matthew 12 and Luke 11 cross-references.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).

Devotional

- ♦ Pray Exodus 34:6 back as gospel — *gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness* — and ask the Lord to make you glad, not resentful, when that mercy reaches the undeserving.
- ♦ Name your own “Nineveh” — the person or people you would rather see judged than saved — and pray for them by name.

A Final Word

You are teaching the book's strangest and most honest turn: a prophet who succeeded and was furious about it. Do not soften Jonah's anger, because the class needs to recognize it — it is the respectable sin of the believer who holds the creed of mercy perfectly and resents it the moment it falls on the wrong person.

Land the class on the heart of God laid bare in the closing question. *Should not I spare Nineveh?* If a sulking prophet can break over a withered vine, the great heart of God breaks over every lost city, every helpless child, every soul that cannot tell its right hand from its left. And the book leaves the question open on purpose, aimed at us: do we share that heart, or guard the gospel jealously for people like ourselves?

And answer the question, finally, with the One who answered it with his life. *A greater than Jonas is here* — not a reluctant doom-preacher but the willing Savior, who went not away from his Nineveh but toward it, all the way to a cross, to seek and save the lost of every nation. Teach the anger; preach the greater Jonah. Then on to Micah, and the little town of Bethlehem.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TEN

Thou Bethlehem Ephratah

Micah 1–5 · with Matthew 2:1–6

A Note to the Teacher

Micah preached in Judah in the same Assyrian shadow as Amos and Hosea, and his book moves in a steady rhythm of judgment and promise — a hard word of doom, then a sudden shaft of light, over and over. This first half climbs to the brightest star in the book and one of the most precious prophecies in the Old Testament: the naming of Bethlehem, seven centuries before a child was laid in its manger.

Teach the two great promises that crown these chapters as the pair they are. First, the Ruler from Bethlehem *whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting* — a King who is older than the town he is born in. Second, the kind of Ruler he will be: not a warrior on a horse but a shepherd who *feeds* his flock and lays down his life for the sheep. The eternal King is the Good Shepherd, and the class should leave holding both.

And keep the remnant thread in view, because Micah gathers it up beautifully — the faithful few preserved through every fire, here pictured as *dew from the LORD* among the nations. That image is the gospel in miniature, and the Church's own portrait.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Out of little Bethlehem comes a Ruler *whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting* — the eternal King born in David's town — and he rules not as a warrior but as a shepherd who feeds his flock and lays down his life for the sheep. Teach the eternity of the King and the tenderness of the Shepherd together, and gather up the remnant who fall like dew among the nations.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Micah 1–5 — the judgment on Samaria and Judah, the land-grabbers and corrupt heads, the mountain of the LORD's house, the Ruler from Bethlehem, the Shepherd-King, and the remnant like dew.
- ◆ Read Matthew 2:1–6, where the chief priests quote Micah 5:2 to Herod to name Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Christ. The New Testament hands us this reading directly.
- ◆ Have John 10 ready — *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep* — the Ruler of Micah 5:4 speaking in his own voice centuries later.
- ◆ Recall the seam with Amos: the fallen booth of David raised (Amos 9) and the Ruler from David's town (Micah 5) are the same hope — great David's greater Son.
- ◆ Fix the contrast in mind: the *goings forth from everlasting* (the King's eternity) born in the smallest town (his humility). The whole gospel hides in that contrast.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Micah swings hard between doom and promise; these three keep the promises clearly in view.

The Ruler from Bethlehem is older than the town he is born in.

Micah first sets the humiliation — *they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek* (5:1), a foreshadowing of the day the true Judge would be struck on the face by his own creatures — and then, against it, the star: *but thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting* (5:2). It matters that the town is Bethlehem, David's town, where the shepherd-boy was anointed king — for by Micah's day the house of David had shrunk toward a stump, and the promise reaches its fulfillment not through the surviving palace but back at the source, in a greater David. And mark the last clause: his *goings forth* are *from everlasting*. The child

born in time is older than time. The deity and eternity of the coming King are written into the prophecy seven centuries before the manger.

The eternal King rules as a shepherd who lays down his life.

What kind of Ruler will this be? Not a warrior on a horse but a shepherd among his flock: *he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD... and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth* (5:4). The word is the shepherd's word — he will *shepherd* his people, feeding and guarding and leading them, not lording it over them like the flaying rulers of chapter three. Centuries later he would say it of himself in the plainest words: *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep* (John 10:11). The hirelings of Micah's day fled and devoured; the true Shepherd-King would lay down his life for the flock. David, Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34 — the whole golden thread of the shepherd-king runs up to him.

The remnant falls like dew — preserved by grace, made fruitful among the nations.

Micah gathers up the remnant theme that has been sounding all through the volume — from Joel's *whosoever shall call*, through Amos's sieve in which not the least grain is lost, through Obadiah's deliverance on Zion — and adds something new: *the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass* (5:7). The scattered people of God will not be swallowed up but will become a means of refreshing — dew on a dry world. It is a lovely picture of the Church among the nations: not a fortress withdrawn behind its walls but life-giving dew, sent freely from above and asking nothing of the soil it waters. Dew is the gospel in miniature — it falls silently in the night, unbidden, from above, earning nothing, and the dry grass wakes refreshed.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:16	Judgment on the land-grabbers and corrupt heads (1–3)
0:16–0:24	The mountain of the LORD's house; swords into plowshares (4)
0:24–0:38	Out of thee, Bethlehem; the eternal King (5:1–3)
0:38–0:48	The Shepherd-King; the remnant like dew (5:4–15)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance

0:56–1:00

Closing prayer; assign Micah 6–7 and Session Eleven

Pacing Tip

Chapter five is the summit; protect it. If time runs short, sketch the judgment of chapters one through three quickly and the mountain of chapter four in a sentence, and spend your minutes on Bethlehem and the Shepherd-King. The class must leave holding both the eternity of the King (*from everlasting*) and the tenderness of the Shepherd (*the good shepherd giveth his life*).

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

Who Is Like the LORD? (1:1–2:13)

The prophet's very name asks the book's question — *Micah* means *who is like the LORD*? — and the opening chapters answer it first with judgment. The LORD comes down and treads the high places; Samaria and Judah are weighed and found wanting. Chapter two indicts the land-grabbers who *covet fields, and take them by violence* (2:2), the powerful who lie awake devising how to seize a poor man's inheritance. But even here the light breaks: the LORD promises to gather the remnant like sheep into a fold, and a *breaker* goes up before them — a first glimpse of the King who will open the way home.

The Mountain of the LORD's House (4:1–5)

Against the doom rises one of the loveliest visions in the prophets: in the last days the mountain of the LORD's house is established above the hills, and all nations flow to it to learn his ways, and *they shall beat their swords into plowshares* (4:3). It is the same vision Isaiah saw, and it is fulfilled not in a rebuilt temple on a literal hill but in the Church drawing the nations to the Word — the kingdom of the risen Christ, to which the Gentiles stream. Teach the class to read the mountain as Zion-fulfilled-in-the-gospel, the same way the apostles read Amos's booth of David.

Out of Thee Shall He Come Forth (5:1–3)

Here is the summit. After the humiliation of the struck judge comes the brightest star: *but thou, Bethlehem Ephratah... out of thee shall he come forth... whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting* (5:2). Slow down on every clause. The town is tiny and forgotten; the King is eternal.

The line of David has shrunk to a stump; the promise springs back to its root. And the chief priests themselves, centuries on, will quote this verse to Herod without hesitation when the magi ask where the Christ is to be born (Matthew 2:5–6). The New Testament hands us the reading; we need not argue it.

He Shall Feed in the Strength of the LORD (5:4–6)

And then the kind of King: a shepherd. *He shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD... and this man shall be the peace* (5:4–5). The Ruler from Bethlehem will not flay his flock like the rulers of chapter three; he will feed them. Connect it to John 10 — the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep — and to the whole shepherd thread from David through Psalm 23 to Ezekiel 34. The eternal King of 5:2 is the dying-and-rising Shepherd of John 10. Hold the two pictures together; neither is complete without the other.

The Remnant Like Dew (5:7–15)

The chapter closes on the remnant — the faithful few the LORD always keeps through the fire — with two images that belong together: dew that refreshes and a lion that cannot be resisted. The first is the gentler and the more gospel: *the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD* (5:7). The Church scattered among the nations is not a fortress but dew on the grass, life where there was none, given from above and asking nothing of the soil. Let the class hear in *dew* the whole shape of grace — silent, unearned, from above — and see themselves as the dew God means to spread over a dry world.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Does ‘whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting’ really mean the child is eternal — that is, divine?”

That is exactly what it means, and it is one of the clearest windows in the Old Testament onto the deity of the coming King. The Ruler born in Bethlehem in time has *goings forth from everlasting* — origins that reach back before time itself. A merely human king has a beginning; this one does not. Seven centuries before the manger, Micah writes the eternity of the child into the prophecy of his birth.

“The chief priests quoted this to Herod — so even Christ’s enemies knew Bethlehem was the place?”

Yes, and it is a striking witness. When the magi asked where the Christ would be born, Herod’s own scholars answered without hesitation from Micah 5:2 (Matthew 2:5–6) — they knew the text cold. The tragedy is that they could locate the King on a map and would not go five miles to worship him. It is a sober reminder that knowing the right answer about Christ is not the same as coming to him.

“Micah 4 says nations will beat swords into plowshares. Hasn’t that obviously not happened?”

It has begun, and not where people look for it. The vision is fulfilled not in world politics but in the Church, where people of every nation are drawn to the Word and learn the ways of peace — the kingdom of the risen Christ already gathering the Gentiles. Its fullness waits for the last Day, when he returns and every sword is finally beaten down. We live, as always, between the already and the not yet.

“Why is the King pictured as a shepherd instead of a conquering warrior?”

Because that is the kind of King he is, and the kind his people need. The rulers of Micah’s day fed themselves and flayed the flock; the Ruler from Bethlehem feeds and guards and finally dies for his sheep. The shepherd image is not a softening of his power but its true shape: he is *great unto the ends of the earth* precisely as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life. Strength that serves and saves — that is the majesty of this King.

“What does it mean that the remnant is ‘dew’ among the nations?”

It means the Church is not meant to be a walled fortress but a quiet, life-giving presence — dew that falls from above and refreshes the dry ground without being asked. The image carries the whole gospel: dew is unearned, silent, given from heaven, and it brings life where there was none. To be the remnant is not to withdraw from the world but to be God’s refreshing spread over it.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 2 — The eternal King in the little town

A strong way into the heart of the session. Ask what it means that the Ruler *from everlasting* is born in the smallest town — the eternity of the King and the humility of his coming, held in one verse. This is the contrast the whole gospel hides in, and it rewards lingering.

Question 3 — Knowing the answer, missing the King

Herod's scholars quoted Bethlehem flawlessly and would not go. Ask the class — gently, of ourselves — how it is possible to know the right answers about Christ and still not come to him. A good check on the difference between information and faith.

Question 4 — The Shepherd who lays down his life

The christological center. Set Micah 5:4 beside John 10 and ask what kind of King feeds his flock by dying for it. Draw out the shepherd thread from David and Psalm 23, and let the class feel the tenderness of a power that serves and saves rather than dominates.

Question 6 — The Church as dew

A fruitful closing question. What would it look like for this congregation to be *dew* among its neighbors — not a fortress withdrawn, but life-giving refreshment given freely from above? Keep it concrete and hopeful; the image invites the class to see their ordinary presence as grace spread on dry ground.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets II: Micah* (Luther's Works, vol. 18), strong on the Bethlehem prophecy and the Shepherd-King.
- ♦ The Augsburg Confession, Article III, on the Son of God born of the Virgin Mary — the eternal one of Micah 5:2 entering time.
- ♦ John 10, read whole — the Ruler of Micah 5:4 speaking in his own voice as the Good Shepherd who gives his life.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Micah 5 and the Matthew 2 cross-reference.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Micah in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ♦ Pray Micah 5:2 in Advent — the eternal King born in the smallest town — and Psalm 23 beside it, the Shepherd who makes you lie down in green pastures.
- ♦ Sit with the image of dew, and ask the Lord to make your quiet, ordinary presence a refreshing from above to the dry ground around you.

A Final Word

You are teaching one of the great Advent texts of the Old Testament, and your task is to let two pictures shine together. The Ruler from Bethlehem is older than the town he is born in — his goings forth are *from everlasting* — and he comes not in a chariot but as a shepherd who stands and feeds his flock. The eternal King is the Good Shepherd. Hold both, and the class holds the whole Christ.

Land them on the tenderness of his power. The rulers of Micah's day flayed their people; this King feeds them, and at last lays down his life for them. The strength that is *great unto the ends of the earth* is the strength of a shepherd dying for his sheep — and that is the majesty of God, not its softening.

And send them out as dew. The remnant is not a fortress but a refreshing, given freely from above to a dry world. The same Shepherd who was born in Bethlehem and rose from the grave now scatters his people like dew among the nations, life where there was none. Teach the eternity of the King; preach the Shepherd who dies. Then on to Micah 6–7, and the God who delights in mercy.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION ELEVEN

Who Is a God Like Unto Thee?

Micah 6–7 · with Matthew 10:35–36

A Note to the Teacher

The second half of Micah opens as a courtroom drama — the LORD brings a formal lawsuit against his people — and closes as a doxology of sheer wonder at the mercy of God. Between those two poles sits one of the best-known and most badly misused verses in all the prophets, *what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* Your hardest task this hour is to keep that verse from being preached as the gospel it is constantly mistaken for.

For Micah 6:8 is not a kindly lowering of the bar — not God saying, never mind the sacrifices, just be a decent person and we are square. Read that way it becomes salvation by good behavior, a manageable little checklist. It is in fact the law held up as a mirror, and the mirror condemns: held against *do justly, love mercy, walk humbly*, we see at a glance that we have done none of them as God requires. Teach the mirror, and the doxology at the book's end becomes pure gospel.

And the book's end is glorious. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity... because he delighteth in mercy?* Land the class there — on a God whose forgiving is not a grudging concession but his joy — and on the sworn oath to Abraham that makes the mercy sure.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Micah's *do justly, love mercy, walk humbly* is the law's mirror, not a lowered bar — it condemns us and drives us to the God who *delighteth in mercy* and pardons iniquity because he swore mercy to Abraham. Teach the mirror so the class feels condemned, and the doxology so they marvel that there is no other God like this one.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Micah 6–7 — the LORD's controversy, the frantic *wherewith shall I come?*, the famous 6:8, the breakdown of society, the LORD who pleads our cause, and the closing doxology on mercy.
- ◆ Read Matthew 10:35–36, where the Lord Jesus quotes Micah 7:6 — *a man's foes shall be they of his own household* — of the division the gospel itself brings.
- ◆ Have the three uses of the law clear in your mind: curb, mirror, guide. Micah 6:8, held up here, is doing the work of the mirror.
- ◆ Read Hebrews 6:13–20 — the oath God swore to Abraham, the two immutable things, the anchor of the soul. Micah 7:20 rests the whole gospel on that oath.
- ◆ Note the bookend: the prophet's name, *Micah*, asks *who is like the LORD?*, and the last chapter answers it — *who is a God like unto thee?*
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Micah 6–7 is a law-and-gospel lesson in miniature; these three keep the two clearly distinguished.

Micah 6:8 is the law's mirror, not a lowered bar.

The verse is constantly quoted as though it were the gospel — a checklist of decency that lets us close the account with God on easy terms. That is precisely what it is not. The law of God has more than one office: it curbs outward wickedness, and it guides the believer in the shape of a faithful life. But its deepest work is to serve as a mirror, showing us with merciless clarity what we are. And that is the office 6:8 is doing here. Held up as a mirror, *do justly, love mercy, walk humbly* does not flatter us — it condemns us, for it shows at a glance that we have done none of these as God requires. To read it as a lowering of the bar is to mistake the very nature of the law. The bar is not lowered; it is raised to heaven, and we are shown to fall short of it — which is exactly what sends us to the mercy at the book's end.

God delights in mercy — forgiving is his joy, not his last resort.

The book that opened by asking *who is like the LORD?* answers with a doxology of amazement: *who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy* (7:18). Mark the reason given — *because he delighteth in mercy*. He does not forgive grudgingly, as a concession wrung out of him; he delights in it. The natural conscience imagines a stern Judge whose arm must be twisted, who pardons reluctantly and keeps the offense on file. Micah says the opposite: mercy is not God's last resort but his joy, the thing he most loves to do. There is no other god like this in all the religions of mankind, and the prophet can only stand back in wonder.

The mercy is sure because God swore it to Abraham.

The very last words of the book ground all this mercy in something older and surer than the people's worthiness — the sworn word of God: *thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old* (7:20). Why will God pardon iniquity and cast sins into the sea? Not because his people earned it — the whole book has proved they did not — but because he swore an oath to Abraham and will perform it. The gospel does not rest on the shifting sand of our performance; it rests on the bedrock of an oath. The writer to the Hebrews dwells on exactly this: God confirmed the promise with an oath, swearing by himself, so that by two immutable things we might have strong consolation, an anchor of the soul (Hebrews 6:17–19). The *mercy to Abraham* — the Hebrew is *chesed*, covenant-faithful love — reaches its fulfillment in the Seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus, in whom all the families of the earth are blessed.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:14	The LORD's controversy; wherewith shall I come? (6:1–7)
0:14–0:28	What doth the LORD require — the mirror, not the lowered bar (6:8)
0:28–0:36	The good man perished; a man's foes of his own house (7:1–7)
0:36–0:48	Who is a God like unto thee; the mercy to Abraham (7:14–20)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Nahum and Session Twelve

Pacing Tip

Two things must not be cut: the right reading of 6:8 (mirror, not lowered bar) and the doxology of 7:18–20 (God delights in mercy, sworn to Abraham). If time runs short, compress the courtroom of 6:1–5 and the social breakdown of chapter seven, and protect the law that condemns and the mercy that pardons. The class must leave marveling, not measuring.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The LORD's Controversy (6:1–5)

The chapter opens as a lawsuit — the Hebrew is *rib*, a formal legal dispute — with the mountains summoned as a jury and the LORD as plaintiff against his own people: *O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me* (6:3). It is a heartbroken question, not a cold indictment. God recounts his kindnesses — the Exodus, the wilderness, the turning of Balaam's curse to blessing — and asks what he ever did to deserve their coldness. The law here comes wrapped in wounded love.

Wherewith Shall I Come? (6:6–7)

The people answer with a frantic escalation, as though the problem were the size of the payment: shall I come with burnt offerings, with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil — shall I give my firstborn for my transgression? (6:6–7). It is the panic of the guilty conscience trying to buy its way back, bidding higher and higher, even to child sacrifice. And it misreads God entirely, for he never wanted the price; he wanted the heart.

What Doth the LORD Require (6:8)

Into that panic the LORD speaks the famous word: *he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* (6:8). Teach it as the mirror it is. It is not a discount on the law but the law in its purest distillation, and held against it no one stands. Have we done justly — always, to everyone? Loved mercy — truly, even toward enemies? Walked humbly — every day, with God? The verse does not lower the requirement; it raises it to heaven and shows us fallen short. And that is its mercy: it drives us out of our bidding and toward the God who gives what he requires.

When the Good Man Has Perished (7:1–7)

Chapter seven opens on a society in collapse — *the good man is perished out of the earth* (7:2) — where no one can be trusted, and a man's own household turns against him: *a man's enemies are the men of his own house* (7:6). The Lord Jesus quotes this very verse (Matthew 10:35–36), but turns it forward: the gospel itself will divide households, setting a man at variance with his father, because some will follow Christ and some will not. Help the class hear both notes — Micah's lament over a corrupt age, and the Lord Jesus' sober warning that the sword of the gospel cuts even through families. And note Micah's response: *I will look unto the LORD** (7:7). When society fails, the believer looks up.

Who Is a God Like Unto Thee? (7:14–20)

And the book ends in wonder. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity... because he delighteth in mercy* (7:18); he will *subdue our iniquities, and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea* (7:19). The gods of the nations demanded rivers of oil and the blood of children and were never satisfied; this God pardons freely, of his own delight, and drowns the sins he forgives where they can never be dredged up again. And the last word grounds it all in the oath sworn to Abraham (7:20) — the sure foundation that the mercy will hold. Lead the class here: not measuring themselves against 6:8, but marveling that there is no other God like this one.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Isn't Micah 6:8 the simplest summary of true religion — just do justice, love mercy, walk humbly?”

It is the purest summary of what God requires — which is exactly why it condemns rather than comforts. Read as a checklist of decency, it becomes salvation by good behavior, a bar set low enough to clear. But held up honestly as a mirror, no one clears it: we have not done justly to everyone, loved mercy toward enemies, walked humbly every day. The verse is not the gospel; it is the law that drives us to the gospel at the book's end.

“So is the verse a bad thing to quote?”

Not at all — quote it freely, but quote it for what it is. As a description of the life faith gladly begins to live, it is a fine guide. As a measure of where we stand before God, it is a mirror that levels us.

The error is only in turning it into a way of salvation, a manageable substitute for the sacrifice God provides. Keep the verse; just do not let it replace the cross.

“Why would the Lord Jesus quote the gloomy verse about a man’s enemies being his own family?”

Because he was honest about what following him costs. Micah lamented a corrupt age in which families turned on each other; the Lord Jesus warns that the gospel itself will sometimes divide a household, when some receive him and some refuse. He is not commending family strife — he is preparing his followers for the real possibility that loyalty to him may set them at odds with those closest to them. Better to know it going in.

“If God ‘delights in mercy,’ why is there so much judgment in these books?”

Because mercy that costs nothing to take seriously is no mercy at all. The judgment is real, and the law must do its full work, or the pardon at the end means nothing. But notice which gets the last word: the book that opened in a courtroom closes in a doxology, and the doxology says God’s anger does not last *because he delighteth in mercy*. Judgment is his strange work; mercy is his joy. The Twelve always end where Micah ends.

“How can I be sure God’s mercy will hold for me?”

On the same ground Micah names — the oath. God did not merely promise mercy; he swore it, to Abraham, and bound himself by two immutable things so that we might have an anchor for the soul (Hebrews 6). Your assurance does not rest on the steadiness of your faith or the quality of your repentance, all of which waver. It rests on the sworn word of a God who cannot lie, fulfilled in the Seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus. The mercy holds because the oath holds.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — The bidding war of the guilty conscience

A good opener. The people offer more and more — rams, oil, even a firstborn — trying to buy back God’s favor. Ask where we still try to pay our way back to God, and why the panic of *wherewith shall I come?* always misreads what he actually wants.

Question 2 — The mirror, not the lowered bar

The theological center. Why is it so important not to read 6:8 as a checklist for salvation? Let the class feel the difference between the verse as a guide for the believing life and the verse as a mirror that condemns — and why mistaking the one for the other costs them the gospel.

Question 4 — God delights in mercy

The gospel landing. Sit with *because he delighteth in mercy* and let it overturn the picture of a grudging Judge that fear paints in every guilty heart. Ask how the class's prayer life would change if they truly believed forgiving was the thing God most loves to do.

Question 5 — The oath that makes mercy sure

A question for anyone who struggles with assurance. Our confidence rests not on our performance but on God's sworn word to Abraham. Ask what it means to anchor the soul to an oath rather than to a feeling — and why that is the only assurance that holds in the dark.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets II: Micah* (Luther's Works, vol. 18), with attention to the closing doxology.
- ♦ The Augsburg Confession and its Apology, Article IV, on law and gospel and the proper use of the law — the key to reading Micah 6:8 rightly.
- ♦ Hebrews 6:13–20, the oath to Abraham as the anchor of the soul — the New Testament's own meditation on Micah 7:20.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Micah 6–7 and the law-and-gospel distinction.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Micah in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ◆ Pray Micah 7:18–19 as a doxology — thank the God who delights in mercy and casts your sins into the depths of the sea, where they can never be dredged up.
- ◆ When assurance wavers, read Hebrews 6:17–20 with Micah 7:20 and rest the soul on the oath, not on your feelings.

A Final Word

You are teaching the verse the world loves to quote and most loves to misquote. Hold the line: *do justly, love mercy, walk humbly* is not a lowering of the bar but the law raised to heaven and held up as a mirror, and the mirror levels everyone who looks honestly into it. Let it do its work; let the class feel that they have not kept it.

And then turn them to the wonder at the book's end. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity... because he delighteth in mercy?* There is no other god like this in all the world — none who forgives freely, joyfully, casting the sins he pardons into the depths of the sea. The mirror condemns; the doxology delivers.

And tell them why the mercy will hold. Not because they have measured up to 6:8 — they have not, and neither have you — but because God swore mercy to Abraham and cannot break his oath, and that oath is kept in the Seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus. Anchor the class to the sworn word, where the soul is safe. Teach the mirror; preach the God who delights in mercy. Then on to Nahum, and the stronghold in the day of trouble.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TWELVE

The LORD Is Good, a Stronghold in Trouble

Nahum · with Romans 10:15

A Note to the Teacher

Nahum is a hard book to love at first reading — three chapters of unrelenting judgment on a single city, Nineveh, the cruel capital of Assyria. But the prophet's name means *comfort*, and that is the key to the whole book. To the people Assyria had terrorized for a century, the announcement that the tyrant would fall was not gloating but gospel. The book of doom is, for the oppressed, a book of consolation.

And right in the middle of the fire sits a single verse that is pure gospel, the heart of the book: *the LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him*. The Day of the LORD has two faces here, as it has had all through the Twelve — terror to Nineveh, refuge to the trusting. The same flood that drowns the bloody city is the high tower into which the helpless run and are safe.

Land the hour on two New Testament gifts the prophet hands forward: the beautiful feet of the messenger who publishes peace, which Paul makes the feet of every gospel preacher; and the fall of the great tyrant, which the Lord Jesus reveals as the binding of the strong man and the overthrow of the devil himself.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Nahum announces the fall of the tyrant Nineveh — doom to the oppressor, comfort to the oppressed — and at its heart declares *the LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble*. Teach the Day's two faces, the beautiful feet that publish peace (Romans 10:15), and the fall of every tyranny fulfilled in the binding of the strong man by a stronger than he.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Nahum straight through — the jealous and mighty God, the jewel of 1:7, the messenger on the mountains, and the fall of the bloody city.
- ◆ Read Romans 10:15, where Paul quotes the messenger with beautiful feet and makes it the feet of everyone who preaches the gospel of peace.
- ◆ Recall Jonah: a century before Nahum, Nineveh repented and was spared. Nahum shows mercy spurned ripening at last into judgment. The two books belong together.
- ◆ Have Luke 11:21–22 ready — the strong man bound by a stronger than he. Nineveh's fall is a small picture of the devil's overthrow by the Lord Jesus.
- ◆ Note the Revelation thread: Nineveh stands for Babylon the Great, the world-system in rebellion, whose fall heaven announces with the same joy.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Nahum is mostly judgment; these three keep the comfort and the Christ in clear view.

“The LORD is good, a stronghold” — the comfort hidden in the book of doom.

Set like a jewel in the middle of the fire is the verse that is the heart of the book: *the LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him* (1:7). Right between the fury of verse six and the overrunning flood of verse eight, the prophet plants this oasis of pure gospel. The same God whose indignation no one can stand before is *good* — and to those who trust him he is not a consuming fire but a stronghold, a fortress, a place of safety in the very day of trouble that overwhelms his enemies. The Day of the LORD has two faces: terror to Nineveh, refuge to the

trusting. The flood that makes an end of the bloody city is, to those who shelter in the LORD, the high tower they run into and are safe. The Scriptures are full of this picture — *God is our refuge and strength* (Psalm 46:1), *the name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe* (Proverbs 18:10) — a fortress whose walls are not ours but the LORD himself.

The beautiful feet on the mountains publish the gospel of peace.

At the close of the first chapter the prophet lifts his eyes from the doomed city to a runner cresting the hills with news: *behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!* (1:15). A watchman sees the messenger pounding up the mountain, and the news he carries is freedom — the tyrant has fallen, the oppressor is cut off, keep your feasts again. The runner's dusty feet are beautiful to the watching city because of the news they bear. Isaiah used the same image, and Paul took it up and gave it its deepest meaning: *how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!* (Romans 10:15). The good tidings of Nineveh's fall were a small picture of the great good tidings the Church now carries to the ends of the earth — for there is a greater oppressor than Assyria, and a greater peace than Nineveh's fall.

A greater than Nineveh is cast down — the binding of the strong man.

Nahum's Nineveh stands, in the end, for something larger than one ancient city. Scripture knows of a great city set against God and drunk with the blood of the saints, and at the end of the Bible John sees it grown to its full form — Babylon the Great, the world-system in rebellion — and hears heaven announce her fall in words that echo Nahum's joy. Nineveh's fall is a rehearsal, a first installment, of the certain overthrow of every tyranny that ever set itself against the LORD. No oppressor stands forever. And the Lord Jesus tells us how this fall is fulfilled: he described his own work as the binding of a strong man — *when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted* (Luke 11:22). The devil, the strong man, had held the human race captive, armed with the power of death; the Lord Jesus, the stronger one, came upon him, disarmed him, and divided the spoils. The gospel itself is the fall of the ultimate tyrant.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time

Segment

0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:12	Nahum means comfort; God jealous and great in power (1:1–6)
0:12–0:24	The LORD is good, a stronghold — the jewel in the fire (1:7)
0:24–0:34	Mercy spurned; the beautiful feet that publish peace (1:9–15)
0:34–0:44	The bloody city; a greater than Nineveh cast down (2–3)
0:44–0:54	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:54–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Habakkuk 1–2 and Session Thirteen

Pacing Tip

Do not let three chapters of judgment crowd out the gospel. Protect the jewel of 1:7 and the beautiful feet of 1:15, and connect the fall of Nineveh to the binding of the strong man. If time runs short, summarize the fall of the bloody city in chapters two and three rather than walking every image — the class needs the comfort and the Christ more than the catalog of ruin.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Comfort in the Book of Doom (1:1)

Begin with the name. *Nahum* means *comfort*, and the irony is only apparent. To Judah, ground under Assyria's heel for a hundred years — cities sacked, captives flayed, tribute extorted — the word that Nineveh would fall was the most comforting word imaginable. Teach the class that the fall of a tyrant is good news to his victims, and that God's judgment on the cruel is the other side of his mercy to the oppressed. Nahum is not bloodthirsty; it is the sigh of relief of the long-afflicted.

God Is Jealous, and Great in Power (1:2–6)

The book opens with a terrifying portrait of God's majesty — jealous, avenging, slow to anger but great in power, who *will not at all acquit the wicked* (1:3), before whom the mountains quake and the earth is burned. This is the law in full voice, and it is meant to be felt. *Who can stand before his indignation?* (1:6). The honest answer is no one — which is precisely what makes the next verse the relief that it is.

The LORD Is Good, a Stronghold (1:7)

And then the jewel. Between the quaking mountains and the overrunning flood, one verse of pure gospel: *the LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him*. The same God no sinner can stand before is, to those who trust him, a fortress. Pause here and let the contrast do its work. The Day of the LORD is not simply terror or simply refuge; it is both at once, depending on whether one stands inside the stronghold or outside it. To the trusting, the very flood that drowns Nineveh is the high tower they run into and are safe.

Mercy Spurned, and the Feet upon the Mountains (1:9–15)

Remember Jonah: a century earlier Nineveh repented and was spared. Now, hardened again, the city has spent its reprieve, and mercy spurned ripens into judgment. But the chapter ends not on Nineveh's doom but on Judah's relief — the runner on the mountains *that publisheth peace* (1:15). Teach this as the gospel-shaped good news it is: the messenger whose feet are beautiful because of the news they carry. Paul makes those feet the feet of every preacher of the gospel of peace (Romans 10:15), and the fall of Assyria the small picture of the great peace the Church proclaims.

The Bloody City, and a Greater than Nineveh Cast Down (2:1–3:19)

The last two chapters paint the fall of Nineveh in vivid, terrible detail — the *bloody city, full of lies and robbery* (3:1), her chariots and captains scattered, her merchants fled like locusts. But teach the class to lift their eyes from the ruin to what it pictures. Nineveh stands for Babylon the Great, every empire drunk with the blood of the saints, and behind them all the strong man himself. The certain fall of the bloody city is a rehearsal of the devil's overthrow — already accomplished at the cross, where a stronger than he disarmed him, and to be made complete when Babylon falls forever. No oppressor stands; the Lord of hosts is against them all.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Isn't it disturbing that a whole book celebrates the destruction of a city?”

It would be, if Nineveh were an innocent victim. But Assyria was the cruelest empire of its age, and had terrorized Judah for a century. To the oppressed, the fall of their tormentor is not bloodlust but justice and relief — which is why the prophet's name means *comfort*. The book does not delight in suffering; it delights that the LORD does not let tyranny stand forever. The same instinct cries *how long?* in the martyrs of Revelation, and heaven answers it.

“Nineveh repented in Jonah — why is it doomed in Nahum?”

Because a century had passed, and the city that once turned had hardened again into its old cruelty. Nahum shows what happens when mercy, once received, is spurned: the reprieve runs out, and judgment long delayed finally falls. The two books are a single lesson — God's mercy is real and his patience is long, but neither is infinite to the impenitent. Jonah is the mercy; Nahum is the mercy at last spurned.

“How is ‘the LORD is good’ the heart of a book this full of wrath?”

Because the wrath and the goodness are the same God seen from two sides. To Nineveh, who will not trust him, he is the consuming fire of verse six; to those who trust him, he is the stronghold of verse seven. The book is not half goodness and half wrath; it is wholly the goodness of a God who is a refuge to his people precisely by being terror to their oppressors. You cannot have the stronghold without the flood it shelters you from.

“What does Nineveh's fall have to do with us?”

Nineveh is the first in a line that runs through Babylon to every tyranny since, and behind them all stands the strong man, the devil, who held the human race captive. The Lord Jesus came as the stronger one and bound him, disarming him at the cross. So Nineveh's fall is a rehearsal of the gospel: every oppressor falls in the end because the great Oppressor has already been overthrown. That is comfort for anyone living under any tyranny, outward or inward.

“Paul quotes the ‘beautiful feet’ about preachers — but Nahum meant a battlefield messenger. Is that a fair use?”

It is the deepest use. Nahum's runner brought one city the news that one tyrant had fallen; Paul saw that the Church's preachers bring the whole world the news that the last tyrant has fallen and peace is made with God. The lesser good news was always a picture of the greater. Paul does not bend Nahum out of shape; he reads it the way the whole Old Testament asks to be read — as pointing forward to the gospel of peace in Christ.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — Doom as comfort

A good opener that reframes the whole book. Why is the fall of a tyrant good news, and how is God's judgment on the cruel the other side of his mercy to the oppressed? Help the class see that a God who never judged evil would be no comfort to its victims at all.

Question 2 — The two faces of the Day

The theological center. The same God is fire to Nineveh and fortress to the trusting. Ask what determines which face one meets — not merit, but trust — and let the class feel that the only safety on the Day is to be found inside the stronghold, sheltering in the LORD himself.

Question 4 — The beautiful feet

The gospel landing. Move from Nahum's battlefield runner to Paul's gospel preacher. Ask what news makes a messenger's feet beautiful, and who in the class's own life first carried them that news. A warm, concrete question that turns the text toward thanksgiving and mission.

Question 6 — The strong man bound

The christological landing. Set Nineveh's fall beside the binding of the strong man (Luke 11). Ask what it means that the great Oppressor has already been disarmed at the cross — and how that steadies us when lesser tyrannies, outward or inward, still seem to stand.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ◆ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets III: Nahum* (Luther's Works, vol. 19).
- ◆ The Small Catechism, the explanation of the Second Article — Christ has *redeemed me... from the power of the devil*, the binding of the strong man in catechism form.
- ◆ Psalm 46 and Proverbs 18:10, the great stronghold texts that Nahum 1:7 joins.

Commentaries

- ◆ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Nahum and the Romans 10 and Luke 11 cross-references.
- ◆ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).

- ◆ For more depth, the treatment of Nahum in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ◆ Pray Nahum 1:7 when trouble closes in — *the LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble* — and run into the tower whose walls are the LORD himself.
- ◆ Thank God for the beautiful feet that first carried you the gospel of peace, and pray to be such feet for someone still under a tyrant.

A Final Word

You are teaching a book that looks, at first, like nothing but thunder — and is in fact named *comfort*. Teach the judgment honestly; let the class feel that no one can stand before the indignation of this God. But do not leave them in the fire, for the prophet did not.

Land them on the jewel. *The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble* — the same God who is terror to the tyrant is a fortress to the trusting, and the flood that drowns Nineveh is the high tower his people run into and are safe. The Day has two faces, and the gospel is the open door into the safer one.

And send them out on the fall of the great tyrant. Nineveh is only the first to fall; behind every oppressor stands the strong man, and the Lord Jesus has already come upon him, disarmed him at the cross, and divided the spoils. The beautiful feet that once brought one city news of one tyrant's fall now carry to the whole world the news that the last tyrant is bound. Teach the doom; preach the comfort. Then on to Habakkuk, and the just who live by faith.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION THIRTEEN

The Just Shall Live by His Faith

Habakkuk 1–2 · with Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38

A Note to the Teacher

Habakkuk is unlike his fellow prophets. He does not preach to the people on God's behalf; he argues with God on the people's behalf. The book is a dialogue — the prophet complains, God answers, the prophet complains again, God answers again — and out of that struggle comes a single line that became the hinge of the Reformation and sits near the heart of the whole gospel: *the just shall live by his faith*.

Teach the context, because it is the making of the verse. Habakkuk is in agony over a question every believer eventually faces: why does God let evil prosper, and why, when he finally acts, does he use an instrument worse than the wrong he is judging? God answers not by solving the riddle but by telling the prophet how to live inside it — not by sight, not by explanation, but by faith. *The just shall live by his faith* is the answer to a question that is never fully answered.

And follow the verse where the apostles take it. Paul makes it the charter of justification by faith (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11); the writer to the Hebrews reads the awaited vision as a Person — *he that shall come will come* — the Lord Jesus himself. Habakkuk's lonely argument with God opens onto the gospel the whole New Testament proclaims.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

When God's ways are inscrutable and evil seems to win, the proud lean on themselves and are *not upright*, but *the just shall live by his faith* — leaning the whole weight of the soul on God and on the promised One who *will come, and will not tarry*. Teach faith as the act of resting wholly on

Another, and the awaited vision as the Lord Jesus.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Habakkuk 1–2 — the prophet's two complaints and God's two answers, the command to write the vision and wait, the great word *the just shall live by his faith*, the five woes on the oppressor, and the knowledge of the glory filling the earth.
- ♦ Read Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:37–38, the three New Testament texts that quote Habakkuk 2:4. Notice how each draws out a different facet of the one verse.
- ♦ Fix the meaning of *emunah* in mind: faith, faithfulness, trust — the leaning of the whole weight upon something trustworthy. Faith is not a feeling worked up but a resting upon Another.
- ♦ Settle the theodicy in your own mind: God does not answer Habakkuk's *why* with an explanation but with a call to live by faith. Be ready to model that for a class that wants every question tied off.
- ♦ Have Hebrews 10:37 ready — *he that shall come will come* — where the apostle reads Habakkuk's awaited vision as the Lord Jesus himself.
- ♦ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Habakkuk is a wrestling match; these three keep the gospel that emerges from it clear.

“The just shall live by his faith” — two men, and the whole difference between them.

At the heart of the book God sets two kinds of men side by side: *his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith* (2:4). On the one hand the soul that is lifted up — puffed up, swollen with self, like the Chaldean who credits his own strength and worships his own net — the proud, self-reliant man who stands on his own achievement; that soul is crooked at the root, however straight it appears. Over against him, the just, who shall *live by his faith*. The

Hebrew *emunah* is faith, faithfulness, trust — the leaning of the whole weight upon something trustworthy. The whole difference between the two kinds of people in the world is drawn in that one line: the one leans on himself and is not upright; the other leans on God and lives. And the power of such faith lies not in the strength of our believing but in the One we believe — faith saves not because it is mighty but because its object is.

Faith lives by an appointed promise — and the promise is a Person.

God tells the prophet to *write the vision, and make it plain upon tables... For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak... though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come* (2:2–3). Faith is taught here to live by an appointed-but-not-yet-arrived promise, trusting the word against the apparent silence of the present. From the human side it will seem to delay; from God's side it will come, and not one hour late. And the writer to the Hebrews tells us what that tarrying vision finally was. Taking up this very passage, he writes, *for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith* (Hebrews 10:37–38). *He that shall come* — the apostle reads Habakkuk's awaited vision not as an event but as a Person, the promised One toward whom the whole Old Testament strains, the Lord Jesus himself.

The proud oppressor stores up his own reckoning — and the earth will be filled with God's glory.

Having answered the prophet at the root, God turns to the oppressor with a series of five woes (2:6–20), and there is a grim justice in their shape: in each, the oppressor's own sin recoils upon his head. He plundered the nations, and the remnant of the nations will plunder him; he built his house by violence, and the very stones cry out against the builder. This is not random vengeance but the moral order of a universe governed by a righteous God, in which the seed a man sows is the harvest he reaps. And set against all the woe is the promise that the present darkness cannot finally hold: *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea* (2:14). The Chaldean's empire is a passing thing; the glory of God is the tide that will cover everything at last.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome

0:05–0:16	How long shall I cry? — the prophet's complaint and God's troubling answer (1)
0:16–0:24	Upon my watch; write the vision and wait (2:1–3)
0:24–0:38	The just shall live by his faith — the two men (2:4)
0:38–0:48	The five woes; the knowledge of the glory (2:5–20)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Habakkuk 3 and Session Fourteen

Pacing Tip

The verse is the session; protect 2:4 and its New Testament use above everything. If time runs short, sketch the complaints quickly and the woes in a sentence, but do not shortchange *the just shall live by his faith* or the reading of the awaited vision as the Lord Jesus. The class should leave knowing that faith is resting on Another, and that the One they rest on has come.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

How Long Shall I Cry? (1:1–4)

The book opens not with *thus saith the LORD* but with a human cry: *O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!* (1:2). Habakkuk looks at the violence and injustice in Judah and at God's apparent silence, and he is in anguish. Tell the class this is permitted — Scripture itself records a believer arguing with God, asking *how long*, without rebuke. Faith is not the absence of hard questions; it is bringing them to the One who can bear them.

I Raise Up the Chaldeans (1:5–17)

God answers — and the answer is worse than the question. He is raising up the Chaldeans, the brutal Babylonians, to scourge Judah. Habakkuk is staggered: how can a God *of purer eyes than to behold evil* (1:13) use an instrument more wicked than the people it punishes? This is the deepest form of the problem of evil — not just that evil exists, but that God seems to use it. Do not rush past the difficulty; let the class feel it, because the verse that follows is the answer to exactly this.

Upon My Watch; Write the Vision (2:1–3)

Habakkuk does the right thing with his unanswered question: he climbs his watchtower to wait for God's reply (2:1). And God tells him to *write the vision... though it tarry, wait for it* (2:2–3). The lesson is patience under an appointed promise. The vision has a fixed hour in God's calendar that has not yet come; faith must live by it against the silence of the present, trusting that what seems delayed will arrive exactly on time.

The Just Shall Live by His Faith (2:4)

And here is the heart of it. *Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.* Two men, two ways to live: the lifted-up soul leaning on its own strength, crooked at the root; and the just one leaning the whole weight of his soul on God. Teach the class what *emunah* is — not a feeling we generate but a resting upon Another, the clinging of a drowning man to a rock. And tell them where the verse went: Paul made it the gospel of justification by faith, the truth that the just stand before God not by works but by trusting Christ. The Reformation turned on this line; so does every troubled conscience that learns to rest, not on itself, but on the Lord Jesus.

The Five Woes and the Knowledge of the Glory (2:5–20)

God then pronounces five woes on the proud oppressor, and each is shaped so that the sin recoils on the sinner — the plunderer plundered, the violent builder buried under his own cried-out stones. It is the moral order of God's universe, not random revenge. And rising above the woes is the promise that lifts the prophet's eyes past the present darkness: *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea* (2:14). The empire that troubles Habakkuk is a passing tide-pool; the glory of God is the ocean that will cover the world.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Is it all right to argue with God the way Habakkuk does?”

Scripture records it without rebuke, so clearly it is permitted — indeed it is a mark of faith, not its failure. Habakkuk does not walk away from God; he walks toward him with his hardest questions and waits for an answer. The opposite of faith is not honest struggle but indifference or despair. Bring the class to see that the watchtower, where Habakkuk waits for God to reply, is the right place to take a complaint — to God, and not away from him.

“God never really answers Habakkuk’s question about why he uses the wicked. Isn’t that unsatisfying?”

It is, by design. God does not solve the riddle of evil for Habakkuk; he gives him something better than an explanation — a way to live inside the mystery: *the just shall live by his faith*. There are questions God does not answer in this life, and faith is precisely trusting the One who knows the answer when we do not. The book teaches us to live by an unfinished argument, leaning on God’s character when his ways are hidden.

“What exactly does it mean to ‘live by faith’? Isn’t faith just believing things are true?”

It is more than agreeing that things are true; the demons do that and tremble. The *emunah* Habakkuk speaks of is leaning the whole weight of the soul on Another — the act of a drowning man clinging to a rock, of someone who has given up on his own strength and rests on God’s. And its power is never in the strength of our believing but in the trustworthiness of the One believed. Weak faith in a strong Savior saves; strong faith in ourselves does not.

“Why is this one verse called the hinge of the Reformation?”

Because Paul quotes it to prove that sinners are justified before God by faith and not by works (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11), and Luther, reading it, came to see that *the just shall live by his faith* means the just live by trusting Christ’s righteousness, not by piling up their own. The whole gospel of free grace stands or falls on it. One Old Testament half-verse, taken up by the apostles, became the doorway back to the gospel.

“How does Hebrews turn the ‘vision’ into a person?”

The writer to the Hebrews quotes Habakkuk 2:3–4 and adds a word: *he that shall come will come, and will not tarry* (10:37). What Habakkuk called an awaited *vision*, the apostle reads as an awaited *One* — the promised Christ toward whom the whole Old Testament strains. The deepest thing Habakkuk was told to write and wait for was not an event but a Person, and that Person has come. The waiting is over; the just now live by faith in the One who arrived.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — Bringing the hard question to God

A warm opener. Habakkuk takes his anguish straight to God and waits on the watchtower. Ask the class where they are tempted to take their hardest questions away from God instead — into silence, cynicism, or despair — and why the watchtower is the better place to wait.

Question 2 — Living by faith when the question is unanswered

The heart of the session. God answers the riddle of evil not with an explanation but with a call to faith. Ask what it means to *live by* a trust in God's character when his ways are hidden — and let the class name the places in their own lives where they are being asked to do exactly that.

Question 4 — The two men

The theological center. Set the lifted-up soul beside the one who lives by faith, and ask where the whole difference lies — not in outward straightness but in what each leans on. A good place to draw out that faith's power is in its object, not its strength.

Question 6 — The vision who came

The gospel landing. Hebrews reads the awaited vision as the Lord Jesus. Ask what changes when the class realizes that the One Habakkuk was told to wait for has already come — that the just no longer wait for a promise but rest on a Person who has arrived and will come again.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on Habakkuk* (*Luther's Works*, vol. 19), where the reformer dwells on the verse that opened the gospel to him.
- ♦ The Augsburg Confession, Article IV, on justification by faith — the doctrinal home of Habakkuk 2:4.
- ♦ Romans 1:16–17 and Galatians 3:10–14, the apostle's own use of the verse.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Habakkuk 2 and the three New Testament citations.

- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Habakkuk in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ♦ When God's ways are hidden, pray Habakkuk's watchtower prayer — bring the question, and wait — and rest on *the just shall live by his faith*.
- ♦ Read Romans 1:17 and remember that the One Habakkuk waited for has come; the just live by faith in a Savior already arrived.

A Final Word

You are teaching the book that gave the Reformation its hinge, and the verse a whole troubled conscience can stand on. Teach the wrestling honestly — the *how long*, the staggering answer, the unanswered *why* — because the class needs to feel the dark before they hear the word that shines in it.

And then set the two men before them. The lifted-up soul, leaning on its own strength, is crooked at the root, however straight it stands; the just one, leaning the whole weight of his soul on God, lives. Faith is not a feeling to work up but a resting upon Another — and its power is never our believing but the One believed.

And tell them the best news of all: the vision they were told to wait for is a Person, and he has come. *He that shall come will come, and will not tarry* — the Lord Jesus, in whom the just are justified and on whom the troubled soul may rest its whole weight. Teach the wrestling; preach the One who came. Then on to Habakkuk 3, and a song sung in the ruins.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FOURTEEN

Yet Will I Rejoice in the LORD

Habakkuk 3 · with Philippians 4:11–13

A Note to the Teacher

The third chapter of Habakkuk is a single sustained prayer, set to music — the prophet who spent two chapters arguing with God now closes his book by singing to him. It is one of the most beautiful poems in the Old Testament and one of the highest peaks of faith in all of Scripture, and it ends with a man rejoicing in the ruins, with every earthly support stripped away.

Teach the chapter as the answer in the heart that follows the answer in the mind. In chapters one and two Habakkuk learned that the just shall live by faith; here he lives it. He looks straight at the coming devastation — no figs, no grapes, no flock, no herd — names it without flinching, and says, *yet I will rejoice in the LORD*. That *yet* is the whole gospel of the chapter.

And keep the Christ in view at the center of the vision. When Habakkuk sees God march out in terrible majesty, the purpose of the march is named: *thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed* — with thy Messiah. The whole expectation of Israel narrows here onto a coming Anointed One, in whom all the anointed offices would be gathered up.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

God marches out in majesty *for the salvation of his people, even for salvation with thine anointed* — and the prophet, naming the total collapse of everything he owns, still sings *yet I will rejoice in the LORD*. Teach joy as a fruit of the Spirit rooted in the unchanging God, strength given from outside to the weak, and the Anointed One at the center of God's saving march.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Habakkuk 3 — the prayer for revival, the theophany of God marching from Teman, the salvation accomplished with his anointed, the prophet's trembling, and the great *yet I will rejoice*.
- ♦ Read Philippians 4:11–13 — Paul's contentment in every circumstance and *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me* — the New Testament echo of Habakkuk's closing confession.
- ♦ Fix the difference between happiness and joy in mind: happiness depends on *happenings*; joy is a fruit of the Spirit rooted in God himself, and can flourish where happiness dies.
- ♦ Note the word *meshicheka* in 3:13 — *with thy anointed*, thy Messiah. The Hebrew *mashiach* becomes the Greek *christos*, the Christ. This is the christological center of the chapter.
- ♦ Have ready the image of the hind's feet (3:19): not the removal of the high and dangerous places, but the strength to walk them without falling — strength given from outside.
- ♦ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. The chapter is a poem; these three keep its gospel from dissolving into mere uplift.

God's saving march is undertaken with his Anointed One.

At the center of the terrifying vision the prophet names its purpose: *thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked* (3:13). The divine Warrior does not go out merely to display his power but for the *salvation* of his people — and he goes out *with thine anointed*. The Hebrew is *meshicheka*, with thy Messiah, thy Anointed One. God's great saving march is undertaken together with his Anointed, and the salvation of his people is bound up with this One at his side. Prophets were anointed, priests were anointed, kings were anointed — the oil poured on the head as the sign of God's choosing — and the whole expectation of Israel narrowed, across the centuries, onto a coming

Anointed One in whom all three offices would be gathered. The *mashiach* of Habakkuk is the *christos* of the Gospels, the Lord Jesus.

Joy is not happiness — it is rooted in the unchanging God.

The summit of the book is one of the highest peaks of faith in all of Scripture. Habakkuk lists, item by item, the total collapse of everything that made for life in his world: *although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls* (3:17). No figs, no grapes, no olives, no grain, no sheep, no cattle — the very things the Babylonian invasion would destroy. And then: *yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation* (3:18). Mark the difference between happiness and joy, for the world confuses them and the confusion is deadly. Happiness depends on *happenings* — on circumstances falling out well. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, grown in the soul by God and rooted in God himself; and because its root is in the unchanging God and not in the shifting things, it can flourish in soil where happiness would wither.

Strength is given from outside — made perfect in weakness.

The book that began with a trembling complaint ends with a man bounding like a deer on the heights: *the LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places* (3:19). The hind is surefooted on the steep and dangerous places where other creatures fall. Habakkuk does not say the high places will be removed; he says he will be given the strength to walk them without falling. And mark where the strength comes from — *the LORD God is my strength*, not Habakkuk's own grit, not a reserve of natural courage summoned from within, but a strength supplied from outside to a man reduced to having none of his own. This is the gospel's deep pattern: God's strength is made perfect in weakness, and those who wait on him exchange their exhausted strength for his — the same lesson Paul learned in his trials, writing out of his weakness, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:14	A prayer set to music; in wrath remember mercy (3:1–2)
0:14–0:24	God came from Teman — the theophany (3:3–12)

0:24–0:34	Thou wentest forth for salvation, with thine anointed (3:13–16)
0:34–0:46	Yet will I rejoice; hinds' feet on the high places (3:17–19)
0:46–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Zephaniah and Session Fifteen

Pacing Tip

The summit is 3:17–19, and the christological center is 3:13; protect both. If time runs short, move briskly through the theophany of 3:3–12 — sketch its grandeur — and spend your minutes on the salvation accomplished with the Anointed One and the great *yet I will rejoice*. The class must leave holding the difference between joy and happiness, and the Christ at the center of the march.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

A Prayer Set to Music; In Wrath Remember Mercy (3:1–2)

The chapter is headed as a prayer set for singing — the prophet's wrestling resolves into worship. He has heard God's answer and he trembles at it, and his prayer is exactly right: *O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years... in wrath remember mercy* (3:2). He does not ask God to cancel the judgment — he knows it is just — but to remember mercy in the midst of it. That petition, *in wrath remember mercy*, is one the church prays in every dark season, and it is always answered in the cross.

God Came from Teman (3:3–12)

Then comes a great theophany — God marching out of the south, from Teman and Mount Paran, in the language of the Exodus and Sinai: the heavens covered with his glory, the everlasting mountains scattered, the sun and moon standing still, the rivers cleft. It is awesome and terrible, and meant to be. Teach it as a reminder of the sheer majesty of the God Habakkuk had been arguing with — not a tame deity to be managed, but the Lord of hosts before whom the everlasting hills bow. The grandeur sets up the surprise of what the march is *for*.

Thou Wentest Forth for Salvation (3:13–16)

For the whole terrifying march has a purpose, and the prophet names it at the center: *thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed* (3:13). The Warrior goes out not to flaunt his power but to save — and he goes with his Anointed One, his Messiah, at his side, wounding *the head out of the house of the wicked* (a phrase that reaches back to the promise that the woman's seed would crush the serpent's head). Habakkuk, seeing it, trembles to his bones — and resolves nonetheless to *rest in the day of trouble* (3:16). The vision of God's saving power does not make him casual; it makes him quiet.

Yet Will I Rejoice; Hinds' Feet (3:17–19)

And the summit. Habakkuk names the total ruin — the failed fig, the empty vine, the cut-off flock — and then turns on it the greatest *yet* in the Old Testament: *yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation* (3:18). His joy has moved its root from the things that can fail to the God who cannot. And the book ends with him bounding like a deer on the heights, his feet made *like hinds' feet* by a strength not his own. Teach the class that this is where living by faith arrives — not at a life without ruin, but at a joy and a surefootedness given from outside, that hold when everything else gives way.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“How can anyone ‘rejoice’ while naming the loss of everything? Isn’t that just denial?”

It is the opposite of denial — Habakkuk names the ruin item by item, without flinching, and rejoices anyway. The key is that his joy was never rooted in the figs and the flock to begin with. Happiness depends on happenings, and when the happenings fail, it drains away. Joy is rooted in the unchanging God, so it can stand in the very ruin that destroys happiness. Habakkuk is not pretending the loss is not real; he is showing where a deeper gladness keeps its root.

“What is the difference between joy and happiness, practically?”

Happiness rises and falls with circumstances — it is there when life goes well and gone when it does not. Joy is a fruit the Spirit grows in the soul, anchored not in our situation but in God himself. That is why a believer can have real joy in genuine grief, and why the world, which knows only happiness, finds it baffling. The practical difference is where you have sunk your roots: in the shifting things, or in the God who does not change.

“Who is the ‘anointed’ God goes forth with in verse 13?”

The Hebrew is *meshicheka* — *thy Messiah*, thy Anointed One. In its first setting it points to God’s anointed king leading his people, but the whole expectation of Israel was narrowing onto one coming Anointed One who would be prophet, priest, and king together. The New Testament gives him his name: the Christ, the Lord Jesus. God’s saving march, even here, is undertaken with his Anointed at his side — the One through whom salvation finally comes.

“Does ‘hinds’ feet upon the high places’ mean God will take my troubles away?”

Not quite — and the precise wording is the comfort. Habakkuk does not say the high and dangerous places will be removed; he says he will be given hinds’ feet to walk them without falling. The deer is surefooted on the very cliffs that would kill another creature. God’s promise is often not the removal of the steep path but the strength to walk it — a strength supplied from outside to a man who has none of his own left.

“How does this connect to Paul saying he can do all things through Christ?”

It is the same lesson in the New Testament key. Paul wrote *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me* not from a mountaintop but from prison, out of weakness and want (Philippians 4:11–13). Like Habakkuk, he had learned that the strength is given, not summoned — that God’s power is made perfect in our weakness. Both men arrive at the same place: a contentment and strength that do not depend on circumstances because they do not come from us.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 2 — The Anointed at the center of the march

A strong way into the christology. God goes forth *with thine anointed*. Ask the class what it means that even this ancient theophany has the Messiah at its center — and how the whole Old Testament hope was narrowing onto the one Anointed in whom prophet, priest, and king would be joined.

Question 4 — Joy in the ruins

The heart of the session. Work the difference between joy and happiness, and let the class locate where their own gladness is rooted. Ask gently: when the figs fail — the job, the health, the

relationship — does the joy drain with them, or does it hold? The question searches without accusing.

Question 5 — Strength from outside

A freeing question for the weary. Habakkuk's strength is the LORD's, not his own grit. Ask what it does to the exhausted to hear that they are not asked to summon strength from within but to receive it from God — and where they most need hinds' feet to walk a cliff they cannot avoid.

Question 6 — The great “yet”

A fitting closing question. The whole chapter turns on one word — *yet*. Ask the class to name the *although* in their own lives, and to consider what it would mean to follow it, as Habakkuk does, with *yet I will rejoice in the LORD*. Keep it honest and hopeful; this is faith's highest note.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ◆ Luther, *Lectures on Habakkuk* (Luther's Works, vol. 19), and his hymn-writing instinct that turned biblical prayers into song.
- ◆ The Small Catechism, the Third Article, on the Spirit who works faith and its fruit — joy among them — in the believer.
- ◆ Philippians 4:4–13, the New Testament's great chapter on joy and contentment in every circumstance.

Commentaries

- ◆ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Habakkuk 3 and the anointed of verse 13.
- ◆ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).
- ◆ For more depth, the treatment of Habakkuk in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ◆ Pray Habakkuk 3:17–18 by name over your own *although* — the loss you most fear — and follow it with the prophet's *yet*.

- ◆ When strength fails, pray *the LORD God is my strength* and Philippians 4:13 together, and ask for hinds' feet to walk the cliff before you.

A Final Word

You are teaching one of the highest peaks of faith in all of Scripture — a man who looks the loss of everything in the face and sings. Do not rush him to the song; let the class feel the ruin he names, the failed fig and the empty fold, so that the *yet* lands with all its weight.

And teach where the joy keeps its root. Habakkuk's gladness was never in the figs and the flock, so it does not fall when they do. Joy is a fruit the Spirit grows in the unchanging God, and it can flourish in soil where happiness withers — which is the only kind of gladness that will hold a soul in the dark.

And do not miss the Christ at the center of the march. God went forth *for salvation with thine anointed* — the Messiah at his side, wounding the head of the wicked, fulfilling the oldest promise of all. The same Anointed One is the strength that makes our feet like hinds' feet on the heights. Teach the loss; preach the *yet*. Then on to Zephaniah, and the God who sings over his people.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FIFTEEN

He Will Joy Over Thee with Singing

Zephaniah · with John 1:14 and Revelation 21:3–4

A Note to the Teacher

Zephaniah begins as darkly as any book in the Bible — with the unmaking of creation — and ends as tenderly as any, with God singing over his people. The whole movement of the little book is that arc, from the great and terrible Day of the LORD down to a love song. Teach it as the journey it is, and the destination will land with full force.

The opening is creation run backward: *I will consume man and beast... the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea*, the very creatures of Genesis swept away in reverse order. And the cause is idolatry — not only open paganism but the subtler sin of divided worship, *them that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham*, hedging their bets between the true God and a false one. That is a sin a church class knows well, and it deserves honest attention.

But the book's last word is its name and its glory: *he will joy over thee with singing*. God sings. Land the class there — on a mighty God in the midst of his people whose love is settled, at rest, and overflows in song — and trace that presence to its fulfillment in Immanuel and its consummation when he wipes away every tear.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Zephaniah moves from the great Day that un-makes creation to the God who *will joy over thee with singing* — the King in the midst of his people, no longer to judge but to save. Teach the danger of divided worship, the promise to the meek who seek the LORD, and the astonishing tenderness of a God who sings, fulfilled when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Zephaniah — the consuming of all things, the great Day of the LORD, the call to the meek to seek him, the pure language, and the closing song over Zion.
- ◆ Read John 1:14 and Revelation 21:3–4 — the Word made flesh dwelling among us, and the tabernacle of God with men where he wipes away every tear. Zephaniah's *in the midst* reaches toward both.
- ◆ Note that Zephaniah 1:14–18 — the great Day, darkness, distress — is the source of the old hymn *Dies Irae*. The class may know the music without the text.
- ◆ Have the threefold *in the midst* of chapter three in view (3:5, 15, 17). It is the anchor of the whole closing joy.
- ◆ Recall the remnant thread: Zephaniah's *meek of the earth* who seek the LORD are the same faithful few the volume has watched preserved through every judgment.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Zephaniah swings from terror to tenderness; these three carry the class safely across.

The great Day exposes the danger of divided worship.

The book opens with words that ought to stop the breath: *I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD* (1:2) — creation run backward, the man, the beast, the bird, the fish swept away in the reverse order of the days of Genesis. The cause is idolatry, and a people *that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him* (1:6). But mark the subtler form Zephaniah names: not only those who worship Baal outright, but *them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham* (1:5) — those who try to have it both ways, bowing to the LORD one day and to the pagan god the next, keeping a foot in both camps. This divided worship is in some ways more dangerous than open idolatry, because it wears the costume of faith while the heart is split. The

Lord Jesus named the same impossibility: no one can serve two masters. The LORD will not be one option among several, one insurance policy held alongside others.

The promise is to the meek who seek the LORD.

Into the darkness comes a call and a refuge: *seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth... seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger* (2:3). The promise of shelter on the Day is held out not to the powerful or the self-assured but to the *meek* — the humble remnant who have given up trusting themselves and seek the LORD. This is the same faithful few the whole volume has watched the LORD preserve through every fire, and the same posture the gospel always requires: not strength brought to God, but emptiness brought to be filled. And the LORD promises further to *turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD* (3:9) — the curse of Babel reversed, the scattered nations gathered to call on the one Name, a promise that breaks open at Pentecost.

God sings over his people — the King in the midst.

The height of the book, and one of the tenderest verses in all of Scripture, is the song that closes it: *the LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing* (3:17). Read it slowly, for it is almost too good to take in. The mighty God, in the midst of his people, will *rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love* — his love is not anxious or wavering or conditional but settled, quiet, content in its object; and then the words that ought to undo us: *he will joy over thee with singing*. God sings. And the whole comfort rests on his presence — *in the midst of thee*, no longer to judge but to save. That presence has a name: it came true when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, Immanuel, God with us — the Lord Jesus, the King of Israel, standing in the very midst of his people.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:16	The great Day of the LORD — creation un-made; divided worship (1)
0:16–0:26	Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek; the pure language (2:1–3:13)
0:26–0:42	He will joy over thee with singing; the King in the midst (3:14–20)
0:42–0:48	Tracing “in the midst” to Immanuel and the new creation

0:48–0:56

Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance

0:56–1:00

Closing prayer; assign Haggai and Session Sixteen

Pacing Tip

The destination is 3:17 — God singing over his people — and it must not be rushed. If time runs short, compress the catalog of judgment in chapter one to its principle (the great Day, and the peril of divided worship), and protect the call to the meek and the closing song. The class should leave having heard that God sings over them, and knowing the singer's name.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Great Day of the LORD (1:1–18)

The book opens with creation in reverse — man, beast, bird, fish consumed — because a people have given to created things the worship that belongs to the Creator alone. Teach the subtle idolatry Zephaniah names: not only open paganism but divided worship, swearing by the LORD and by Malcham at once. It is more dangerous than honest unbelief because it looks like faith. And note the famous lines that follow — *the great day of the LORD is near... a day of wrath... a day of darkness* (1:14–15) — the very words the church set to music in the *Dies Irae*. The Day is real, and the law here is in full voice.

Seek Ye the LORD, All Ye Meek (2:1–3)

Against the terror comes the open door: *seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth* (2:3). Mark to whom it is offered — the meek, the humble remnant who have stopped trusting themselves. The shelter on the Day is not earned by strength but found in seeking the LORD with empty hands. This is the gospel's posture, and the same faithful few the volume has traced from Joel's *whosoever* onward. The proud have no refuge on the Day; the meek are hidden in it.

A Pure Language (3:8–13)

The LORD promises to *turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent* (3:9). It is the reversal of Babel — where God once confused the tongues and scattered the proud, he now purifies the tongue and gathers the humble to call on his

Name with one voice. Teach the class to hear Pentecost coming: the nations, once divided, drawn together to call on the one Name — the Church gathered out of every language to worship the Lamb.

He Will Joy Over Thee with Singing (3:14–17)

And the book rises to a song. Every dread of chapter one is reversed: *the LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee* (3:15). The judgments are not merely paid — they are *taken away*. And then the summit: *he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing* (3:17). Linger here. The God before whom the everlasting mountains bow sings over his people the way a bridegroom sings over his bride. His love is settled and at rest, content in its object. Let the class feel how astonishing it is that the verdict of the great Day, for those in the midst of whom the King stands, is a love song.

The King in the Midst (3:14–20)

Do not miss the phrase that anchors all the joy: *in the midst of thee*, sounding three times in the closing verses. The whole comfort rests on the presence of God among his people — no longer to judge but to save and to sing. And that presence has a name. The promise that the King would be in the midst of his people came true when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), and it presses toward a still greater fulfillment, when *the tabernacle of God is with men*, and he wipes away every tear, and the redeemed *shall not see evil any more* (Revelation 21:3–4). *In the midst of thee* is the heartbeat of the whole Bible's story — God walking with man in the garden, the tabernacle pitched in the camp, the glory between the cherubim, the Word made flesh, and at last the city where God dwells with his people forever.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Why does Zephaniah open with God destroying everything — even animals and birds?”

Because he is painting creation run backward. The man, beast, bird, and fish are swept away in the reverse order of the days of Genesis — a deliberate un-making of the world to show how seriously God takes the idolatry that has corrupted it. It is the law in its most sweeping voice, meant to break every false security. And it makes the tenderness of the book's ending all the more astonishing: the God who can un-make the world chooses instead to sing over his people.

“What is wrong with ‘swearing by the LORD and by Malcham’? Isn’t worshipping the LORD at all a good thing?”

Divided worship is not partial faith; it is its own kind of unbelief, because it refuses to let the LORD be God alone. Keeping a foot in both camps treats him as one option among several, an insurance policy held alongside others — and that is a denial of who he is. The Lord Jesus said no one can serve two masters, and meant it. The danger is that this idolatry wears the costume of faith, which makes it harder to see and easier to excuse than open paganism.

“Why is the promise of shelter given to the ‘meek’ specifically?”

Because the meek are those who have stopped trusting themselves and turned to seek the LORD with empty hands — which is the only posture in which anyone receives grace. The proud have a refuge they trust in already (themselves), and so they are exposed on the Day; the meek have given that up, and so they are hidden in the LORD. It is the same lowliness the whole gospel requires: not strength brought to God, but emptiness brought to be filled.

“Does God really ‘sing’? Isn’t that just poetry?”

It is poetry, and it is true — poetry is how Scripture says things too large for plain prose. The verse means that God’s delight in his redeemed people is not grudging or dutiful but overflowing, the way joy overflows into song. He does not merely tolerate his people or save them at arm’s length; he rejoices over them with the gladness of a bridegroom. That a holy God should feel such delight in sinners he has rescued is the most moving note in the whole book — and it is no exaggeration.

“Has the promise that the King would be ‘in the midst’ been fulfilled?”

Already and not yet, like so much in the Twelve. It came true when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us — Immanuel, God with us, the King standing in the very midst of his people (John 1:14). And it presses toward its fullness in the new creation, where the tabernacle of God is with men and he wipes away every tear (Revelation 21:3–4). We live between the two comings of the King who is *in the midst*, already among us by his Word and Supper, not yet visibly enthroned.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — The peril of divided worship

A searching opener for a church class. Where do we *swear by the LORD and by Malcham* — keep a foot in both camps, holding God alongside other masters? Ask why this hidden idolatry is more dangerous than open unbelief, precisely because it looks like faith.

Question 3 — Seeking with empty hands

The gospel posture. The promise is to the meek who seek the LORD. Ask what it means to come to God with emptiness rather than strength, and why the proud find no shelter on the Day while the lowly are hidden in it. A good place to surface how grace is received.

Question 5 — The God who sings

The tender heart of the session. Sit with *he will joy over thee with singing* and let it overturn the picture of a reluctant, arm's-length God. Ask the class what it would change to truly believe that God delights in them with the gladness of a bridegroom — not despite the gospel, but because of it.

Question 6 — “In the midst” through the whole story

The christological landing. Trace *in the midst* from the garden to the tabernacle to the Word made flesh to the new creation. Ask the class to see their own place in that story — God already in their midst by Word and Supper, and the day coming when he dwells with them and wipes away every tear.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets III: Zephaniah* (Luther's Works, vol. 18).
- ♦ The Small Catechism, the First Commandment and its explanation — *we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things* — the cure for divided worship.
- ♦ John 1:1-14, the Word made flesh dwelling among us — the fulfillment of *the King... in the midst of thee*.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Zephaniah 3 and the *in the midst* refrain.

- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Zephaniah in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ♦ Pray Zephaniah 3:17 over yourself — hear the mighty God *joy over thee with singing* — and let it answer the lie that God merely tolerates you.
- ♦ Examine your own divided loyalties in the light of the First Commandment, and ask the Lord to be your God alone, not one master among several.

A Final Word

You are teaching a book that travels the whole distance from the unmaking of the world to a love song — and your task is to walk the class across that distance without letting them stall in the dark. Teach the great Day honestly; let them feel the peril of a worship that hedges its bets and keeps a foot in both camps.

But land them on the song. *He will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing* — the mighty God, in the midst of his people, delighting in them with the gladness of a bridegroom. That is the verdict of the great Day for all who are found in the midst of whom the King stands: not wrath but a love song.

And tell them the singer's name. The promise that the King would be *in the midst* came true when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and it will be complete when he dwells with his people forever and wipes away every tear. The God who sings over you now is Immanuel, already in your midst by Word and Supper. Teach the great Day; preach the God who sings. Then on to Haggai, and the desire of all nations.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SIXTEEN

The Desire of All Nations

Haggai · with Hebrews 12:26–28

A Note to the Teacher

With Haggai the calendar changes. The exiles have come home from Babylon, the temple lies in ruins, and the people have settled into their own paneled houses while the house of God stays a heap of rubble. Haggai's task is to stir a discouraged, distracted people to finish what they began — and to lift their eyes from their modest pile of stones to the glory that would one day fill it.

Teach the book's great encouragement honestly, because the builders needed it and so does every weary congregation. The old men who remembered Solomon's temple wept at how plain the new one was; and into that disappointment God speaks the promise that turns the whole book: *the desire of all nations shall come... the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former*. The plain house would hold a greater glory than the golden one — because God himself would walk into it.

And keep the theology of the cross in view, because Haggai is a parable of it. The instinct that looks for God's glory in marble and gold is forever disappointed by the plainness of how God actually works — in a modest temple, a stable, a carpenter's shop, a cross. Teach the class to find the glory where God hides it, beneath its opposite.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Into a discouraged people building a plain temple, God promises *the desire of all nations shall come, and... the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former* — not in gold but because God himself would enter it. Teach the glory hidden beneath plainness, the Davidic line restored in the

signet of Zerubbabel, and the kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Haggai — the rebuke of the paneled houses, the call to *consider your ways*, the promise *I am with you*, the weeping over the plain temple, the desire of all nations, and the signet of Zerubbabel.
- ◆ Read Hebrews 12:26–28, where the shaking of Haggai 2:6 becomes the promise of a kingdom that *cannot be moved*. This is the New Testament's reading of Haggai's shaking.
- ◆ Have ready the theology-of-the-cross lens: God reveals his greatest glory not in splendor but hidden beneath its opposite — the plain temple, the stable, the cross.
- ◆ Recall Jeremiah 22:24, where the LORD plucked off King Coniah like a signet in judgment — so the restoring of the signet to Zerubbabel, his grandson, lands with full weight.
- ◆ Note that Zerubbabel stands in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus; the signet restored is the Davidic line carried forward toward Bethlehem.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Haggai is short and practical; these three open its plain stones onto the gospel.

The Desire of all nations is a Person, and the glory is his coming.

God promises: *I will shake the heavens, and the earth... and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory* (2:6–7). The phrase has been read two ways that finally meet in one place. Some hear *the desire of all nations* as the treasures and peoples of the Gentile world streaming in — the great ingathering the Twelve have promised again and again. But the church has long heard something deeper: a title for the Coming One himself, the Desire of all nations — the One whom the whole heathen world, in all its restless idolatry and longing, was blindly seeking without knowing his name. Every nation's hunger for God, every reaching after the divine

in all the religions of mankind, was at bottom a hunger for him. The glory that would fill the house was not gold or grandeur but a Person — the Lord himself, come at last into his temple.

The latter house is greater — not in gold, but because God came in.

Then the verse fought over by those who look for a future, rebuilt, physical temple: *the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former... and in this place will I give peace* (2:9). How could that modest second temple ever outshine Solomon's? Not in silver and gold — the LORD waves those away as already his, and the second house never matched the first in splendor. It was greater for one reason only: the theology of the cross. There is a way of reading prophecy that always looks for God's glory in outward grandeur — a temple of marble, restored sacrifices, visible magnificence — and is forever disappointed by the plainness of how God actually works. The old theologians called that instinct the theology of glory, and set against it the theology of the cross: God reveals his greatest glory not in splendor but hidden beneath its opposite. The plain second temple is a parable of it — so is the stable, the carpenter's shop, the cross itself, where the glory of God blazed out most fully precisely where the eye saw only a dying man. The latter house was greater because God himself walked into it.

The signet is restored — the Davidic line carried toward Christ, the kingdom unshakable.

The book closes with a word over one man that reaches to the cradle in Bethlehem: *will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant... and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee* (2:23). To feel its weight, remember Zerubbabel's grandfather, King Coniah, of whom the LORD had said in judgment, *though Coniah... were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence* (Jeremiah 22:24). The royal signet — the king's ring, the seal of his authority — had been torn off and cast away in the exile; the Davidic line had seemed finished. And now, to the grandson, the LORD says: I will make thee a signet. The ring is restored. The line cut down to a dead stump is honored again and carried forward — straight toward the Lord Jesus, for Zerubbabel stands in the genealogy of Christ. And the same God who shakes heaven and earth gives his people a kingdom *which cannot be moved* (Hebrews 12:28) — everything shakeable will be shaken away, and only his kingdom will remain.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time

Segment

0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:16	The house that lay waste; consider your ways; I am with you (1)
0:16–0:24	Who saw this house in her first glory? — the weeping builders (2:1–5)
0:24–0:38	The desire of all nations; the glory of the latter house (2:6–9)
0:38–0:46	A signet for Zerubbabel; the unshakable kingdom (2:20–23)
0:46–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Zechariah 1–6 and Session Seventeen

Pacing Tip

The summit is 2:6–9 — the Desire of all nations and the greater glory of the latter house; protect it. If time runs short, sketch the rebuke of chapter one quickly and spend your minutes on the glory hidden in the plain temple and the signet restored to Zerubbabel. The class must leave seeing that the latter house was greater because God walked into it — and that they should look for glory where God hides it.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The House That Lay Waste; Consider Your Ways (1:1–11)

The exiles have come home and built themselves comfortable, paneled houses, while the house of God lies in ruins — and they have prospered at nothing: they sow much and bring in little, eat and are not filled, earn wages and put them in a bag with holes. Four times God says, *consider your ways* (1:5, 7). The disordered priorities have drained the blessing out of everything. Teach the diagnosis gently but plainly: when the house of God comes last, nothing else quite satisfies, because we were made to put first things first.

I Am with You (1:12–15)

The people obey — a rare and lovely thing in the prophets — and God answers their obedience with five of the best words in the book: *I am with you, saith the LORD* (1:13). That promise is the engine of the whole rebuilding. They do not work to earn God's presence; they work because he is already with them. Note for the class that the same promise crowns the Great Commission — *lo, I am with you always* — the abiding presence of God with his working people.

Who Saw This House in Her First Glory? (2:1–5)

As the new temple rises, the old men who remembered Solomon's glory weep at how plain it is — *is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?* (2:3). Discouragement is the great enemy of every building project, then and now. And God meets it not by denying the plainness but by promising his presence and his Spirit: *be strong... for I am with you* (2:4). Teach the class that God's work often looks unimpressive in progress, and that faithfulness, not grandeur, is what he asks of the builders.

The Desire of All Nations; the Glory of the Latter House (2:6–9)

Into that disappointment God speaks the promise that turns the book: he will shake the nations, and *the desire of all nations shall come*, and fill the house with glory — a glory greater than Solomon's, though the house is plainer. Teach both readings of *the desire of all nations* — the treasures and peoples streaming in, and the Coming One whom the nations were blindly seeking — and let them meet in the Person who would one day walk into that very temple. The latter house was greater not because of its stones but because God in the flesh stood in it.

A Signet for Zerubbabel (2:20–23)

The book ends with the signet restored. Where the LORD had plucked King Coniah off like a discarded ring in judgment, he now says to Coniah's grandson, *I will make thee as a signet* (2:23). The Davidic line, seemingly finished in the exile, is honored again and carried forward toward great David's greater Son. And the shaking of all the kingdoms is set against the one kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28). Teach the class to read the signet as God's pledge that his promise to David never failed — it was moving, all along, through a minor governor of a tiny province, toward Bethlehem.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Does Haggai's promise of a greater temple mean there will be a future rebuilt temple in Jerusalem?”

No — the promise was fulfilled in the very building Haggai's hearers were raising. Its glory exceeded Solomon's not in gold (the second temple never matched the first in splendor) but because the Lord himself walked into it. To hold the promise in reserve for a future temple of marble is to miss the fulfillment that already happened and to repeat the theology-of-glory

mistake — looking for God's glory in grandeur instead of where he actually placed it, in a plain house entered by God in the flesh.

“Who or what is ‘the desire of all nations’?”

Both the wealth and peoples of the nations streaming to God, and — more deeply — the Coming One himself. The church has long heard in the phrase a title for the Lord Jesus: the One whom every nation, in all its restless idolatry and longing, was blindly seeking without knowing his name. Every hunger for God in the religions of mankind was at bottom a hunger for him. He is the Desire of all nations whether they know to name him or not, and his coming was the glory that filled the house.

“What does ‘consider your ways’ have to say to us?”

It asks whether first things are first. Haggai's hearers had built comfortable homes and left God's house in ruins, and found that nothing quite satisfied — their wages ran out as through a bag with holes. The principle stands: when the things of God come last, the rest does not deliver what it promised, because we were made to seek first his kingdom. *Consider your ways* is an invitation to put the disordered priorities back in order and find the blessing return.

“Why does it matter so much that Zerubbabel gets the ‘signet’ back?”

Because his grandfather had lost it. God had said he would pluck King Coniah off like a signet ring in judgment, and with that the Davidic line seemed finished. To restore the signet to Coniah's grandson is God's pledge that the promise to David had not failed after all — the royal line, cut to a stump in the exile, is carried forward through Zerubbabel toward the Lord Jesus, in whose genealogy he stands. The discarded ring is restored, and the covenant moves on toward Bethlehem.

“What is the ‘kingdom that cannot be shaken’?”

It is the kingdom of God in Christ. The writer to the Hebrews takes Haggai's promise to shake heaven and earth and draws the comfort out: everything that can be shaken — every empire, every temple of stone, every earthly security — will be shaken away, so that only what cannot be moved remains (Hebrews 12:26–28). And the unshakable thing is the kingdom we receive in Christ. When all else gives way, that kingdom stands — which is why we hold it with reverence and thanksgiving.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — Considering our ways

A practical opener. Haggai's hearers had their priorities inverted and found nothing satisfied. Ask the class, without prying, where *consider your ways* lands for them — where the things of God have slipped down the list, and the rest has quietly stopped delivering.

Question 3 — Glory hidden in plainness

The theological center. Why was the plain second temple greater than the golden first? Draw out the theology of the cross — God's glory hidden beneath its opposite — and ask where we, too, look for God in grandeur and miss him in the plain places where he actually comes.

Question 4 — The Desire of all nations

The christological landing. Ask what it means that the nations' restless longing was, all along, a hunger for the Lord Jesus they did not know to name. A rich place to talk about the church's mission — carrying the Desire of all nations to people already aching for him.

Question 6 — The unshakable kingdom

A steadying closing question. Everything shakeable will be shaken; only the kingdom of Christ remains. Ask the class what they are leaning on that can be shaken — and what it would mean to set their weight, instead, on the one kingdom that cannot be moved.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ◆ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets III: Haggai* (Luther's Works, vol. 18).
- ◆ Luther's Heidelberg Disputation on the theology of the cross — the lens for the greater glory of the plain temple.
- ◆ Hebrews 12:18–29, the shaking and the unshakable kingdom — the New Testament's reading of Haggai 2:6.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Haggai 2 and the Hebrews 12 cross-reference.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Haggai in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ♦ Pray *consider your ways* over your own priorities, and ask the Lord to set first things first again.
- ♦ When God's work in your life looks plain and unimpressive, remember the latter house — and look for the glory where God hides it, beneath its opposite.

A Final Word

You are teaching a book about a discouraged people building something that looked like nothing — and your task is to lift their eyes, as Haggai lifted his hearers', from the plain stones to the glory God would put in them. Teach the rebuke honestly; let the class hear *consider your ways*. But do not leave them measuring their work by its grandeur.

Land them on the promise. The latter house was greater than Solomon's not in gold but because God himself walked into it — and that is the theology of the cross in stone. Teach the class to look for God's glory not in marble and magnificence but where he actually hides it: in a plain temple, a stable, a carpenter's shop, a cross.

And send them out on the signet and the unshakable kingdom. The ring plucked off in judgment is restored to Zerubbabel and carried forward to great David's greater Son; and the God who shakes heaven and earth gives his people a kingdom that cannot be moved. The Desire of all nations has come, and his kingdom is the one thing that will be left standing. Teach the plain stones; preach the glory that filled them. Then on to Zechariah, and the Branch, the priest upon his throne.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SEVENTEEN

The Branch, My Servant

Zechariah 1–6 · with Hebrews 7 and Psalm 110

A Note to the Teacher

Zechariah is the most apocalyptic of the Twelve — a book of night visions, lampstands and flying scrolls and horsemen among the myrtle trees — and the most densely christological. The first half, our session, runs through eight visions to a stunning sign: a crown set on the head of a high priest, and a word spoken over him about One who would be priest and king at once. Of all the prophets, Zechariah may see the coming Christ most clearly.

Teach the visions for their gospel, not their machinery. The danger with apocalyptic is to get lost decoding the horns and the horses; the reward is in what they reveal — the LORD's jealous love for Jerusalem, a sinner's filthy garments stripped and replaced, the Branch springing from a dead stump, a work done *not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit*, and a priest enthroned. Keep the class moving toward those.

And bring the New Testament in for the two great signs. The cleansing of Joshua is justification in a picture; the crown on the priest's head is the priest-king, the One whom Psalm 110 swore would be *a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*, and whom Hebrews names plainly as the Lord Jesus. Two offices Israel kept rigorously apart are united at last in one Person.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Zechariah's visions show a sinner's filthy garments stripped and replaced, the *BRANCH* springing from David's dead stump, and a crown set on a priest's head — *he shall be a priest upon his throne* — the King-Priest no son of David or Levi could be, only the Lord Jesus. Teach justification in the

cleansing of Joshua and the priest-king in the crown, by the Spirit and not by might.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Zechariah 1–6 — the horsemen, the LORD jealous for Jerusalem, the cleansing of Joshua and the promise of the Branch, the lampstand and the *not by might*, the flying roll, and the crowning of the priest.
- ◆ Read Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7, the great priest-king texts. *Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec* is the key to a priest upon his throne.
- ◆ Note that the names matter: *Joshua* the high priest is, in Hebrew, the very name that means *the LORD saves* — a fitting man to stand as a sign of the One who cleanses sinners.
- ◆ Have ready the BRANCH thread: Isaiah's shoot from the stump of Jesse, Jeremiah's *THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*, now Zechariah's *my servant the BRANCH*.
- ◆ Recall how strictly Israel kept king and priest apart — Uzziah struck with leprosy for entering the temple — so the crown on the priest lands with full shock.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. The visions are strange; these three keep them pointed straight at Christ.

The cleansing of Joshua is justification in a picture.

In the fourth vision the high priest Joshua stands before the LORD in filthy garments, with Satan at his right hand to accuse him — and the LORD rebukes the accuser, strips off the filthy clothes, and says, *behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment* (3:4). Teach this for the gospel it is: the sinner stands accused and defiled, unable to cleanse himself; God himself silences the accuser, removes the filth, and clothes him in clean raiment he did not provide. This is justification in a single scene — our sin taken away and a righteousness

given that is not our own. And it is fitting that the man at the center is named *Joshua* — the very name that means *the LORD saves* — for the One who truly cleanses sinners bears it.

The Branch springs from the dead stump — the LORD our righteousness.

The cleansing opens onto a promise, one of the great Messianic words of the Old Testament: *behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH* (3:8). The Branch — in Hebrew *tsemach*, the green shoot — was already a known name for the Coming One. Isaiah had seen a Branch grow out of the felled stump of Jesse; Jeremiah had promised a righteous Branch raised to David whose name would be called *THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*. The prophets speak with one voice: a tender green shoot springing from what looked like a dead stump — the royal line of David the exile had seemed to cut off at the ground. And note how cleansing and Branch belong together: the One who clothes Joshua in clean raiment and the Branch who is coming are bound up in the same saving work, for the Branch *is* our righteousness, the clean garment God provides.

A priest upon his throne — the two offices united in one Person, by the Spirit.

The climax is a sign no Israelite could miss. The LORD tells Zechariah to make a crown and set it on the head of *Joshua the high priest* (6:11) — astonishing, for in Israel king and priest were kept rigorously apart: kings from Judah, priests from Levi, and when King Uzziah dared to burn incense in the temple he was struck with leprosy on the spot. Yet here a royal crown is set on a priest's head, with the word that explains it: *behold the man whose name is The BRANCH... he shall build the temple of the LORD... and he shall be a priest upon his throne* (6:12–13). A King who is also a Priest, a Priest who also reigns — no son of David could be this, and no son of Levi; only One could hold both crowns at once. This is the One Psalm 110 foresaw, *a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*, and Hebrews names as the Lord Jesus. And the temple he builds rises not by human strength but as the angel told Zerubbabel: *not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts* (4:6).

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:14	The night visions; the LORD jealous for Jerusalem (1–2)
0:14–0:26	A brand plucked from the fire — the cleansing of Joshua, the Branch (3)

0:26–0:34	Not by might, nor by power; the curse carried away (4–5)
0:34–0:46	A priest upon his throne — the crowning of Joshua (6)
0:46–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Zechariah 7–9 and Session Eighteen

Pacing Tip

Do not get lost in the machinery of the visions. The two indispensable scenes are the cleansing of Joshua (chapter 3, justification) and the crowning of Joshua (chapter 6, the priest-king); protect both. If time runs short, summarize the horsemen and horns quickly and spend your minutes on the filthy garments exchanged and the crown on the priest's head — the gospel of the whole session.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Apocalypse of the Old Testament; I Am Jealous for Jerusalem (1–2)

Zechariah opens with a call to return — *turn ye unto me... and I will turn unto you* (1:3) — and then a series of night visions: horsemen patrolling the earth, horns and craftsmen, a man with a measuring line. Through them sounds the LORD's tender refrain: *I am jealous for Jerusalem... with a great jealousy* (1:14). Teach the class that the strangeness of apocalyptic serves a warm purpose here — to assure a small, discouraged remnant that the LORD has not forgotten them, that he watches the whole earth and burns with love for his city. The visions are comfort dressed in cosmic imagery.

A Brand Plucked out of the Fire (3:1–5)

The fourth vision is the heart of the chapter. Joshua the high priest stands before the LORD in filthy garments, and Satan stands to accuse him — and the LORD answers the accuser, *is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?* (3:2). Then the gospel in action: the filthy garments are stripped away, the iniquity caused to pass, and clean raiment put on. Teach it as justification pictured — the sinner defiled and accused, cleansed and clothed by God's own act, the accuser silenced. We bring the filth; God provides the clean garment.

Behold, I Will Bring Forth My Servant the BRANCH (3:6–10)

The cleansing opens onto the promise of the Branch — *my servant the BRANCH* (3:8) — and a stone with seven eyes, and the day when the LORD will *remove the iniquity of that land in one day* (3:9). Gather the Branch thread for the class: Isaiah's shoot from Jesse's stump, Jeremiah's righteous Branch called *THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*, now Zechariah's servant the Branch. A green shoot from a dead stump — the Davidic line, seemingly finished, springing to life in the Coming One who is himself our righteousness.

Not by Might, nor by Power (4:1–6)

The fifth vision shows a golden lampstand fed by two olive trees, and its word is one of the most quoted in the prophets: *not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts* (4:6). The discouraged builders are told that the temple will rise not by human strength or numbers but by the Spirit of God. Teach the class the abiding lesson: the work of God in the church and in the soul is never finally our achievement but the Spirit's gift. The mountain of obstacles becomes a plain before grace, not before effort.

The Curse Carried Away (5:1–11)

Two visions of judgment follow — a flying scroll, a curse going out over the land against thieves and liars, and a woman named Wickedness sealed in a basket and carried off to Babylon. Teach them briefly as the necessary other side: the same God who cleanses Joshua also removes wickedness from the land. Grace does not ignore sin; it carries it away. The land is purged so that the holy temple may rise in it.

A Priest upon His Throne (6:9–15)

The session climaxes in a sign. A crown is made and set on the head of Joshua the high priest — an act every Israelite would have felt as a shock, for king and priest were never joined. And the word explains it: *behold the man whose name is The BRANCH... he shall be a priest upon his throne* (6:12–13). Teach the class that Joshua, crowned, is a living sign of One who is coming — a King who is also a Priest, in whom the two offices Israel kept forever apart are united. Psalm 110 swore it; Hebrews 7 names him: the Lord Jesus, priest and king at once, who offered the sacrifice and now reigns.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“These visions are so strange — horns, horses, flying scrolls. How am I supposed to teach them?”

Teach them for what they reveal, not for a decoder ring. Apocalyptic imagery is a way of saying large things vividly, and the large things here are clear: God watches the whole earth and loves his city, he cleanses and clothes sinners, he builds by his Spirit, he carries wickedness away, and he is sending a priest-king. Keep moving the class toward those gospel realities and do not let the hour disappear into the machinery. The horns serve the Branch, not the other way around.

“Why is the cleansing of Joshua such a big deal?”

Because it is justification acted out on a stage. A guilty man stands accused and filthy, unable to clean himself; the accuser is silenced by God, the filth is removed, and clean clothes the man never bought are put on him. That is exactly what happens to the sinner in Christ — our sin taken away, a righteousness given that is not our own. The whole gospel of free justification is in that one scene, and it is all the more striking that the man's name, Joshua, is the very name that means *the LORD saves*.

“What is ‘the Branch,’ and why that image?”

The Branch is a settled Old Testament name for the Coming One — a green shoot springing from a stump that looked dead. The image is exact: the royal line of David had been cut down in the exile to what seemed a lifeless stump, and the Branch is the living shoot God brings up from it. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah all use it, and Jeremiah even names the Branch *THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS* — which is why the cleansing and the Branch belong together: he is the clean garment God provides.

“Why was it so shocking to put a crown on a priest?”

Because Israel kept the two offices rigorously apart. Kings came from Judah, priests from Levi, and the line was never to be crossed — when King Uzziah tried to act as a priest, he was struck with leprosy. So a royal crown on a high priest's head was a deliberate, startling sign that One was coming who would hold both offices at once — a King who is also a Priest. No ordinary man could be both; only the Lord Jesus, of whom Psalm 110 swore *a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*.

“What does ‘not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit’ mean for us?”

It means the work of God is never finally our accomplishment. The discouraged builders were told the temple would rise not by their strength or numbers but by the Spirit — and the same is true of every work of grace, in the church and in the soul. We labor, but the increase is God's; the

mountain of obstacles is leveled before his Spirit, not before our effort. It is a word of relief for the weary: the outcome does not rest on the size of our power.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 2 — The filthy garments exchanged

The gospel center. Walk the class through the cleansing of Joshua as justification — the accuser silenced, the filth removed, the clean raiment given. Ask what it means that the garment is provided, not earned, and how that frees the conscience that knows its own filth.

Question 3 — The Branch from the dead stump

A rich christological question. Gather the Branch texts and ask what hope it gives that God brings a living shoot from what looked like a dead stump — the Davidic line, and by extension every situation that seems finished. The Branch is the gospel's answer to apparent dead ends.

Question 4 — By the Spirit, not by might

A freeing question for the discouraged. Ask where the class is tempted to measure God's work by visible might and numbers, and what changes when they hear that it rises by the Spirit. A good place for the weary builder to set down a burden God never asked them to carry alone.

Question 6 — The priest upon his throne

The climactic landing. Why could no ordinary man be both king and priest, and what does it mean that the Lord Jesus is both? Connect it to Hebrews 7 and Psalm 110, and let the class rest in a Savior who offered the sacrifice for them and now reigns over them — priest and king in one Person.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on Zechariah* (*Luther's Works*, vol. 20), a substantial and richly christological treatment.

- ♦ Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7, the priest-king after the order of Melchizedek — the key to *a priest upon his throne*.
- ♦ The Augsburg Confession, Article IV, on justification — the doctrine pictured in the cleansing of Joshua.

Commentaries

- ♦ R. Reed Lessing, *Concordia Commentary: Zechariah* — confessional, christological, and excellent on the visions and the Branch.
- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Zechariah 3 and 6.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).

Devotional

- ♦ Pray Zechariah 3:4 as your own — hear God silence the accuser, take away your filth, and clothe you in raiment you did not provide.
- ♦ Rest in *a priest upon his throne* — the Lord Jesus who offered the sacrifice for your sin and now reigns to intercede for you.

A Final Word

You are teaching the most densely christological of the Twelve, and your task is to keep the class from getting lost in the visionary machinery and bring them to the Christ at the center of every vision. Teach the horns and horses lightly; spend your strength on the two great scenes.

In the first, a guilty priest stands filthy and accused, and God silences the accuser, takes away the filth, and clothes him in clean raiment — justification before your eyes, and the man's name is the very name that means *the LORD saves*. In the second, a crown is set on a priest's head, and a word is spoken about One who will be priest and king at once.

Land the class there. No son of David could be a priest, no son of Levi a king — only the Lord Jesus could hold both crowns, the priest who offered the sacrifice and the king who reigns, *a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*. And he builds his temple not by might, nor by power, but by his Spirit. Teach the visions; preach the priest upon his throne. Then on to Zechariah 7–9, and the King who comes lowly.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION EIGHTEEN

Thy King Cometh, Lowly

Zechariah 7–9 · with Matthew 21:1–11 and John 12:12–16

A Note to the Teacher

These chapters move from a question about fasting to a coronation procession down the streets of Jerusalem — and the procession is one the class has watched every Palm Sunday of their lives. Zechariah 9:9, *behold, thy King cometh unto thee... lowly, and riding upon an ass*, is the verse the crowds were singing when the Lord Jesus rode into the city, and the Gospels quote it directly. You are teaching a Holy Week text.

Teach the kind of King the prophet sees, because it corrects a hope every age gets wrong. Against a backdrop of marching armies and falling cities, Zechariah lifts his eyes and sees a King who is *just, and having salvation* — but who comes *lowly*, on a donkey, not a war-horse. The Lord Jesus chose that donkey deliberately, to declare that he is not the political, conquering Messiah the crowds wanted, but the Prince of Peace.

And follow the King to the next verses, where he accomplishes his salvation: *by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit*. These are words the Lord Jesus took on his own lips the last night before he died. The lowly King frees the prisoners by the blood of his covenant, and leaves them a name to live by: *prisoners of hope*.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The King comes *just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass* — not a war-horse — and accomplishes his salvation *by the blood of thy covenant*, sending the prisoners out of the waterless pit as *prisoners of hope*. Teach the lowly King of Palm Sunday and the covenant blood the Lord

Jesus poured out, and the hope that holds the captive fast.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Zechariah 7–9 — the question about fasting, the call to mercy and not mere observance, the LORD returned to Zion, the nations taking hold, the lowly King, and the blood of the covenant freeing the prisoners.
- ♦ Read Matthew 21:1–11 and John 12:12–16, where the Lord Jesus fulfills Zechariah 9:9 by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, and John tells us the disciples understood it only later.
- ♦ Have Exodus 24:8 ready — *behold the blood of the covenant* — and Matthew 26:28, where the Lord Jesus says *this is my blood of the new testament*. Zechariah's phrase runs between them.
- ♦ Fix the contrast in mind: a King *just, and having salvation*, yet *lowly* — power and humility in one rider. The donkey is the whole message.
- ♦ Settle the image of the *pit wherein is no water* — the dry cistern where Joseph was thrown and Jeremiah sank — a picture of hopeless captivity, of being shut up in death.
- ♦ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. The chapters cover a lot of ground; these three carry the gospel through it.

The worship God desires is mercy, not mere observance.

A delegation comes asking whether they should keep up their fasts, and the LORD answers their question with a sharper one: *did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?* (7:5). It is possible, he is saying, to keep a whole calendar of devout observance and be doing it all for oneself. What he desires is named plainly: *execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother* — and do not oppress *the widow... the fatherless, the stranger, the poor* (7:9–10). This is the same word the class met in Amos: God rejects worship that is faithless and merciless. The mercy he requires is

not a ladder we climb to him but the fruit of a faith that has received his mercy first — and the Lord Jesus pressed the very same point, quoting Hosea: *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.*

Thy King cometh, lowly — on a donkey, not a war-horse.

Against a backdrop of marching armies — many have heard in chapter nine the tramp of Alexander coming down the coast — the prophet sees a different kind of King arriving: *rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion... behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass* (9:9). Mark how he comes. He is *just* and brings *salvation* — but he comes *lowly*, humble, on a donkey rather than a war-horse, and *he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea* (9:10). The Lord Jesus chose that donkey deliberately on Palm Sunday, fulfilling this verse to the letter, to declare what kind of King he is: not the political, conquering Messiah the crowds were hoping for, but the Prince of Peace who would win his kingdom by a cross. The donkey guards us against every dream of a Messiah who rules by force.

By the blood of thy covenant — prisoners of hope freed from the pit.

How does this lowly King accomplish the salvation he brings? The next verse tells us, in words the Lord Jesus would take on his own lips the last night before he died: *by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water* (9:11). There is a covenant, sealed in blood, and by that blood the prisoners go free. The phrase *the blood of the covenant* called up Israel's deepest memories — the blood Moses sprinkled at Sinai (*behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you*), the Passover blood on the doorposts — for *without shedding of blood is no remission*. Zechariah points to a sacrifice yet to come, a blood that would do what the blood of bulls and goats could only picture, and the Lord Jesus named it at the Supper: *this is my blood of the new testament*. And to the freed captives he gives a name to live by: *prisoners of hope* (9:12) — held fast not by their chains but by a promise that cannot fail.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:14	Did ye fast unto me? — mercy, and not mere observance (7)
0:14–0:24	I am returned unto Zion; the nations take hold (8)
0:24–0:38	Thy King cometh, lowly — Palm Sunday (9:1–10)

0:38–0:48	The blood of thy covenant; prisoners of hope (9:11–17)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Zechariah 10–11 and Session Nineteen

Pacing Tip

The summit is 9:9–12 — the lowly King, the covenant blood, the prisoners of hope; protect it. If time runs short, compress the fasting question and the restoration of chapter eight, and spend your minutes on Palm Sunday and the blood of the covenant. The class must leave knowing the King comes on a donkey, frees them by his blood, and holds them as prisoners of hope.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

Did Ye Fast unto Me? (7:1–7)

A delegation arrives asking whether the people should keep their long-established fasts, and the LORD turns the question on them: *when ye fasted... did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?* (7:5). The probe is uncomfortable and necessary — a person can keep a full calendar of devout observance and aim every bit of it at himself. Ask the class, as the text does, whether our religious routines are *unto the LORD* or quietly unto ourselves.

Mercy, and Not Sacrifice (7:8–14)

The LORD names the worship he actually desires: *execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions* — and do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the stranger, the poor (7:9–10). The fathers refused, and were scattered. This is Amos's lesson again: ritual divorced from mercy is empty, and the mercy God wants is the fruit of a faith that has received his mercy. Set the Lord Jesus' word beside it — *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice* — and let the class feel that the New Testament presses exactly the same point.

As I Returned unto Zion (8:1–17)

Then the light: *I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem* (8:3). The LORD paints the restoration not as power but as peace — *old men and old women* sitting safely in the streets, the streets *full of boys and girls playing* (8:4–5). It is a picture of *shalom*, of ordinary life made safe under

God's presence. And he adds, of this gentle vision, *if it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant... should it also be marvellous in mine eyes?* (8:6) — nothing is too hard for him. Teach the class that God paints peace rather than power because peace is the deeper miracle.

Ten Men Shall Take Hold (8:18–23)

The fasts will become feasts, and the nations will be drawn in: *ten men shall take hold... of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you* (8:23). What draws the nations is not Israel's might but the real presence of God among his people — *God is with you*. Teach the class to hear *Immanuel* here, and to see the fulfillment in the Church, where God dwells by Word and Sacrament and draws people of every nation to take hold of the gospel.

Thy King Cometh, Lowly (9:1–10)

Chapter nine opens with judgment sweeping down the coast — the empires clash, the cities fall — and the LORD promises to guard his house in the middle of it (9:8). And then, against that backdrop, the prophet sees the King: *behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass* (9:9). Slow down on the contrast. He is righteous and he brings rescue, but he comes humble, on a donkey, speaking *peace unto the heathen*, his dominion *from sea even to sea* (9:10). This is the verse the Lord Jesus fulfilled on Palm Sunday by his own deliberate choice of mount — declaring himself the Prince of Peace, not the warlord the crowds wanted.

The Blood of Thy Covenant; Prisoners of Hope (9:11–17)

And the lowly King saves by blood: *by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water* (9:11). The pit is the dry cistern — Joseph's, Jeremiah's — a picture of hopeless captivity, of being shut up in death with no water and no way out. Out of it the prisoners are sent, by the blood of the covenant the Lord Jesus would pour out at the cross. And to them he gives a name: *prisoners of hope* (9:12) — captives still, in a world still groaning, but held by a hope that cannot fail, told to *turn... to the strong hold*, to the LORD himself. Teach the class that this name describes their whole present life, between the King's coming in peace and his coming in glory.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Is Zechariah saying fasting and religious observance are wrong?”

Not at all — he is asking whom the observance is *for*. A fast aimed at oneself, kept while the widow and the poor are neglected, is empty, however devout it looks. What God desires is the worship that bears fruit in mercy, the same point Amos made and the Lord Jesus repeated: *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*. Keep your disciplines, by all means; just aim them at the LORD and let them overflow into compassion, or they are only ritual turned inward.

“Why does it matter so much that the King rides a donkey?”

Because the mount declares the kind of King. A conquering general rode a war-horse; a king coming in peace rode a donkey. By choosing the donkey, the Lord Jesus announced on Palm Sunday that he was not the political, military Messiah the crowds were cheering for, but the Prince of Peace who would win his kingdom by a cross rather than a sword. The donkey is a deliberate correction of every dream of a Messiah who rules by force — then and now.

“What is ‘the blood of thy covenant’?”

It is the blood that seals the bond between the holy God and sinful people. At Sinai, Moses sprinkled the sacrificial blood and said, *behold the blood of the covenant*; at the Passover, blood on the doorposts turned away the destroyer. A covenant with God could never be sealed cheaply — *without shedding of blood is no remission*. Zechariah points forward to the one sacrifice that all that blood pictured, and the Lord Jesus named it the night before he died: *this is my blood of the new testament*. By that blood the prisoners go free.

“What is the ‘pit wherein is no water’?”

It is the dry cistern, the dungeon of the ancient world — the place where Joseph was thrown by his brothers and where Jeremiah sank in the mire. With no water to keep a prisoner alive, it is a picture of hopeless captivity, of being shut up in death with no way out. That is the pit the covenant blood empties: the King reaches into the place of death and sends the prisoners forth alive. It is the gospel in one image — captives raised from the pit by blood.

“What does it mean that we are ‘prisoners of hope’?”

It describes the believer's whole present life with great precision. We are prisoners still — not yet fully free, living in a world that groans and in bodies still mortal, in the time between the King's coming in peace and his coming in glory. But we are not prisoners of *despair*, shut in a hopeless dark; we are prisoners of *hope*, held fast by a promise that cannot fail. The hope is the anchor of

the soul, sure and steadfast — so the waiting is not anxious uncertainty but a confident holding-on, told to *turn to the strong hold*.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 2 — Mercy, not sacrifice

A searching opener. Why is the mercy God desires the fruit of faith rather than a ladder we climb? Set the Lord Jesus' *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice* beside Zechariah, and ask where our own observance has quietly turned inward, kept for ourselves rather than offered to the LORD and overflowing to the poor.

Question 4 — “God is with you”

A rich missionary question. The nations take hold because *God is with you*. Ask how the real presence of God among his people draws the world — and how this is fulfilled in the Church and in Immanuel, God with us. A good place to see mission as people taking hold of the gospel because God is genuinely present in it.

Question 5 — The King on a donkey

The christological center. Why does it matter that the King comes on a donkey and not a war-horse, and that the Lord Jesus chose this deliberately on Palm Sunday? Let the class feel how it guards against every dream of a political, conquering Messiah — and what kind of kingdom is won by lowliness and a cross.

Question 6 — The covenant blood and the prisoners of hope

The gospel landing. Trace the blood of the covenant from Sinai to the Supper, and ask what it means that the lowly King frees the prisoners by his own blood. Then dwell on *prisoners of hope* as a name for the class's own life — still captive in a groaning world, yet held by a hope that cannot fail.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on Zechariah* (Luther's Works, vol. 20), strong on the lowly King and the covenant blood.
- ♦ The Small Catechism on the Sacrament of the Altar — *this is my blood of the new testament* — the fulfillment of *the blood of thy covenant*.
- ♦ Matthew 21:1–11 and John 12:12–16, the Palm Sunday fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9.

Commentaries

- ♦ R. Reed Lessing, *Concordia Commentary: Zechariah* — excellent on the lowly King and the blood of the covenant.
- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Zechariah 9 and the Palm Sunday cross-references.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).

Devotional

- ♦ Pray Zechariah 9:9 on Palm Sunday — welcome the King who comes lowly, just and having salvation — and receive him as the Prince of Peace, not the warlord we are tempted to want.
- ♦ At the Lord's Supper, hear *the blood of thy covenant* in the words of institution, and live the week as a prisoner of hope, holding to the strong hold.

A Final Word

You are teaching a Palm Sunday text, and your task is to let the class see what kind of King they have been welcoming all these years. Against the tramp of empires, Zechariah sees a King who is just and brings salvation — but comes lowly, on a donkey, the Prince of Peace. The Lord Jesus chose that donkey on purpose, to refuse the crown the crowds wanted and to claim the one the prophet promised.

And teach how the lowly King saves. Not by the sword but by blood — *the blood of thy covenant* — the very words he took on his lips the night before he died and gave to his church in the cup. By that blood he reaches into the waterless pit, the place of death, and sends the prisoners forth alive.

And leave the class with the name he gives them. They are prisoners still, in a world that groans, between the King's coming in peace and his coming in glory — but prisoners of *hope*, held not by their chains but by a promise that cannot fail, told to turn to the strong hold and be safe. Teach the lowly King; preach the covenant blood. Then on to Zechariah 10–11, and the thirty pieces of silver.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION NINETEEN

The Thirty Pieces of Silver

Zechariah 10–11 · with Matthew 27:3–10 and John 10

A Note to the Teacher

These two chapters contain one of the most precise predictive prophecies in all of Scripture — a rejected shepherd, valued at thirty pieces of silver, the money thrown to the potter in the house of the LORD — fulfilled to the detail in the betrayal of the Lord Jesus by Judas. But the apologetic precision, striking as it is, is not the deepest thing here. The deepest thing is what that contemptuous price reveals, and what the Shepherd did with it.

Teach the insult of the sum, because the class will miss it otherwise. Thirty pieces of silver was the legal compensation in the law of Moses for a slave gored to death by an ox — the price of a dead slave, the lowest valuation in the whole code. That is what the flock reckoned their Shepherd to be worth: not a king's ransom, not a free man's wage, but the going rate for a corpse.

And teach the freedom of the Shepherd, because it is the gospel. Read against the words of John 10 — *I lay down my life... no man taketh it from me* — the Shepherd valued at a slave's price was no trapped victim. He took the price knowingly and went to the slaughter deliberately, because the selling was the road to the cross, and the cross was the road by which the despised flock would be bought back.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The rejected Shepherd is weighed *thirty pieces of silver* — the law's price for a dead slave — and fulfills it to the letter in Judas's betrayal; yet the Good Shepherd was no trapped victim, for *no man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself*. Teach the world's contemptuous valuation of

Christ and the Shepherd who let himself be sold, to buy back the flock that despised him.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Zechariah 10–11 — the failure of the false shepherds, the LORD visiting his flock, the cornerstone and the nail, the rejected shepherd, the thirty pieces of silver cast to the potter, and the worthless shepherd.
- ◆ Read Matthew 27:3–10, where Judas throws the thirty pieces into the temple and the priests buy the potter's field — the detailed fulfillment of Zechariah 11:12–13.
- ◆ Read John 10, the Good Shepherd discourse — *I lay down my life of myself, and other sheep I have... one fold, and one shepherd*. It unlocks Zechariah's acted parable.
- ◆ Have Exodus 21:32 in mind — thirty shekels as the compensation for a slave gored by an ox. The sum is the insult.
- ◆ Note that Zechariah performs an acted parable here, taking up shepherd's staffs named *Beauty* and *Bands* and breaking them — a sign of a broken covenant and a scattered flock.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. The prophecy is precise; these three keep it pointed at the Shepherd, not just the apologetics.

Thirty pieces of silver — the price of a dead slave, the world's estimate of Christ.

The rejected shepherd turns to the flock and asks, almost with weary irony, what they think he is worth: *if ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver* (11:12). They name his value, and the value is an insult. For thirty pieces of silver was a fixed and familiar sum in Israel — the compensation set in the law of Moses for a slave gored to death by an ox (Exodus 21:32), the price of a dead slave, the lowest valuation in the whole code. The flock weighs out for its Shepherd, the LORD their God come to feed them, the going rate for a corpse. They might have named any figure; they named the one figure in all the law that meant a

dead slave. And it is still the world's estimate of Christ today — not hated so much as cheaply valued, weighed and found worth very little.

The Good Shepherd lays down his life of his own accord.

Set beside this acted parable the words the Good Shepherd would speak of himself, for they unlock it: *I am the good shepherd... the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*, and he insisted the giving was wholly his own free act — *no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again* (John 10). Read against those words, Zechariah's strange parable comes clear. The Shepherd was not a victim merely, not a good man overtaken by events and sold against his will. He took the slave's price knowingly; he set his face toward the slaughter deliberately; he laid down his life of his own accord. The thirty pieces did not trap him — he let himself be sold, because the selling was the road to the cross, and the cross was the road by which the flock of slaughter would be bought back. The Good Shepherd was not overpowered; he gave himself.

One fold, one Shepherd — the flock gathered from every people.

The chapters open with the LORD's anger against the false shepherds who fed themselves and let the flock wander *because there was no shepherd* (10:2), and his promise to visit and gather his flock himself — from Judah, from Joseph, from the far countries. And the same Shepherd who took the slave's price spoke of that gathering: *other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring... and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd* (John 10:16). The whistling for the scattered sheep was never about the borders of an earthly nation; it was about the one flock, drawn from every people under heaven into a single fold under the one Shepherd. Read the regathering of these chapters, as the apostles read every such promise, of the Church gathered by the gospel.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:14	No shepherd; the LORD visits his flock; the corner and the nail (10)
0:14–0:22	The two staffs, Beauty and Bands; feed the flock of slaughter (11:1–11)
0:22–0:36	The thirty pieces of silver, cast to the potter (11:12–13)
0:36–0:46	The worthless shepherd; and the Good Shepherd who lays down his life (11:15–17; John 10)

0:46–0:56

Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance

0:56–1:00

Closing prayer; assign Zechariah 12–14 and Session Twenty

Pacing Tip

The center is 11:12–13 and its fulfillment in Matthew 27, read through John 10. Protect the insult of the sum (the price of a dead slave) and the freedom of the Shepherd (he was not trapped; he gave himself). If time runs short, summarize the false shepherds and the two staffs, and spend your minutes on the thirty pieces and the Good Shepherd.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Flock and the Shepherds (10:1–3)

The people *went their way as a flock... because there was no shepherd* (10:2), and the LORD's anger burns against the false shepherds who fed themselves while the sheep scattered. Teach the class that the failure of human leaders is the dark backdrop against which God promises the brightest thing: he will come and shepherd his people himself. Every broken under-shepherd makes the room for the one true Shepherd who would not fail them.

The Corner and the Nail (10:4)

A dense little verse promises that *out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail* (10:4). The corner is the cornerstone, the nail the firm peg driven into a wall to bear weight. Both are pictures of the Coming One: the cornerstone on which the whole building rests, the sure peg on which the whole weight of our salvation may safely hang. Teach the class that everything leans on this One — he is the corner that holds the house together and the nail that holds the load.

Feed the Flock of the Slaughter (11:1–11)

Zechariah is told to *feed the flock of the slaughter* (11:4) and performs an acted parable, taking two staffs named *Beauty* and *Bands* — grace and union — and breaking them, a sign of a covenant broken and a people scattered when they reject their shepherd. It is a grim drama of what happens to a flock that will not be led: the bonds that held it are cut, and it is left to the wolves. The breaking sets up the question the shepherd asks next.

Thirty Pieces of Silver (11:12–13)

The shepherd asks his price, and the flock weighs out *thirty pieces of silver* — the law's compensation for a dead slave. And the LORD says, with bitter irony, *cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at* (11:13), and the silver is thrown to the potter in the house of the LORD. Lay Matthew 27 beside it: Judas, sickened, throws the thirty pieces into the temple; the priests, unwilling to keep blood money, buy the potter's field. Every detail — the number, the silver, the temple, the potter — comes true. But press the class past the precision to the meaning: the Shepherd valued at a corpse's price went and became the corpse, for the flock that despised him.

The Worthless Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd (11:15–17; John 10)

The chapter ends with the LORD raising up a *foolish shepherd* who devours the flock instead of feeding it (11:15–17) — the consequence of rejecting the true one. Teach this by contrast: the worthless shepherd, who eats the sheep and flees the wolf, shows by opposition what the Good Shepherd is — the one who *giveth his life for the sheep* (John 10:11). A flock that will not have the Shepherd who dies for it is left with a shepherd who feeds on it. The warning is sharp, and the gospel beside it is sweet.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Why is ‘thirty pieces of silver’ such a pointed number?”

Because in the law of Moses it was the fixed compensation for a slave gored to death by an ox — the price of a dead slave, the lowest valuation in the whole code (Exodus 21:32). It was not a wage or a respectable sum; it was what you paid when the least-valued person in society had been killed by a beast. So when the flock weighs out exactly that for its Shepherd, it is naming him worth a dead slave. Of all the figures they might have chosen, they chose the one that meant contempt.

“How exactly was this fulfilled in the Gospels?”

To the detail. Judas agreed to betray the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver; stricken with remorse, he threw the money down in the temple; and the priests, unwilling to put blood money in the treasury, used it to buy the potter's field (Matthew 27:3–10). The number, the silver, the house of the LORD, the potter — every element of Zechariah 11:12–13 is there. Matthew points to it explicitly as fulfilled prophecy.

“If it was all prophesied, was Judas just a puppet with no real guilt?”

No. Prophecy describes what will happen without forcing the betrayer's hand; God foreknew Judas's free and guilty choice and wove even that into his saving plan. The Lord Jesus called the betrayal a real sin and Judas a real sinner, while also going to the cross as the deliberate Shepherd who laid down his life. Both are true at once: wicked men did a wicked thing, and God used it to buy back the flock. The fulfillment of prophecy never excuses the one who fulfills it.

“Wasn't the Shepherd just a victim of the whole thing — betrayed, sold, killed?”

That is exactly what John 10 corrects. The Good Shepherd said *no man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself*. He was not overpowered by the betrayal or trapped by the thirty pieces; he took the slave's price knowingly and walked to the slaughter deliberately, because the selling was the road to the cross. The cross looks like the Shepherd's defeat and is in fact his freest act — he gave himself to buy back the very flock that valued him at a corpse's price.

“Who is the ‘foolish shepherd’ at the end of the chapter?”

He is the worthless shepherd God allows a flock to fall to once it rejects the true one — a leader who feeds on the sheep instead of feeding them, who flees when the wolf comes. He functions by contrast: he shows, by being everything the Good Shepherd is not, just what we lose when we refuse the Shepherd who dies for us. A flock that will not be led by the one who lays down his life is left to one who devours it. The warning aims at every age that prefers shepherds who flatter to the One who saves.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 2 — The corner and the nail

A good way into the christology. The cornerstone and the firm peg are pictures of the One on whom everything rests. Ask what it means that the whole weight of our salvation hangs on him as on a nail driven into a sure place — and what it would be to lean that weight entirely there.

Question 3 — The world's valuation of Christ

A searching question. The flock weighed the Shepherd at a dead slave's price. Ask how this is still the world's estimate of Christ — not so much hated as cheaply valued, weighed and reckoned worth little — and where we ourselves quietly price him low.

Question 4 — The Shepherd who became the corpse

The gospel center. Beyond the apologetic weight of so exact a prophecy, ask what it means that the Shepherd valued at a corpse's price went and *became* the corpse, for the flock that despised him. Let the class feel the love in it — he was sold at the price of a dead slave and used the selling to die for the sellers.

Question 5 — The worthless shepherd by contrast

A sober closing question. The foolish shepherd shows, by opposition, what the Good Shepherd is (John 10:11–13). Ask what warning there is for any flock — and any age — that prefers shepherds who flatter and feed on it to the One who lays down his life for it.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on Zechariah* (*Luther's Works*, vol. 20), on the rejected shepherd and the thirty pieces.
- ♦ John 10, the Good Shepherd discourse — the Lord Jesus' own commentary on Zechariah's acted parable.
- ♦ The Augsburg Confession, Article III, on Christ who *truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried* — the Shepherd who became the corpse.

Commentaries

- ♦ R. Reed Lessing, *Concordia Commentary: Zechariah* — excellent on the shepherd oracles and their fulfillment.
- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Zechariah 11 and the Matthew 27 cross-reference.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).

Devotional

- ♦ Read Zechariah 11:12–13 beside Matthew 27:3–10, and worship the Shepherd who was sold at a slave's price and used the selling to buy you back.

- ◆ Pray John 10:11 — *the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep* — and rest in a Shepherd who was not overpowered but gave himself.

A Final Word

You are teaching one of the most exact prophecies in all of Scripture, and the precision is worth pausing over — the number, the silver, the temple, the potter, every detail fulfilled in Judas. But do not let the apologetics be the whole hour. The deeper marvel is what the price reveals and what the Shepherd did with it.

Teach the insult of the sum. The flock weighed its Shepherd — the LORD their God come to feed them — at thirty pieces of silver, the law's compensation for a dead slave. Of every figure they might have named, they chose the one that meant contempt. And it is still the world's estimate of Christ: not so much hated as cheaply valued.

But preach the freedom of the Shepherd. He was no trapped victim. *No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself.* He took the slave's price knowingly and walked to the slaughter deliberately, because the selling was the road to the cross, and the cross was the road by which the despised flock would be bought back. The Shepherd valued at a corpse's price went and became the corpse — for the very ones who sold him. Teach the silver; preach the Shepherd. Then on to Zechariah 12–14, and the One whom they pierced.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TWENTY

They Shall Look upon Me Whom They Have Pierced

Zechariah 12–14 · with John 19:31–37 and Matthew 26:31

A Note to the Teacher

The last three chapters of Zechariah are among the most densely christological in the Old Testament, and they bring the class to the foot of the cross from an angle no Gospel takes. Here is the pierced One looked upon and mourned; here is a fountain opened for sin; here is a sword summoned against God's own Shepherd. Three of the heaviest truths of the atonement are laid out in three short chapters.

Teach 12:10 with great care, for every clause is heavy with the gospel. The LORD pours out the Spirit of grace *before* the people look and mourn — repentance is a gift, not an achievement. And the pronouns shift in a way that opens a window into the very life of God: *they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him*. The One pierced is the LORD himself, and yet is mourned as another.

And teach 13:7, the most staggering word of all. We have learned to see the cross as the work of wicked men — a betrayer's kiss, a contemptuous price — and so it was. But here the curtain lifts on the deeper thing beneath the crime: *awake, O sword... smite the shepherd*, says the LORD of hosts, against his own Shepherd. The hand that drew the sword was the hand of God.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The LORD pours out the Spirit so that they *look upon me whom they have pierced* and mourn, and a *fountain* is opened for sin — and the sword that smote the Shepherd was summoned by the LORD himself against *the man that is my fellow*. Teach evangelical repentance born of looking on the crucified, the fountain of blood and water, and the cross as a sacrifice required by God, not only a crime permitted.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Zechariah 12–14 — the burdensome stone, the pierced One looked upon and mourned, the fountain opened, the smitten Shepherd and scattered sheep, and the LORD King over all the earth.
- ◆ Read John 19:31–37, where the soldier's spear brings forth blood and water and John quotes *they shall look on him whom they pierced*.
- ◆ Read Matthew 26:31, where the Lord Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7 on the night of his betrayal — *I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered*.
- ◆ Fix the order of 12:10–13:1 in mind: the Pierced One, then the looking, then the mourning, then the fountain. It is the shape of the gospel itself.
- ◆ Have Isaiah 53:10 ready — *it pleased the LORD to bruise him* — the same truth as Zechariah 13:7, that the cross was the LORD's own doing.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. These chapters are dense; these three hold the gospel through them.

They look upon the pierced One — and the looking and mourning are the Spirit's gift.

One of the most astonishing verses in the Old Testament: *I will pour upon the house of David... the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son* (12:10). Do not hurry past the first clause, for it tells us where true repentance comes from. *Before* ever they look and mourn, the Spirit is poured out;

the looking and the mourning are not achievements they work up but gifts the Spirit grants. Left to ourselves we do not look upon the pierced One at all — we look away, we make excuses, for the sight is unbearable to a heart that will not own its guilt. It is the Spirit of grace who turns the face toward the cross and holds it there. And mark the shifting pronouns — *look upon me*, yet *mourn for him* — a window into the life of God: the One pierced is the LORD himself, and yet is mourned as another. Here, centuries early, is the deity of the Son and the mystery of the Father and the Son.

A fountain is opened — the blood and water from the pierced side.

The mourning does not end in mourning. The very next words turn grief into cleansing: *in that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David... for sin and for uncleanness* (13:1). Mark the order, for it is the order of the gospel: first the pierced One, then the looking, then the mourning — and then, flowing straight out of it, a fountain. The sight of the crucified breaks the heart in repentance, and the broken heart finds, opened before it, a fountain for the very sin that broke it. And where is the fountain opened? By the piercing. The same spear that opened the side of the Lord Jesus brought forth, John tells us, a sudden flow of *blood and water* (John 19:34) — the double stream the old teachers loved: the blood that atones and the water that cleanses, and, in the sacraments, the blood of the Supper and the water of Baptism, both poured from the wounded side. As Eve was taken from the side of sleeping Adam, the Church, the bride of the last Adam, was brought forth from the opened side of her Lord.

Smite the shepherd — the sword summoned by the LORD himself.

And the most staggering word of all tells us who drove the sword: *awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered* (13:7). The sword is summoned — and it is the LORD of hosts who summons it, against his own Shepherd. We have learned to see the cross as the work of wicked men, and so it was; but here we are shown the deeper thing beneath the crime: the sword that fell on the Shepherd was the sword of divine justice, and the hand that drew it was the hand of God. The smiting was not merely a crime permitted but a sacrifice required — the sword falling on the Substitute in the place of the sheep. Isaiah had said the same: *it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief*. And the Shepherd is *the man that is my fellow* — the LORD's own equal, struck down in our stead.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:12	The burdensome stone; the LORD's defense of Jerusalem (12:1–9)
0:12–0:26	They shall look upon me whom they have pierced (12:10–14)
0:26–0:34	A fountain opened; the blood and water (13:1; John 19:34)
0:34–0:44	Smite the shepherd — the sword by the hand of God (13:7)
0:44–0:50	King over all the earth; holiness unto the LORD (14)
0:50–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Malachi 1–2 and Session Twenty-One

Pacing Tip

The three indispensable texts are 12:10 (the pierced One and the gift of repentance), 13:1 (the fountain), and 13:7 (the sword summoned by God). Protect all three. If time runs short, summarize the burdensome stone of chapter twelve and the cosmic upheavals of chapter fourteen, and spend your minutes at the cross seen from these three angles.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Burdensome Stone (12:1–9)

The chapter opens with the LORD making Jerusalem *a burdensome stone for all people* (12:3) — a rock that crushes everyone who tries to lift it against her, for the LORD himself defends his city. Teach it as the backdrop of grace: the God who will pour out the Spirit and open the fountain is also the God who guards his people against every gathered nation. The cross is set within the larger story of a LORD who will not lose his own.

Whom They Have Pierced (12:10–14)

And then the astonishing verse. The LORD pours out the Spirit of grace, *and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn* (12:10). Teach the order and the mystery. The Spirit comes first, so that looking and mourning are gifts, not works. The looking is on the pierced One; the mourning is the deep grief of one bereaved of an only son. And the pronouns shift — *me*, yet *him* — showing the One pierced to be the LORD himself, mourned as another. John quotes this

verse of the spear at the cross (John 19:37); the deity of the crucified Son is written here, six centuries early.

A Fountain Opened (13:1–6)

The mourning flows into cleansing: *in that day there shall be a fountain opened... for sin and for uncleanness* (13:1). The order is the gospel's — the pierced One, the looking, the mourning, and then the fountain that springs from the broken heart's very need. Connect it to John 19:34: the spear opened the Lord's side and out came blood and water, the double cure — blood that atones and water that cleanses, the Supper and Baptism flowing from the wound. Teach the class that the fountain for their sin is opened by the very piercing they once mourned.

Smite the Shepherd (13:7–9)

Then the curtain lifts on what was happening beneath the visible crime: *awake, O sword... smite the shepherd*, says the LORD of hosts, against his own Shepherd, *the man that is my fellow* (13:7). It was the LORD who summoned the sword. The cross was not only a crime permitted but a sacrifice required — the sword of divine justice falling on the Substitute in the place of the sheep, as Isaiah said, *it pleased the LORD to bruise him*. The Lord Jesus quoted this very verse the night he was betrayed (Matthew 26:31), knowing himself the smitten Shepherd. Teach the class the awful, gracious depth: behind the wicked men stood the loving will of God, striking his own equal for us.

King over All the Earth; Holiness unto the LORD (14:1–21)

The book ends in cosmic upheaval and final triumph: the LORD goes forth to fight, his feet stand on the Mount of Olives, living waters flow from Jerusalem, and *the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one* (14:9). And the last image is of total holiness — even the bells of the horses and the common pots inscribed *holiness unto the LORD* (14:20–21), the whole creation made holy. Teach it as the consummation toward which the pierced One, the fountain, and the smitten Shepherd all press: the day the LORD reigns over everything and all is holy.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Why do the pronouns switch — ‘look upon me’ but ‘mourn for him’?”

Because the verse is opening a window into the life of God. The One pierced speaks as the LORD himself — *look upon me* — and yet is mourned as a distinct person, *for him*, an only son. Centuries before the doctrine was formulated, Zechariah gives us a glimpse of God who is one and yet more than one: the pierced One is the LORD, and the LORD pierced is the Son. John saw the fulfillment at the cross and quoted this very verse (John 19:37). The shifting pronouns are not careless; they are profound.

“Where does real repentance come from, according to this chapter?”

From the Spirit, and from looking on the crucified. Notice the order: the LORD pours out the Spirit of grace *first*, and then the people look and mourn. The mourning is not something we manufacture; it is what happens when the Spirit turns our face to the pierced One and holds it there. This is why the preaching of Christ crucified breaks hearts in a way moral scolding never can — the law can frighten, but it is the sight of the wounded Savior, granted by the Spirit, that melts a heart into true grief over sin.

“What is the ‘fountain’, and what does the blood and water mean?”

The fountain is the cleansing that flows from the cross, opened by the very piercing the people mourned. John tells us that when the soldier's spear opened the Lord's side, blood and water came out (John 19:34) — and the church has long seen in that double stream a double cure: the blood that atones for sin and the water that washes it away. Many have also heard the sacraments in it — the blood of the Supper and the water of Baptism, both flowing from the wounded side. The fountain is opened for the very sin that broke the heart that looks on it.

“Does 13:7 really mean God himself put the Lord Jesus to death?”

It means the cross was God's own doing, not merely something he allowed. *Awake, O sword... smite the shepherd*, says the LORD of hosts, against his own Shepherd. Wicked men truly betrayed and crucified the Lord Jesus, and bear real guilt — but beneath their crime stood the loving will of God, who laid on his Son the sword of justice that should have fallen on us. Isaiah says it too: *it pleased the LORD to bruise him*. The cross is a sacrifice required by God's justice and provided by God's love — not only a crime permitted, but a substitution willed.

“Who is ‘the man that is my fellow’?”

The word means a companion, an equal, one of the same kind — the LORD's own peer. It is a startling thing for God to call the Shepherd his *fellow*, his equal, and it teaches the deity of the Son

as plainly as 12:10 does: the One smitten by the sword of divine justice is no mere man but God's own equal. And there is deep comfort in it — the sacrifice that saves us is not a creature offered to appease God, but God's own equal, given by God himself, in love, for us.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — The shifting pronouns and the life of God

A profound opener. Work *me* and yet *him*, and let the class glimpse the mystery: the One pierced is the LORD himself, mourned as another. A careful, reverent place to see the deity of the Son written into the Old Testament centuries before the creeds.

Question 2 — Repentance born of looking, not scolding

The heart of the session. The mourning comes from looking on the pierced One, not from the lash of the law. Ask why the preaching of Christ crucified breaks hearts as moral scolding never can — and let the class feel the difference between being frightened into sorrow and being melted by the sight of the wounded Savior.

Question 4 — The sword by the hand of God

The deepest mystery of the cross. Ask how 13:7 shows the cross to be a sacrifice required, not only a crime permitted — and why it matters that the sword fell by the hand of God. A reverent place to teach substitution: the sword that should have struck the sheep fell on the Shepherd.

Question 5 — The LORD's own equal

A comforting closing question. *The man that is my fellow* — the LORD's own equal — with the pierced One of 12:10 teaches the deity of the Son. Ask what comfort there is in knowing it was God's own equal, given by God himself, who was smitten for us. The sacrifice is not a creature appeasing God but God giving himself.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on Zechariah* (Luther's Works, vol. 20), on the pierced One and the smitten Shepherd.
- ♦ The Augsburg Confession, Article III, and the Apology, on Christ's satisfaction — the sacrifice required and provided.
- ♦ John 19:31–37 and Isaiah 53:4–10, the New Testament fulfillment and the parallel of the LORD bruising his Servant.

Commentaries

- ♦ R. Reed Lessing, *Concordia Commentary: Zechariah* — rich on chapters 12–14 and their fulfillment at the cross.
- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Zechariah 12–14 and the John 19 and Matthew 26 cross-references.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).

Devotional

- ♦ Pray Zechariah 12:10 — ask the Spirit of grace to turn your face to the pierced One and hold it there — and let the looking work the mourning.
- ♦ At the Lord's Supper and at the font, remember the blood and water from the wounded side — the fountain opened for your sin and uncleanness.

A Final Word

You are teaching the cross from three angles no Gospel takes, and your task is to let the class stand at Calvary and see what Zechariah saw. They look upon the pierced One — and the looking and the mourning are the Spirit's gift, not their own work, for left to ourselves we only look away. Teach repentance as something granted, born of the sight of the wounded Savior.

And teach the fountain. Out of the very piercing the people mourned flows a fountain for sin — the blood and water from the opened side, the blood that atones and the water that cleanses, the Supper and Baptism poured from the wound. The cure is opened by the wound; the broken heart finds the fountain springing from its own need.

And lift the curtain on the deepest mystery of all. The sword that fell on the Shepherd was summoned by the LORD himself, against *the man that is my fellow*, his own equal. Behind the betrayer's kiss and the soldier's spear stood the loving will of God, striking his own Son in our place. The cross was no accident and no mere crime — it was a sacrifice required by justice and provided by love. Teach the piercing; preach the fountain. Then on to Malachi, and the messenger of the covenant.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TWENTY-ONE

The Messenger of the Covenant

Malachi 1–2 · with Romans 9:13 and Matthew 19:4–6

A Note to the Teacher

Malachi is the last voice before four centuries of silence — the final prophet, speaking to a people grown cynical and cold, going through the motions of worship while their hearts have gone elsewhere. His book is built as a series of disputes: God makes a statement, the people answer back with a jaded question, and God replies. It is the voice of a tired, late-stage faith, and a class will recognize it.

But teach the order of the book, because it is the order of grace. Before a single rebuke, before any charge is laid, the LORD opens his last book to his people with a declaration of love: *I have loved you*. Everything Malachi must go on to say about blemished offerings and broken covenants is said by a God who has first said that. The gospel comes first here, as it has all through the Twelve.

And keep the longing pointed forward. These chapters are full of failure — priests who profane the name, messengers who corrupt the covenant — and the failure makes us ache for the one true Priest, the Messenger of the covenant in whose mouth the law of truth was found without flaw. The cynics' sneer, *where is the God of judgment?*, will be answered not by an argument but by a coming.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

God's last book opens with *I have loved you* and proves it by his free choice of Jacob, while a faithless priesthood offers blemished worship — yet a *pure offering* will rise among the nations, and the failed messengers make us long for the true *Messenger of the covenant*. Teach the love that

comes first, the one pure offering of the Lamb without blemish, and the God of judgment who comes first in mercy.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ♦ Read Malachi 1-2 — *I have loved you*, the love proved in Jacob and Esau, the polluted offerings, the pure offering among the nations, the corrupted priesthood, the broken marriage covenant, and the cynical *where is the God of judgment?*
- ♦ Read Romans 9:13, where Paul quotes *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated* to teach that God's love rests on his free grace, not our merit.
- ♦ Read Matthew 19:4-6, the Lord Jesus on marriage — *what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder* — the New Testament beside Malachi's defense of the marriage covenant.
- ♦ Have 1 Peter 1:19 ready — *a lamb without blemish and without spot* — the one unblemished offering against all the blemished ones the priests brought.
- ♦ Decide in advance to handle the marriage text pastorally: Malachi condemns treacherous abandonment, not those who have been sinned against. Be ready to make that distinction clearly.
- ♦ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. Malachi is full of rebuke; these three keep the grace in front of it.

The order of grace — “I have loved you” comes first.

Before a single charge is laid, the LORD opens his last book with a declaration: *I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?* (1:2). The people are too far gone in cynicism even to feel it — their faith dulled by familiarity and disappointment until the very love surrounding them has become invisible. And God proves his love not by pointing to anything in them but by his free choice: *was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob* (1:2-3).

Paul takes up the same words (Romans 9:13) to teach that God's electing love rests on nothing in us. Teach the class why that is a comfort and not an offense: a love that rested on our worthiness could be lost the moment we proved unworthy; a love that rests on God's free choice cannot be. He loved you because he loved you — and that answers the cynic's *wherein hast thou loved us?* once for all.

The blemished offerings — and the one pure offering of the Lamb.

The priests offered God the blind, the lame, and the sick — the animals no one else wanted — and the LORD said he would rather the temple doors be shut than receive such contempt (1:8, 10). Yet against that failure comes one of the most surprising verses in the book: *from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place... a pure offering* (1:11). While the priests despise the name at the one altar, the LORD declares a pure offering will rise to him from the nations — the Gentile ingathering the whole Twelve has promised, in pointed irony, for the very nations the priests despised would honor the name the priests profaned. But how can there be a pure offering when every offering Israel brought was blemished, and ours are too? Only because of the one Lamb *without blemish and without spot* (1 Peter 1:19), whose perfect sacrifice is the pure offering the nations bring. This guards us at once from despair — as if our gifts must finally be good enough — and from pride — as if we could bring God anything pure on our own.

The true Messenger — and the God of judgment who comes first in mercy.

The LORD draws a picture of what the priesthood was meant to be: *the law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity* (2:6) — *for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts* (2:7). The priest was to be a messenger, carrying God's truth to the people. But these priests had corrupted the covenant, and the failure of the human messengers makes us long for the true one — the Priest in whose mouth the law of truth was found without a single flaw, the Lord Jesus, the Messenger of the covenant himself. And when the cynics sneer *where is the God of judgment?* (2:17), the answer comes not as an argument but as a coming (3:1): the God of judgment would indeed appear — but first in mercy, sending his Messenger before him. The very question of the cynic becomes the doorway to the gospel.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:16	I have loved you; the free choice of Jacob (1:1–5)
0:16–0:26	A polluted bread; the pure offering among the nations (1:6–14)
0:26–0:36	The messenger of the covenant — the failed and the true (2:1–9)
0:36–0:44	The wife of thy covenant (2:10–16)
0:44–0:50	Where is the God of judgment? — the doorway to the gospel (2:17)
0:50–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Malachi 3–4 and Session Twenty-Two

Pacing Tip

Protect the opening word (*I have loved you*, with Jacob and Esau) and the pure offering of 1:11, and end on the turn at 2:17. If time runs short, treat the marriage text briefly but carefully — do not rush it, and do not weaponize it — and make sure the class leaves on the God of judgment who comes first in mercy. The whole hour is framed by grace; keep it there.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Last Voice; I Have Loved You (1:1–5)

Malachi is the last prophetic voice before four centuries of silence, and he opens with love: *I have loved you, saith the LORD*. The people answer with a shrug — *wherein hast thou loved us?* — the jaded question of a comfortable faith too dulled to feel either God's love or its own sin. And God answers with grace: he chose Jacob over Esau freely, not for merit. Teach the class that the order matters — love before rebuke — and that a love resting on God's free choice is the only love that cannot be lost.

A Polluted Bread (1:6–14)

The LORD indicts the priests for offering *polluted bread* and the blind, lame, and sick animals — the leftovers, the things they would not dare give a human governor (1:8). *Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought?* — better the temple closed than worship that costs nothing

(1:10). Press the class gently: where do we give God our leftovers — the tired ends of our time, strength, and love — and call it worship? The sin of the priests is alarmingly ordinary.

A Pure Offering among the Nations (1:11)

Set against the contemptible worship at the one altar comes a sudden, sweeping vision: *in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name is great among the heathen* (1:11). The very nations the priests despised would honor the name the priests profaned — the Gentile ingathering once more. Teach the class that the pure offering is not finally ours, for ours are blemished; it is the one Lamb without blemish whose sacrifice the nations bring, the perfect offering rising from every place under heaven.

The Messenger of the Covenant (2:1–9)

The LORD draws the ideal priest — truth in his mouth, walking with God, turning many from iniquity (2:6) — *for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts* (2:7). The priest was to be a messenger, his lips keeping knowledge, his mouth the place the people came to seek the law. But these had corrupted the covenant. Teach the longing this creates: the failure of every human messenger makes us ache for the one whose mouth held the law of truth without a flaw — the true Messenger of the covenant, who is himself the Priest and the message.

The Wife of Thy Covenant (2:10–16)

From the broken covenant of the priesthood the LORD turns to another covenant his people were breaking — marriage. The men of Judah were casting off the wives of their youth, often to marry foreign women who served other gods, and the LORD names it treachery: *the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth... yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant* (2:14). Marriage, Malachi teaches, is a covenant the LORD himself witnesses; the wife is a *companion*, a partner, not a possession to discard. Teach this for its high dignity — and teach it pastorally. The text condemns *treacherous abandonment*, the casting-off of a faithful spouse; it is not a stone to throw at those who have been sinned against, the betrayed and the abandoned. Lift up the dignity of the covenant; do not crush the wounded with it.

Where Is the God of Judgment? (2:17)

The chapter ends on a sneer: the people have wearied the LORD by saying that evildoers prosper and God does nothing — *where is the God of judgment?* (2:17). It is the cynicism of a faith that has stopped expecting God to act. And the answer, in the next verse, is not an argument but an announcement: the God of judgment is coming — *behold, I will send my messenger* (3:1). Teach the

class that the cynic's question becomes the doorway to the gospel: the God of judgment they doubted would indeed come, but first in mercy, sending his Messenger before him.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Why does God say he ‘hated Esau’ (1:3; Romans 9:13)? That sounds cruel.”

The strong language is the Bible's way of saying God's saving love rests on his free choice and not on anything in us. He loved Jacob — the schemer, no more deserving than his brother — simply because he chose to. Far from cruel, that is the deepest comfort: a love based on our worthiness could be forfeited the moment we proved unworthy, but a love based on God's free choice cannot be lost. *He loved you because he loved you*, and that is the only foundation steady enough to stand on.

“What exactly was wrong with the priests' sacrifices?”

They offered God the animals no one else wanted — the blind, the lame, the sick — the leftovers, the things they would have been ashamed to give the governor (1:8). It was worship that cost them nothing, and God said he would rather the doors be shut than receive it. The searching question for us is the same: where do we give God the tired ends of our time, strength, and money, and call it worship? The sin was not exotic; it was treating God as worth less than our convenience.

“How can Malachi promise a ‘pure offering’ when he just said every offering is blemished?”

Because the pure offering does not finally come from us. Every gift we bring is blemished, like the priests' animals; if the pure offering depended on the quality of our worship, it could never rise. But there is one Lamb *without blemish and without spot* (1 Peter 1:19), and his perfect sacrifice is the pure offering the nations bring. This keeps us from two errors at once — despair, as though our gifts had to be good enough, and pride, as though we could bring God anything pure on our own. The purity is Christ's, offered for us.

“Is Malachi saying divorce is always a sin? What about people who have been through one?”

Malachi is condemning a specific treachery — men casting off the faithful wives of their youth, often to marry pagan women — and he gives marriage its true dignity as a covenant God himself witnesses. He is not heaping condemnation on those who have been *sinned against*: the abandoned, the betrayed, those who suffered another's unfaithfulness. The text aims at the

treacherous spouse, not the wounded one. Teach the high honor of the marriage covenant, by all means — but never as a stone to throw at people God's word is, here, defending.

“How does the cynical question ‘where is the God of judgment?’ lead to the gospel?”

Because God answers it with a coming rather than a debate. The cynics doubted that God would ever act — and the very next words promise that he will: *behold, I will send my messenger* (3:1). The God of judgment they mocked would indeed appear, but he came first in mercy, sending his Messenger before him to prepare the way. The sneer becomes the doorway: the question *where is the God of judgment?* is answered by the gospel of the God who came, and is coming, in his own time.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 2 — A love that rests on nothing in us

A rich opener. God proves his love by his free choice of Jacob, who had nothing to commend him. Ask why it is actually a comfort that God's love rests on nothing in us — and how *he loved you because he loved you* answers the cynic's *wherein hast thou loved us?* A good place to ground assurance in grace rather than performance.

Question 4 — The Lamb without blemish

The christological center. Every offering is blemished, and only the Lamb without blemish offers a pure one. Ask how this guards the class from both despair (our gifts are never good enough) and pride (as if we could bring God anything pure). Let them rest the whole weight of their worship on Christ's offering, not their own.

Question 5 — The true Messenger

A longing question. The human messengers failed and corrupted the covenant. Ask how their failure makes us long for the true Messenger — and who the Priest is in whose mouth the law of truth was found without a flaw. The disappointment of every earthly messenger points to the one who never disappoints.

Question 6 — The question that becomes a doorway

The gospel landing. *Where is the God of judgment?* is answered by a coming, not an argument. Ask the class what it means that the cynical question becomes the doorway to the gospel promise —

that the God of judgment came first in mercy, sending his Messenger before him. A hopeful note on which to leave the first half of Malachi.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets III: Malachi* (Luther's Works, vol. 18), strong on the love that opens the book and the true Messenger.
- ♦ The Formula of Concord, Article XI, on election — God's love resting on his free grace, the comfort of *I have loved you*.
- ♦ The Small Catechism on the Sixth Commandment, on the honor and dignity of marriage — the covenant the LORD witnesses.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Malachi 1–2 and the Romans 9 and Matthew 19 cross-references.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Malachi in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ♦ Hear *I have loved you* as the first word God speaks over you — before any rebuke — and answer the cynic in your own heart with the free choice of grace.
- ♦ Examine where you have brought God the blind and lame — the leftovers — and ask for a heart that gives him the first and the best, resting in the one pure offering of the Lamb.

A Final Word

You are teaching the last voice before four centuries of silence, speaking to a cold and cynical people — and the first thing he says is *I have loved you*. Teach the order, because it is the order of

grace: love before rebuke, and a love proved not by anything in them but by God's free choice. That is the only love that cannot be lost, and the answer to every jaded *wherein hast thou loved us?*

Teach the failure honestly — the blemished offerings, the corrupted priesthood, the broken covenants — but let the failure do its proper work: make the class long for the true Messenger of the covenant, the Priest in whose mouth the law of truth was found without a single flaw, and the one Lamb without blemish whose offering is the pure one the nations bring.

And leave them on the turn. The cynics sneered *where is the God of judgment?*, and God answered with a coming, not an argument: he would send his Messenger before him, and come first in mercy. The very question of unbelief becomes the doorway to the gospel. Teach the cold heart; preach the love that comes first. Then on to Malachi 3–4, and the Sun of righteousness rising with healing in his wings.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TWENTY-TWO

The Sun of Righteousness

Malachi 3–4 • with Matthew 11:7–15 and Luke 1:76–79

A Note to the Teacher

These are the last chapters of the Old Testament, and they spend their final breath pointing forward — past four centuries of silence, to a herald in the wilderness and a Sun rising with healing in his wings. You are teaching the closing words of the first Testament, and they end not with a period but with an outstretched arm, straining toward the One who was coming.

Teach the great image at the heart of the session: the Day that is *two things at once*. *The day cometh, that shall burn as an oven*, and the proud are stubble; *but unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings*. It is not two days, one of wrath and one of mercy — it is one Day with two effects, as the same sun that hardens clay melts wax. This is the double-edged Day of the LORD the whole volume has traced, here given its sharpest image.

And teach the last promise the Old Covenant ever made: *behold, I will send you Elijah*. The New Testament leaves no doubt who he was — the Lord Jesus said plainly that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come. The Old Testament closes pointing across the silence to the Baptist's wilderness cry and the Coming One it announces.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The God of judgment comes — but first in mercy, as *the Sun of righteousness rising with healing in his wings* on those who fear his name, while the same Day burns the proud as stubble; and the Old Testament's last word sends an Elijah, John the Baptist, to prepare the way. Teach the one Day with two effects and the canon's final, outstretched reach toward the Coming One.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Malachi 3–4 — the Lord coming suddenly to his temple, the refiner's fire, the robbing of God in tithes, the book of remembrance, the Sun of righteousness, and the promise of Elijah.
- ◆ Read Luke 1:76–79, the Benedictus, where Zacharias names his son the forerunner and the Lord Jesus the *dayspring from on high* — the Sun of righteousness rising.
- ◆ Read Matthew 11:7–15 and 17:10–13, where the Lord Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the Elijah who was to come.
- ◆ Fix the image of the one Day with two effects: the same sun hardens clay and melts wax; the same coming is stubble-fire to the proud and healing dawn to the faithful.
- ◆ Be ready to handle the tithe text (3:8–10) as the fruit of faith and a call to trust God's faithfulness — not as a prosperity-gospel formula for getting rich.
- ◆ Choose your two or three discussion questions ahead of time, and decide which you will protect if the hour runs short.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach. These are the closing chapters of the Old Testament; these three carry their weight.

The Lord whom ye seek comes — a herald, and the King he announces.

The LORD answers the cynics' sneer (*where is the God of judgment?*) not with an argument but with an announcement: *behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant... saith the LORD of hosts* (3:1). Mark that two figures stand in this single verse — *my messenger*, who goes ahead to prepare the way, and *the Lord... the messenger of the covenant*, who comes after to the temple. A herald, and the King the herald announces. And there is a deep irony folded in: the Lord *whom ye seek... whom ye delight in*, he says — yet when he came, his own received him not, and those who had flippantly demanded the God of judgment did not recognize him standing in their midst. They had imagined his coming would be all vindication for them and ruin for their enemies; they had

not reckoned that it would first put *them* under the searching light. And there is mercy in the timing — he came first to refine, not to destroy.

The Sun of righteousness — one Day, two effects.

The book rises to its climax as the long-promised Day breaks — a Day that is two things at once, depending on where one stands. *The day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud... shall be stubble* (4:1). For the proud the Day is a furnace and they the stubble flung into it. *But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall* (4:2). One Day, two effects — as the same sun that hardens clay melts wax, the coming of the Lord is destruction to the impenitent and healing dawn to the faithful. This is the very heart of what the Day of the LORD has meant all through the Twelve, sounding from Joel to Zephaniah to Zechariah, here given its sharpest image: the proud are dry stubble fit only for burning; the faithful are calves let out of the stall into the spring sun, leaping for joy in the light. It is not two days, one of wrath and one of mercy; it is one Day, two effects — and the Sun that rises with healing is the Lord Jesus, the *dayspring from on high* of the Benedictus (Luke 1:78–79).

The last word points forward — remember Moses, watch for Elijah.

The Old Testament has only a few words left, and it spends them pointing ahead. *Remember ye the law of Moses my servant* (4:4) — hold fast to what God has already given. And then the very last promise of the Old Covenant: *behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD... and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children* (4:5–6). Before the great Day, God would send an Elijah — a prophet in the spirit and power of the old fire-prophet — to turn hearts and prepare a people. And the New Testament leaves no doubt who he was: John the Baptist the Lord Jesus said plainly, *this is Elias, which was for to come* (Matthew 11:14), and *Elias is come already, and they knew him not* (Matthew 17:12). Not the old Tishbite returned in person, but one in the spirit and power of Elijah, as the angel told Zacharias of his son (Luke 1:17) — the same fiery, uncompromising call to repentance, the same wilderness severity. The Old Testament closes with its arm outstretched across four hundred years of silence, pointing to the Baptist and the Coming One.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:16	The Lord whom ye seek; a herald and the King (3:1)
0:16–0:24	The refiner's fire; robbing God in tithes (3:2–12)
0:24–0:32	A book of remembrance — God's treasured remnant (3:13–18)
0:32–0:44	The Sun of righteousness — one Day, two effects (4:1–3)
0:44–0:50	Behold, I will send you Elijah — the canon's last word (4:4–6)
0:50–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer; assign Luke 24 and the closing session

Pacing Tip

Protect the two summits: the Sun of righteousness (4:2, one Day with two effects) and the promise of Elijah (4:5–6, the canon's last reach toward the Coming One). If time runs short, treat the tithe carefully but briefly, and make sure the class leaves with the healing dawn and the outstretched arm of the Old Testament pointing across the silence to the Baptist and the Lord Jesus.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Lord Whom Ye Seek (3:1)

The cynics had ended chapter two demanding *where is the God of judgment?*, and the LORD answers with a coming, not a debate: *the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple* (3:1). Teach the two figures — the messenger who prepares the way, and the Lord, the messenger of the covenant, who comes after. And teach the irony: those who demanded the God of judgment imagined only vindication for themselves; they had not reckoned that his coming would first put them under the light, and that his own would not receive him. The God they sought came — and they missed him.

The Refiner's Fire (3:2–6)

And how does he come? *Who may abide the day of his coming?... for he is like a refiner's fire* (3:2). He *shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver* (3:3). Teach the class that refining is not destruction but purification — the fire that consumes the dross only makes the silver pure. To the impenitent the

fire consumes; to the faithful it cleanses. The same fire does both, depending on what it finds — which is the refrain of the whole Day of the LORD.

Robbing God in Tithes (3:7–12)

The LORD charges his people with robbing him — *will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me... in tithes and offerings* (3:8) — and calls them to bring the tithes and *prove me now herewith* (3:10). Handle this carefully. The robbing was a symptom of hearts that had stopped trusting God; the call to bring the tithes is a call to trust his faithfulness, not a formula for getting rich. Giving is the fruit of faith, a glad response to the God who gives everything — not a transaction that obligates him. Teach generosity as trust, and the promise as God's abundant faithfulness to his people, never as the prosperity gospel.

A Book of Remembrance (3:13–18)

Amid the cynicism, a faithful remnant still speaks: *they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written* (3:16). God writes down the faithful, and says, *they shall be mine... in that day when I make up my jewels* (3:17). Teach the tenderness of it: in an age of cold worship, God keeps a record of those who fear him, and calls them his treasured possession, his jewels. The remnant the whole volume has traced is, at the end, written in God's own book.

The Sun of Righteousness (4:1–3)

The climax. The Day breaks, and it is two things at once: a furnace to the proud, who are stubble (4:1); and a sunrise to those who fear God's name, on whom *the Sun of righteousness* arises *with healing in his wings* (4:2). Teach the one Day with two effects — the same sun hardens clay and melts wax — and let the class see the faithful as calves let out of the stall into the spring sun, leaping for joy. And name the Sun: the Lord Jesus, the *dayspring from on high* who came to give light to those in darkness (Luke 1:78–79). The healing in his wings is the gospel's warmth breaking over a cold world.

Behold, I Will Send You Elijah (4:4–6)

The Old Testament spends its last words pointing forward: *remember ye the law of Moses* (4:4), and *behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD* (4:5). Before the great Day, an Elijah would come to turn hearts. Teach the class who he was: the Lord Jesus said John the Baptist was the Elijah to come (Matthew 11:14) — not the old Tishbite returned, but one in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17), the same fiery call to repentance,

the same wilderness severity. The Old Testament ends with its arm outstretched across four centuries of silence, pointing to the Baptist's cry and the Coming One he announces.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Who are the two figures in Malachi 3:1?”

A herald and the King he announces. *My messenger* goes ahead to prepare the way — the forerunner, John the Baptist. And *the Lord... the messenger of the covenant* comes after, suddenly, to his temple — the Lord Jesus himself. The verse holds both in one breath: the voice in the wilderness crying *prepare the way*, and the One whose way is prepared. The New Testament unfolds exactly this order — first the Baptist, then the Lord he pointed to.

“If the people were ‘seeking’ the Lord and ‘delighted in’ him, why didn’t they recognize him when he came?”

Because they wanted a God of judgment who would vindicate them and ruin their enemies — and they had not reckoned that his coming would first put *them* under the searching light. They sought a Messiah who would confirm them as they were; he came to refine them. So when he stood in their midst, *his own received him not*. It is a sober warning against demanding a God of judgment who only judges other people — his light falls first on the one who calls for it.

“Is the ‘refiner’s fire’ a threat or a comfort?”

Both, depending on what the fire finds. A refiner’s fire is not meant to destroy the silver but to purify it — it burns away the dross and leaves the metal pure. To the faithful, the fire of God’s coming purifies; to the impenitent, the same fire consumes, for there is nothing in them but stubble. It is the same fire, the same Day, the same Lord — and what it does to us depends on whether we are silver to be refined or stubble to be burned.

“Does ‘bring all the tithes... and prove me’ mean God will make me wealthy if I give?”

No — that is the prosperity gospel, and it misreads the text badly. The robbing of God in tithes was a symptom of hearts that had stopped trusting him; the call to bring the tithes is a call to trust his faithfulness, not a formula to get rich. Giving is the fruit of faith, a glad response to the God who has already given us everything in Christ — not a coin in a machine that dispenses blessing. The

promise is of God's abundant faithfulness to a people who trust him, not a transaction that obligates him to make us prosperous.

“Is the ‘Sun of righteousness’ really Christ, and is Elijah really John the Baptist?”

Yes to both, on the New Testament's own authority. Zacharias, filled with the Spirit, named the Lord Jesus the *dayspring from on high* who would give light to those in darkness (Luke 1:78–79) — the Sun of righteousness rising with healing. And the Lord Jesus said plainly of John the Baptist, *this is Elias, which was for to come* (Matthew 11:14) — not the old prophet returned in the flesh, but one who came *in the spirit and power of Elias* (Luke 1:17). Malachi's last two promises are fulfilled in the Baptist and the Christ he announced.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with six questions; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — The God who comes first in mercy

A strong opener. The cynics demanded the God of judgment; he came, but first in mercy, to refine rather than destroy. Ask the class what it means that those who flippantly demanded judgment did not recognize the Lord when he came — and how we might be tempted to want a God who judges others while sparing us.

Question 3 — The fire that purifies

A searching question. The refiner's fire purifies the silver rather than destroying it. Ask the class where God's refining work is at work in their own lives — not as punishment but as purification — and how the same fire that consumes stubble makes silver pure.

Question 5 — One Day, two effects

The christological center. Work the image of the one Day with two effects — the same sun hardening clay and melting wax. Ask what determines which one meets — not merit, but whether one fears his name — and let the class feel the warmth of the Sun of righteousness rising with healing on the faithful.

Question 6 — The canon's last word

A fitting close to the prophets. The Old Testament ends pointing forward — remember Moses, watch for Elijah, the Coming One is on his way. Ask the class what it means that the first

Testament closes not with a period but with an outstretched arm, straining across the silence toward the One the next session will reveal.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luther, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets III: Malachi* (Luther's Works, vol. 18), strong on the coming Lord and the Sun of righteousness.
- ♦ Luke 1:67–79, the Benedictus — the forerunner and the *dayspring from on high*, the New Testament's own reading of Malachi 3–4.
- ♦ Matthew 11:7–15 and 17:10–13, where the Lord Jesus names John the Baptist as the promised Elijah.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Malachi 3–4 and the Luke 1 and Matthew 11 cross-references.
- ♦ *The Minor Prophets*, People's Bible Commentary (Northwestern Publishing House).
- ♦ For more depth, the treatment of Malachi in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*.

Devotional

- ♦ Pray the Benedictus (Luke 1:68–79) and Malachi 4:2 together — welcome the Sun of righteousness rising with healing in his wings over your own darkness.
- ♦ Read Malachi's last verses and feel the four centuries of silence that follow — then turn to the opening of the Gospels and hear the silence broken by a voice in the wilderness.

A Final Word

You are teaching the last chapters of the Old Testament, and your task is to let the class feel the canon straining forward. The God of judgment the cynics mocked is coming — but first in mercy,

as a refiner who purifies rather than destroys, and as the Sun of righteousness rising *with healing in his wings* on all who fear his name.

Teach the one Day with two effects. The same coming that burns the proud as stubble is the healing dawn over the faithful, who go forth like calves let out of the stall into the spring sun. It is not two days but one — and which one we meet depends on whether the Sun finds us silver to be refined or stubble to be burned. The Sun is the Lord Jesus, the dayspring from on high.

And leave the class with the Old Testament's last, outstretched word. Remember Moses; watch for Elijah; the Coming One is on his way. The first Testament ends not with a period but with an arm flung forward across four centuries of silence, pointing to a voice in the wilderness and the One he announces. The prophets have done their work; the witness is complete. Teach the Sun rising; preach the One it heralds. Then on to Luke 24, where the risen Lord himself gathers up everything the prophets foretold — the things concerning himself.



Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TWENTY-THREE

The Things Concerning Himself: The Twelve, and the Whole

Luke 24:13–49 · with Malachi 4:2 and John 1:14

A Note to the Teacher

This is the last session of the volume — and the last session of the whole four-volume series. It closes not only the Twelve but the entire road you have walked through Genesis, the Psalms, Isaiah, and the Minor Prophets. Teach it as a gathering-up: the place where every thread of the Old Testament is drawn back to a single center, the risen Lord Jesus expounding, on the Emmaus road, *in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*.

The session has a different shape from the others, and rightly so. It moves from the Emmaus road outward — to the chorus of the Twelve, then to the Day on two horizons that bound them together, and then back across the whole series: the Seed of the woman in Genesis, the prayer book of Christ in the Psalms, the despised and exalted Servant in Isaiah — and gathers them all into the one testimony the risen Lord claimed. There is no “looking ahead” to another session here, because this is where the Old Testament ends.

But it does look ahead to something greater: across the seam, to the Gospels and the apostles’ witness, where the One so long foretold stands revealed. Teach this hour with the joy of arrival. The whole long Advent of the Old Testament has been straining toward a single sentence — *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us* — and your class has now walked the whole road to it.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

On the Emmaus road the risen Lord Jesus went first to the Scriptures and expounded *in all the scriptures the things concerning himself* — and the whole Old Testament, from the Seed of the woman in Genesis to the Sun of righteousness over Malachi, has been, all along, the things concerning him. Gather the four volumes into one testimony, and carry the class across the seam to the Word made flesh.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Luke 24:13–49 — the Emmaus road, the risen Lord expounding Moses and the prophets, the burning hearts, the breaking of bread, and the claiming of *the law of Moses, and... the prophets, and... the psalms*.
- ◆ Read John 1:1–14 and Galatians 4:4, where the Word made flesh and the fulness of time meet the Old Testament's long waiting.
- ◆ Have the four volumes in mind: the Seed of the woman (Genesis), the prayer book of Christ (Psalms), the despised and exalted Servant (Isaiah), and the chorus of the Twelve. Be ready to gather one Christ-thread from each.
- ◆ Recall the governing principle of the whole series — reading Scripture for what shows forth Christ — and the guardrail that keeps it honest: we follow the types the apostles anchor, and do not invent allegories they never drew.
- ◆ Have Malachi 4:2 and the voice in the wilderness ready — the Sun of righteousness and the Elijah — so you can carry the class across the four hundred years of silence to the Word made flesh.
- ◆ This is the series finale; decide how you will mark it. A moment of thanksgiving, a word about where the road goes next — into the Gospels and the apostles' *something better* — fits the occasion.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three convictions to settle before you teach the close of the whole series. These three gather everything that has come before.

The risen Lord went first to the Scriptures — the warrant for the whole road.

On the evening of the first Easter, two heartbroken disciples walked to Emmaus, and the risen Lord Jesus joined them unrecognized. Mark what he did next, for it is the charter of this entire series. He did not first show them his hands and his side; he did not first prove the resurrection by sight. He took them to the Scriptures: *O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself* (Luke 24:25–27). And note the strangeness of his rebuke: these were not pagans ignorant of the Scriptures, but Jews who had the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms, who had heard them read in the synagogue all their lives. They held the very texts that spoke of a suffering and rising Messiah — and missed him, until he opened them. That is the warrant for reading the whole Old Testament as concerning Christ: the risen Lord himself read it that way.

The four volumes are one testimony — Christ in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

That same evening, in the upper room, the Lord Jesus named the three great divisions of the Hebrew Bible and claimed them all: *all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me* (Luke 24:44). The law of Moses — and we found him there, in the first volume: the Seed of the woman, the offered son, the Passover lamb. The prophets — and we found him there, in the third volume and this one: Isaiah's pierced Servant and the chorus of the Twelve. The psalms — and we found him there, in the second volume: praying his Passion and singing his triumph. There is no part of the Old Testament that is not, in the end, about him; the testimony of the Lord Jesus is the very spirit of prophecy. This is a lesson the Church has had to defend in every age, and must defend again in ours: that the Old Testament is the Christian's book, full of Christ — not a sub-Christian relic to be set aside. When Marcion tried to put it away from the Church, claiming its God was a lesser and harsher deity, the Church rightly condemned him, for to lose the Old Testament is to lose the roots of the gospel.

The Day on two horizons — and the Word made flesh at the seam.

One great theme bound the Twelve together from beginning to end: the Day of the LORD, always double-edged — the day that burns as an oven, and the dawn of the Sun with healing in his wings, the same coming that is darkness to one and light to another. And the prophets saw that Day on more than one horizon: a near horizon of historical judgments in their own centuries, each a small Day of the LORD foreshadowing the great one; and the far horizon of the end. We live between those horizons, in the interval that is both comfort and urgency — the delay of the final Day is not the absence of God but the patience of God, the acceptable year in which the fountain

still stands open and the Sun still shines with healing for any who will come; and yet the same Day that dawns as healing will at last burn as an oven, and the interval will not last forever. And the whole long Advent of the Old Testament ends at the seam: Malachi's last promise, then four hundred years of silence, then the voice in the wilderness, and then the One the voice announced — *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). *When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son* (Galatians 4:4). The waiting is over; the things concerning himself have a face.

Suggested Time Plan

The plan assumes a one-hour session. Adjust freely; the Pacing Tip tells you what to protect. This being the finale, leave room at the end for thanksgiving.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:15	The stranger on the road — he went first to the Scriptures (Luke 24:13–27)
0:15–0:24	The chorus of the Twelve; the Day on two horizons
0:24–0:40	The whole: the Seed of the woman, the prayer book of Christ, the Servant
0:40–0:48	All the scriptures; and the Word was made flesh (Luke 24:44; John 1:14)
0:48–0:56	Discussion — two or three questions chosen in advance
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer and thanksgiving for the whole journey

Pacing Tip

The indispensable beats are the Emmaus road (he went first to the Scriptures) and the gathering of the four volumes into one testimony. Protect both, and leave the last minutes for the Word made flesh and a word of thanksgiving. If time runs short, gather the four volumes more briefly — one Christ-thread each — rather than cutting the close; the class should leave at the seam, looking across into the Gospels.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The notes follow the movements of the student chapter. They are background to let you teach freely, not a script to read aloud.

The Stranger on the Road (Luke 24:13–27)

Two disciples walk to Emmaus on Easter evening, hearts broken — *we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel* (24:21). The risen Lord joins them, their eyes holden, and instead of revealing himself by sight he opens the Scriptures, rebuking their slowness to believe *all that the prophets have spoken* and expounding *in all the scriptures the things concerning himself* (24:27). Teach the class the lesson in the method: faith is meant to rest on the Word, and the risen Lord himself treats the whole Old Testament as a book about him. The burning hearts came not from a vision but from the Scriptures opened.

The Chorus of the Twelve

Gather, first, what this volume has shown: the Christ of the Twelve, who are not twelve scattered pamphlets of doom but one chorus, singing in twelve voices the one song of the coming Redeemer. Hosea's wounded faithful love and the Son called out of Egypt; Joel's Spirit poured out, *whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD*; Amos's fallen booth of David raised and the Gentiles gathered; Obadiah's *the kingdom shall be the LORD's*; Jonah swallowed and risen on the third day, the very sign the Lord Jesus claimed; Micah's Bethlehem; Nahum's stronghold; Habakkuk's just who live by faith; Zephaniah's God who sings; Haggai's Desire of all nations; Zechariah's lowly King and pierced Shepherd; Malachi's Sun of righteousness. They are called *minor* only for their brevity, never for any smallness in their witness to Christ.

The Day on Two Horizons

One theme bound the Twelve from beginning to end: the Day of the LORD, double-edged — terror for the impenitent and salvation for the remnant. And the prophets saw it on more than one horizon: the near horizon of judgments that fell in their own centuries, each a small Day foreshadowing the great one. Teach the class to live between the horizons. The comfort: the delay of the final Day is the patience of God, the acceptable year in which the door of grace still stands open. The urgency: the same Day that dawns as healing will at last burn as an oven, and the interval will not last. The prophets never let the comfort dull the urgency, nor the urgency drown the comfort.

The Seed of the Woman (Genesis)

Now lift the eyes from the Twelve to the whole. Go back to Genesis, the book of first promises, where every later seed was first planted. In the very hour of the first sin, before a single sacrifice had been offered or a single law given, God spoke the first gospel into the dark: that the *seed of the woman* would crush the serpent's head, though the serpent would bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).

The whole of Scripture is the slow unfolding of that one promise — the long search for the woman's Seed who would undo the ruin of the garden, and the wound he would take in the undoing. Teach the class that the protoevangelium, the first gospel, sets the pattern of everything that follows: a promise of rescue planted in the very hour of catastrophe.

The Prayer Book of Christ (Psalms)

From Genesis the series came, in the second volume, to the Psalms — and there we learned, with Luther, to call the Psalter the prayer book of Christ. The Psalms are not merely ancient Hebrew poetry; they are, in the deepest sense, the prayers and praises of the Lord Jesus himself, the words he prayed in the days of his flesh and the words his Church prays still in him. When he hung upon the cross it was the twenty-second Psalm he cried — *my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me* — a psalm that goes on to describe, a thousand years early, the pierced hands and feet, the parted garments, the casting of lots. It was the sixteenth Psalm that promised his body would not be left in the grave nor see corruption — the resurrection sung in advance. Teach the class that when we open the Psalter we are overhearing the prayers of our Head, into which the Church is drawn to pray along with him.

The Servant Despised and Exalted (Isaiah)

From the Psalms the series came, in the third volume, to Isaiah — so full of Christ the Church has long called it the fifth gospel. Isaiah saw the virgin's son called Immanuel; the child born and the Son given, *Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace*; the shoot from the felled stump of Jesse on whom the Spirit of the LORD would rest. And then, in the Servant Songs that are the summit of the Old Testament, the suffering Servant — despised and rejected, *wounded for our transgressions... bruised for our iniquities*, on whom the LORD *laid... the iniquity of us all* (Isaiah 53:5–6). Teach the fifty-third chapter as the high summit of the whole Old Testament, the place where the cross stands out most clearly seven centuries before it was raised — the gospel before the Gospels.

All the Scriptures (Luke 24:44–49)

And so the four volumes are gathered into one testimony. In the upper room the risen Lord named the three divisions and claimed them all: *all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me* (24:44). The law — and we found him there, the Seed of the woman, the Passover lamb. The prophets — and we found him there, in Isaiah's Servant and the chorus of the Twelve. The psalms — and we found him there, praying his Passion and singing his triumph. Teach the class the conviction that has carried the whole series:

there is no part of the Old Testament that is not, in the end, about him — and the Old Testament is the Christian's book, full of Christ, never a relic to be set aside.

And the Word Was Made Flesh (John 1:14; Malachi 4:2)

We end where the Old Testament ends, at the seam. Malachi made his last promise — a messenger and a rising Sun — and then the heavens fell silent for four hundred years. The people waited in the dark, holding the promises: the Seed of the woman, the Lion of Judah, the pierced Servant, the Branch, the Sun of righteousness. And then the silence broke. A voice cried in the wilderness, the Elijah who was to come — *prepare ye the way of the Lord* — and after the voice came the One the voice announced: *the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us* (John 1:14). The four hundred years were not empty; *when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son* (Galatians 4:4). Teach the class that the whole Old Testament had been one long Advent — and at the seam, the waiting ends and the foretold One has a face.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

Questions you are likely to hear, with language ready so none of them catches you flat.

“Did the Old Testament writers know they were writing about Christ?”

They saw the shape of a coming One — sometimes dimly, sometimes with startling clarity — but they did not see the whole. Peter says the prophets *searched diligently* what the Spirit in them signified, *testifying beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow* (1 Peter 1:10–11). The Spirit who inspired them knew, and wove the testimony all the way through, even where the human author grasped only part of it. So we are not reading Christ *into* the Old Testament; we are reading the witness the Spirit wrote *there*, and which the risen Lord himself drew out.

“Isn't it forcing things to find Christ everywhere in the Old Testament?”

The warrant is the risen Lord himself, who said the whole — Moses, the prophets, the psalms — was *concerning me* (Luke 24:27, 44). We are following his reading, not imposing our own. And there is a guardrail that keeps it honest: where the New Testament anchors a type — the bronze serpent, Jonah's three days, the Passover lamb — we follow it confidently; where it does not, we do not invent allegories the apostles never drew. The discipline of the whole series has been to find Christ where Scripture actually places him, not to chase him into every detail by our own cleverness.

“Why keep the Old Testament at all? Couldn't we just have the Gospels?”

Because to lose the Old Testament is to lose the roots of the gospel. The New Testament assumes the Old on every page — every “as it is written,” every fulfilled promise, every type made plain. A man named Marcion once tried to cut the Old Testament away from the Church, and the Church rightly condemned him, for the gospel without its Old Testament roots hangs in the air with no soil. The Old Testament is the Christian's book, full of Christ; we do not set it aside, we read it through him.

“What does it mean that the Day of the LORD has ‘two horizons’?”

It means the Day the prophets announced is fulfilled in the two comings of Christ. He came first in mercy — the Sun of righteousness rising with healing in his wings — and he comes again in judgment, when the same Day will burn as an oven. We live in the interval between, the acceptable year in which the fountain still stands open and the door of grace is not yet shut. That gives us both comfort (the delay is God's patience, not his absence) and urgency (the interval will not last forever). The prophets held the two together, and so should we.

“We've reached the end of the Old Testament — where does the series go from here?”

To the seam, and across it. The Old Testament ends in four hundred years of silence, broken by a voice in the wilderness and the Word made flesh. From here the road runs into the Gospels, to meet face to face the One the prophets foretold, and into the apostles' witness — the *something better* of the New Testament: a better covenant, a better hope, an unshakable kingdom. Everything this series has traced as promise, the New Testament unfolds as fulfillment. The class has walked the whole Advent; now they stand at the dawn.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter closes with questions for the whole series; two or three, chosen for your class, is right. Keep them on the text and the Christ it shows forth. Notes on how four of them behave in a room:

Question 1 — Why the Scriptures first

A fitting opener for the finale. The risen Lord went first to the Scriptures, not first to the sight of his wounds. Ask why that matters — and how it is the warrant for reading the whole Old Testament as concerning Christ. A good place to let the class feel that faith rests on the Word, the way the burning hearts did.

Question 2 — The chorus that struck you

A warm, personal question. The Twelve are one chorus, not twelve scraps. Ask which of the Christ-sightings of the Twelve struck each person most — the booth of David, the sign of Jonah, Bethlehem, the just who live by faith, God singing, the lowly King, the pierced One, the Sun of righteousness — and why. Let the class testify to what they have seen.

Question 3 — Living in the interval

The pastoral center. The Day is fulfilled in two comings — mercy first, judgment after — and we live in the acceptable year while the fountain stands open. Ask what it means to live between the two horizons, and how it shapes both our hope (the door is open) and our urgency (it will not stay open forever).

Question 4 — Christ in each volume

The gathering question, and the right one to close a series on. Ask the class how they have seen Christ in each volume — the Seed of the woman in Genesis, the prayer book of Christ in the Psalms, the despised and exalted Servant in Isaiah, the chorus of the Twelve — and let the whole road be drawn together in their own words into the one testimony the risen Lord claimed.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply, or a student asks for recommendations, the following will serve — and will carry you on past the seam.

Primary Sources

- ♦ Luke 24, read whole — the risen Lord's own reading of the Old Testament, the charter of the entire series.
- ♦ Luther's prefaces to the Old Testament and the Psalter, on Scripture's scope — *was Christum treibet*, what shows forth Christ — and the Psalms as the prayer book of Christ.
- ♦ The Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord, on Christ as the center and scope of all Scripture, against every attempt (Marcion's and later) to set the Old Testament aside.

Commentaries

- ♦ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia), for its notes on Luke 24 and its Christ-centered reading of the Old Testament throughout.

- ◆ The four volumes of *The Things Concerning Himself* themselves — Genesis, the Psalms, Isaiah, and the Twelve — now read together as one testimony.
- ◆ For the road ahead, the companion New Testament studies on the *something better* of the apostolic witness — a better covenant, a better hope, an unshakable kingdom.

Devotional

- ◆ Pray the Emmaus prayer — ask the risen Lord to open the Scriptures and show you himself on every page — and let your heart burn within you.
- ◆ Read the opening chapters of the Gospels next, and hear the four hundred years of silence break: the Word made flesh, the foretold One arrived, full of grace and truth.

A Final Word

You have come to the end of the whole road — four volumes, the law and the prophets and the psalms — and it ends where it was always going to end: with the risen Lord Jesus opening the Scriptures and making hearts burn. He did not first show his wounds; he took two heartbroken disciples to Moses and the prophets and showed them, in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself. That is the gift you have been handing the class all along: not a clever reading, but his reading.

Gather it all for them one last time. From the Seed of the woman promised in Eden, through the Lion of Judah and the prayer book of Christ, through Isaiah's despised and exalted Servant and the twelvefold chorus of the Twelve — the Branch, the lowly King, the pierced and smitten Shepherd, the Sun risen with healing in his wings — the whole of the Old Testament has been, all along, the things concerning him. There is no part of it that is not finally about the One who walked the Emmaus road.

And then send them across the seam. The long silence is broken; the Word has been made flesh and dwelt among us; the One so long foretold has come, has borne the curse, has risen, and reigns. The road through the law and the prophets and the psalms now opens onto the Gospels and the apostles' witness — the *something better* he has secured: a better covenant, a better hope, an unshakable kingdom. Keep the class in the light of his dawn until the great Day breaks and every shadow flees away. The prophets have done their work; the Lord they foretold has come. To him, who is himself the substance of every page, be all the glory.



Soli Deo Gloria